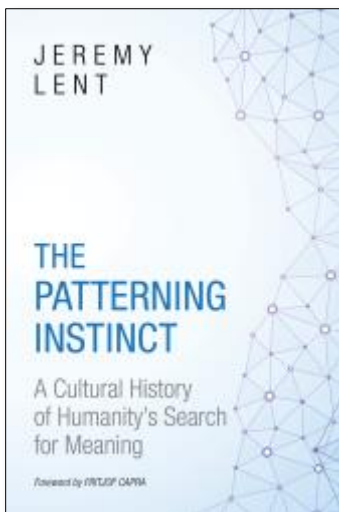


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## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The same underlying patterns of Western thought that gave us the benefits of science are also driving us to possible catastrophe, says Jeremy Lent, author of the groundbreaking new book, *The Patterning Instinct: A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning* (Prometheus Books, May 2017, Hardcover, Foreword by Fritjof Capra).



In 1405, Admiral Zheng set off from China with the greatest armada in history, leading 300 magnificent ships on a 30-year odyssey to distant lands as far afield as Africa. Later that century, Columbus landed in the New World with three barely seaworthy boats. Zheng's armada, for all its grandeur, left virtually no imprint on the world while Columbus changed the entire course of history. Why?

The answer to this question, Lent reveals, is directly related to why our civilization is driving species to mass extinction and facing the crisis of climate change. Culture shapes values, Lent argues, and those values shape history—and the values our society chooses to live by today will shape our future.

With rigorous scholarship and deep insight, Lent investigates how different cultures have made sense of the universe and how their underlying values have changed the course of history. From the first farmers to Chinese sages to the trailblazers of the Scientific Revolution, he shows how humanity's unique instinct to pattern meaning into the cosmos has constructed the world we live in today. Along the way, he reveals why a hunter-gatherer tribe insulted the anthropologist who gave them a fat ox for Christmas; why a great Muslim scholar received fifty lashes for his scientific research; and why it was the Europeans—and they alone—who shaped the structure of our modern world.

Lent argues that foundational elements of Western thought have led us to a crisis of sustainability where civilization's very survival is at stake. "We need to understand the underlying mind-set that has brought us to this place," he says. "Only then can we consciously shape our values to create a sustainable future of shared human dignity and flourishing."

—*Watch the 2-minute book trailer*—

**THE PATTERNING INSTINCT: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF HUMANITY'S SEARCH FOR MEANING**  
Jeremy Lent | May 2017 | 540 pages | ISBN: 978-1633882935 | Prometheus Books | Hardcover | \$26.00  
[JeremyLent.com](http://JeremyLent.com)

Lent is available for interview. Here is just some of what he can discuss:

**LOSING THE METAPHOR.** *How we went from thinking “nature is like a machine” to believing “nature is a machine” —and the implications for us today.* Lent traces how cultures throughout history have used “root metaphors” to understand the world, from early hunter-gatherers’ view of “nature as a giving parent” to modern times. In 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, a metaphor of “nature as a machine” took hold and became so ingrained that today we have forgotten that it is a metaphor. In the popular imagination, nature is no longer *like* a machine, but *is* a machine. This thinking, which has been reinforced by popularizers of science such as Richard Dawkins, underlies much of our environmental crisis, and encourages misguided ventures such as geoengineering as a solution to climate change.

**21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CRISES, 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY IDEAS.** *The double-edged legacy of the Scientific Revolution.* We live everyday with the benefits and wonders bequeathed to us by the Scientific Revolution, but that’s only half the picture. The 17<sup>th</sup> century revolution in thought was based on the clarion call of “conquering nature,” and the belief that Europeans had an inborn right to ravage both nature and other continents for their own benefit. We see today how this thinking has culminated in the twin crises of environmental degradation and massive global inequality. Lent says it is time to revisit these age-old assumptions and recognize both our shared humanity and our intrinsic connection with the natural world.

