

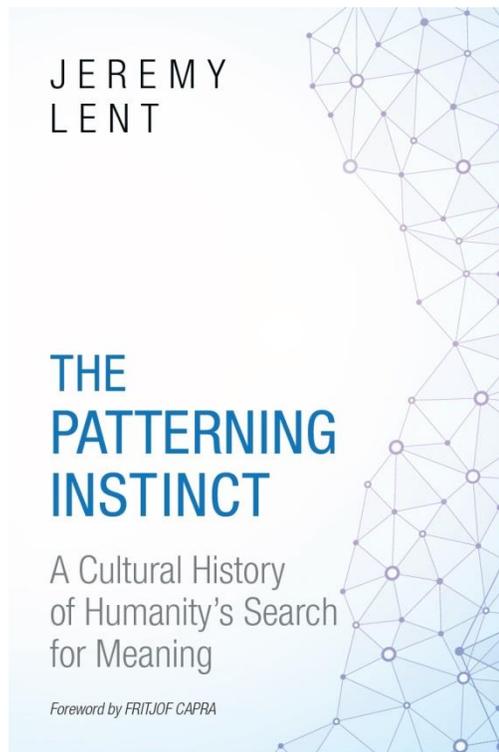
book review by john varney

The Patterning Instinct

- A cultural history of humanity's search for meaning

Jeremy Lent

published 2017 by Prometheus Books



This big thick history book surprised me by being so engaging I didn't want to put it down. It covers the whole history of human civilisation from the beginning of time until the present and then to somewhere in the uncertain future. In this journey we are enthralled, entertained, appalled and enchanted in turn. Filled with fascinating detail and challenging ideas the book is a romp through what has given meaning to life in different parts of the world at different times.

It culminates with a glimpse of a potentially cataclysmic future – or alternatively one in which humanity might just possibly avert disaster and make a better world.

The first three quarters of the book provide a commanding perspective through a well researched and broad perspective of the major cultures that have existed around the world through the ages. In the last quarter we use this perspective to view our own western civilisation that currently dominates the world and seems to be leading us to disaster of one sort or another. In the closing chapters we look at alternative possibilities that might avert the worst aspects of such disasters and lead to the founding of a different and more harmonious kind of civilisation.

The index, notes and further reading suggested, serve not only to support Lent's scholarship but also to nudge the reader towards going more deeply into the arguments and, hopefully, coming to similar conclusions that might just result in collective action to save us from the worst excesses of modernity.

I strongly recommend this book to everyone – whether or not you are in a leadership or management role, you are surely a responsible citizen of humanity. Read this and think! It will surely influence your own world and thereby change, and maybe even save, the world we share.

Published 2017 by Prometheus Books. The Patterning Instinct: A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning. Copyright © 2017 by Jeremy Lent. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, digital, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or conveyed via the Internet or a website without prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. Such a book, for me, is The Patterning Instinct by Jeremy Lent (May 2017, Prometheus Books). The book's subtitle, a cultural history of humanity's search for meaning, encapsulates its focus, scope and ambitions. It attempts to identify the hidden patterns which have shaped human cultures and how the latter have been expressed in terms of the values which have defined and guided each civilisation and generation. Playing for Team Human today is Jeremy Lent, author of The Patterning Instinct. Lent's expansive research looks at the variety of ways cultures throughout history have patterned meaning into the cosmos. In excavating these patterns, Lent shares how humans might retrieve those metaphors that amplify altruism and shared intentionality. Together, Rushkoff and Lent explore The Patterning Instinct tells us that seeking answers from recent history is likely to prove forlorn; deep-seated patterns in the way we both think and behave have predisposed us to acting in ways that are self-evidently irrational and against our own interests. To have any hope of transforming this perverse and potentially apocalyptic worldview, we will need to dig much deeper into our own history—and this extraordinary book provides an authoritative and inspirational guide.

•Jonathon Porritt, environmentalist and author. He is the author of Requiem of the "Human Soul" and "The Patterning Instinct" the latter of which will be the topic of our discussion.

About Barry Daniel. I live in the Lake District in the UK where I run a guesthouse with my partner Kate and my cat Manuel.