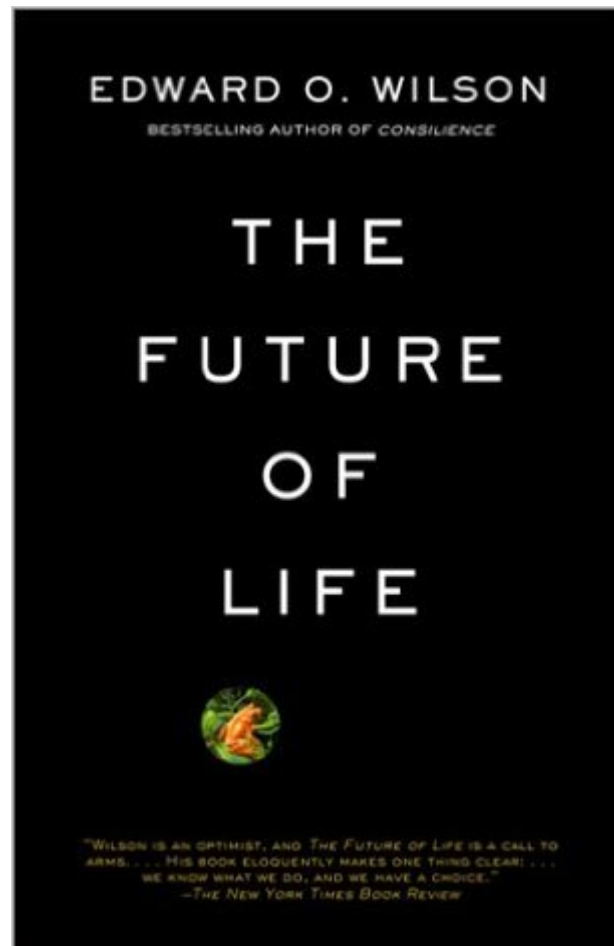


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The Future Of Life



Synopsis

One of the world's most important scientists, Edward O. Wilson is also an abundantly talented writer who has twice won the Pulitzer Prize. In this, his most personal and timely book to date, he assesses the precarious state of our environment, examining the mass extinctions occurring in our time and the natural treasures we are about to lose forever. Yet, rather than eschewing doomsday prophecies, he spells out a specific plan to save our world while there is still time. His vision is a hopeful one, as economically sound as it is environmentally necessary. Eloquent, practical and wise, this book should be read and studied by anyone concerned with the fate of the natural world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Edward Wilson is America's, if not the world's, leading naturalist. Years of field work are applied in *The Future of Life* in a global tour of the world's natural resources. How are they used? What has been lost? What remains and is it sustainable with present rates of use? With broad vision, Wilson stresses our need to understand fully the biodiversity of our planet. Most importantly, that knowledge must include a realistic view of human impact on those resources. While many works of this genre sound tocsins of despair with little to offer in countering the threat of the "outbreak" of humanity on our planet, Wilson proposes a variety of realistic scenarios that may save our world and our own species. Survival will be obtained from a sound knowledge base, and the foundation for that insight starts here. Wilson begins with an open letter to the patron saint of environment defenders, Henry David Thoreau. He offers a comparative view of today's Walden Pond with that of Thoreau's day. Wilson will use such comparisons for the remainder of the book. The issue is clear:

humanity has done grave damage to its home over the millennia. The growth of human population, but more importantly, the usurpation of the biosphere for limited human purposes, threatens a world losing its ability to cope with the intrusion. Can this planet, with human help, be restored to biodiversity levels that will ensure its ongoing capacity to provide for us? Wilson's writing skills readily match his talents as a researcher. Presenting sweeping ideas with an economy of words, he avoids vague assertions or the need for the reader to fill in information. With each stop of our global voyage in his company, he provides detailed information describing examples of human "erasure of entire ecosystems."

The Future Of Life is a great book and a perfect antidote to: a) unwarranted optimism about the state of the environment, which by almost any measure appears desperate; b) unwarranted pessimism or fatalism regarding man's ability to DO something about this situation; and c) the reams of misinformation, uninformed opinion, and ridiculously wild-eyed optimism on environmental matters that exists out there (i.e., "The Skeptical Environmentalist"). Unlike The Skeptical Environmentalist, which is written by a statistician, The Future Of Life is written by one of the world's greatest living scientists, Edward O. Wilson, author of 20 books (including Sociobiology, and Consilience), winner of two Pulitzer prizes plus dozens of science prizes, and discoverer of hundreds of new species. Dr. Wilson is often called, for good reason, "the father of biodiversity." Wilson is also one of the rare breed of scientists, like Stephen J. Gould, Carl Sagan, and Stephen Hawking, who can actually communicate their thoughts and findings to the general public. This is particularly important when it comes to Wilson's area of expertise, given that the environment is something which affects all of us and which all of us can play a part in protecting (or destroying). Wilson's main theme can be summed up as "situation desperate, but not hopeless." Why desperate? Because humans--all 6 billion of them--are the most destructive force ever unleashed on Earth. According to Wilson, humanity's "bacterial" rate of growth during the 20th century, its short-sightedness, wasteful consumption patterns, general greed and rapaciousness, ignorance, and technological power have resulted in a mass extinction: "species of plants and animals..."

Whereas the author's last really big book, "Consilience", addressed the integral relationship between the knowledge offered by the humanities and that of the sciences (too often isolated and out of context), this book brings together political economy and nature. It is more easily readable than his more heavily foot-noted and astonishingly deep earlier work, but all the more valuable for

its smooth overview of why life on the rest of the planet matters to the American heartland; why we must deal with the limits of food production and control population (both in terms of numbers and in terms of consumption per capita). The heart of the book, for me, can be found in three profound numbers--numbers that we must all appreciate: Value of the Ecosystem/Cost to Replace: \$33 trillion per year in increased Gross National Product (GNP)--and presumably everything would be artificially recreated. One-Time Cost of Fund for Preserving Nature: \$24-72 billion one-time funding. His numbers vary from \$24 billion (one -time) to preserve 800,000 square kilometers already under protection, to \$28 billion to preserve a (different?) representative sample. The bottom line: for a one-time \$100 billion investment, 25% of what the US spends on its military *every* year, we could, at our own expense, save the world. Subsidies for Unsound Acts Against Nature: \$2 trillion per year and rising (\$2000 per American alone--this refers to energy, water, deforestation, and agricultural subsidies that encourage and perpetuate unsound acts against nature as well as unneeded exploitation--one example: \$20 billion a year in subsidies for fishing--this is the difference between the actual value of \$100 billion and the lower subsidized revenues of \$80 billion a year).

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