**ARE WE NATURALLY GREEDY & SELFISH?** *No, and believing we are fuels our crises.* That human beings are motivated solely by their own self-interest is one of the most pernicious ideas to make it into popular consciousness. Modern economics relies on this premise, which has been used to justify the extreme and inhumane trends of modern capitalism. It is, however, false. Modern anthropology and neuroscience show that cooperation is a defining characteristic of humanity. Lent says it’s time to replace this idea of the self-interested individual with a more complex understanding of who we are—not just because it can lead to a better world, but because it’s based on better science.

**SCIENCE VERSUS RELIGION?** *How a close look at history upends this dichotomy.* The torrid debate between science and religion hides an inconvenient truth: that Christian rationalism served as an incubator for early scientific thinking. Both traditional Christianity and mainstream reductionist science are based on shared assumptions of a “dead” material world and a higher nonmaterial “Truth” available to the mind/soul. Lent shows how a systems-oriented view of the world, recognizing that everything is both connected and sacred, offers the basis for an integrated vision that frees us from the mire of the “science vs. religion” conflict.

**HOW MONOTHEISM ENGENDERS FUNDAMENTALISM.** *The root of fundamentalism is the belief that there is only one universal Truth.* Politics today is colored by the debate on “Islamic fundamentalism.” But Lent argues that this is a dangerously limited point of view. In

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fact, he shows, ideological fundamentalism didn't exist in human thought until the rise of monotheism, which insisted that there is only one Truth and all other perspectives are heretical. This, Lent claims, is a poison that has infected modern society. "The foundation of a tolerant society," he says, "is the recognition that while many things may be true, there is no universal Truth. This recognition allows us to respect the views of others whose beliefs may be based on different cultural preconceptions."

**TECHNOSPLIT: THE BIFURCATION OF HUMANITY.** *Will social inequality soon be programmed into our DNA?* The lives of affluent people in developed countries are vastly different from the experience of billions in other regions. Lent warns that, with advances in genetic engineering, the gulf between rich and poor may extend within a few decades beyond economics to biology. "When futurists blithely envision the possibilities for human enhancement," he says, "they ignore the fact that billions of people are barely surviving." The immense global inequality we already experience may pale in comparison with a future bifurcation of humanity into two human species. "Those of us who value our connection with all humanity," he adds, "must demand that technology is used for the benefit of everyone, not just the privileged few."

**SHAPING OUR FUTURE.** *The choices each of us makes now will affect the future of humanity.* We're used to interpreting the drastic changes happening around us as the product of vast impersonal forces beyond our power to affect. But Lent demonstrates that, since time immemorial, cultural values have shaped history—and they will shape our future. That has huge implications for humanity's trajectory. "The future," Lent says, "is not a spectator sport, but is ultimately subject to our individual and collective will. We have the power, as the collective force of humanity, to steer our future in a direction of our choosing. To look away is to neglect our individual and collective responsibility."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



**Jeremy Lent** is a writer and the founder and president of the nonprofit Liology Institute, dedicated to fostering a worldview that could enable humanity to thrive sustainably on the earth. The Liology Institute ([liology.org](http://liology.org)), which integrates systems science with ancient wisdom traditions, holds regular workshops and other events in the San Francisco Bay Area. Lent is the author of the novel *Requiem of the Human Soul*. Formerly, he was the founder, CEO, and chairman of a publicly traded internet company. Lent holds a BA in English Literature from Cambridge University and an MBA from the University of Chicago. More information: [jeremylent.com](http://jeremylent.com).

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## **SELECTED PRAISE FOR *THE PATTERNING INSTINCT***

“A tour de force on the biological and psychological background of the human predicament. If you are concerned about our future you should know about our past. This amazing, well-documented book should be read by every college student, and every congressman.”

—**Paul R. Ehrlich**, author of *Human Natures*

“This fascinating, page-turning exploration of the human journey from the stone age to the space shuttle gives us powerful new ways to see ourselves. Deeply researched, and written with great clarity and style, this book is also full of hope about humanity’s possibilities in the twenty-first century.”

