

Study Guide
MICROBIAL DIVERSITY
ToL 30

E.O. Wilson is one of the preeminent biologists currently living. He has been called ‘the father of biodiversity’ – and is well known for his work in evolutionary biology. This reading summarizes his views on the Tree of Life, and the place of microbial diversity among the many branches of that tree.

1. About how many species of living things have been described to date? How precise is this figure? About how many species are likely to exist?
2. Nematodes make up about what percent of animal life on earth?
3. Why is systematics – the so-called Linnean enterprise, seeking to classify all living species in the world – an important endeavor? Provide several arguments.
4. We have named only a tiny fraction of the species on earth. Of those, what proportion has been thoroughly enough studied such that we know something about their ecology, habits, or evolution?
5. What fields, according to Wilson, will be among the major industries of science in the next decade or two?
6. What is an ATBI?