—**Rick Hanson, PhD**, author of *Buddha’s Brain*

“A brilliant deep dive into the history of human cultures that brings us to today’s cultural dysfunctions that threaten the planet. Insight, illumination, and potential ways out of the seeming dead end that we’ve walked ourselves into. I recommend it!”

—**Thom Hartmann**, nationally syndicated radio host and author of *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*

“In prose that is a joy to read, Jeremy Lent takes us on a tour of human history, guided by systems theory and cognitive science, to argue for the prominence of culture and the habits of the mind in shaping our collective destiny. If you’ve been too busy for the last twenty years to pay attention to the big ideas about the nature of the human animal, the engines of history, our place in the biosphere, and the shape of things to come, Lent can bring you up to date painlessly.”

—**J. R. McNeill**, Professor, Georgetown University, and author of *Something New Under the Sun*

“A must-read for anyone concerned about the future of humanity. The book delves beneath the surface of problems facing our world today to examine the dominant cultural assumptions that lie at their root. [It] thoughtfully traces how views about human nature and the natural world in both Eastern and Western culture have shaped history and how the emerging global culture of connectedness and the systems view of life may hold the key to humanity’s evolution and future survival.”

—**Atossa Soltani**, Amazon Watch founder and president

“Shell-shocked liberals and progressives are casting around to explain the political setbacks of 2016. *The Patterning Instinct* tells us that seeking answers from recent history is likely to prove forlorn... 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 of *The World We Made*

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## SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### *The Patterning Instinct*

1. What is the “patterning instinct?” Why is it so important?
2. You talk about “root metaphors” that shape how we view and act in the world. What is a “root metaphor”? What are the root metaphors operating today and what impact do they have?
3. You suggest that the human patterning instinct is responsible for all the benefits of civilization. At the same time, you point out that it has also brought our civilization to the brink of collapse. Is our situation, then, an inevitable result of human nature?
4. It’s easy to romanticize hunter-gather societies as a way of life in which humans lived in harmony with nature, but you show that even hunter-gatherer societies caused environmental destruction. How so and what we can learn from this?
5. You claim that the rise of agriculture was responsible for the development of land ownership, hierarchies, and patriarchy. How did that happen?

### *Current Events*

6. Your central claim is that our prevailing worldview is inherited from previous generations and has a direct impact on our day-to-day world. Let’s look at a present-day challenge like climate change. How is this linked to ideas from the past, and why does this linkage matter now?
7. The scientific consensus is clear that climate change is driving us toward a global crisis. You argue in *The Patterning Instinct* that even if we succeeded in dealing with climate change, without a major shift in our thinking it would only be replaced by another existential threat. What do you mean?
8. We face crises that require immediate action. Do we really have time to shift our worldview on a global scale? Shouldn’t our focus be on action?

## *Ideas*

9. In modern thought, the idea of nature—and human beings—as machines has become ubiquitous. You criticize people like Richard Dawkins for going beyond the metaphor of “nature as a machine” to actually arguing that nature—and human beings—*are* machines. What’s wrong with this in your view?
10. You upend the torrid debate between science and religion with what you call an “inconvenient truth” that Christianity acted as an incubator for science. What is the significance of that on the current conflict between science and religion?
11. You argue that the focus on Islamic fundamentalism in our political discourse is a “dangerously limited” perspective. Why is it dangerous? How do you think we should be thinking about it?
12. You look to traditional China as a rich source of ideas that can help inform a new worldview. Yet, as you point out, China has hardly been free from human-made catastrophes throughout history. What specific ideas do you think we should take from Eastern thought? Why didn’t these ideas save China from their own problems?
13. If you could offer a worldview for a healthy, just, and sustainable future society, what elements would it include?

## *Personal questions*

14. You came to this work through an unconventional route. You began your career in finance and you were one of the early internet entrepreneurs. It’s quite a distance to travel between being a businessman on the cutting edge of technology to someone who studies intellectual history. How did you get from there to here?
15. What made you decide to write *The Patterning Instinct*? Whom is it written for?
16. What do you hope readers will come away with after reading *The Patterning Instinct*?