

THE WEB OF MEANING: Book Club Guide

General Discussion Guide

How would you describe the difference between the dominant worldview and the “Web of Meaning” laid out in this book?

How might a worldview of connectedness lead to different ways of organizing human activity (e.g. economics, relationship structures, politics, governance, and relationship to the living Earth)?

What part of the book was most surprising to you?

How did *The Web of Meaning* affect your understanding of the world? Inform your sense of who you are? Did it change how you relate to the world?

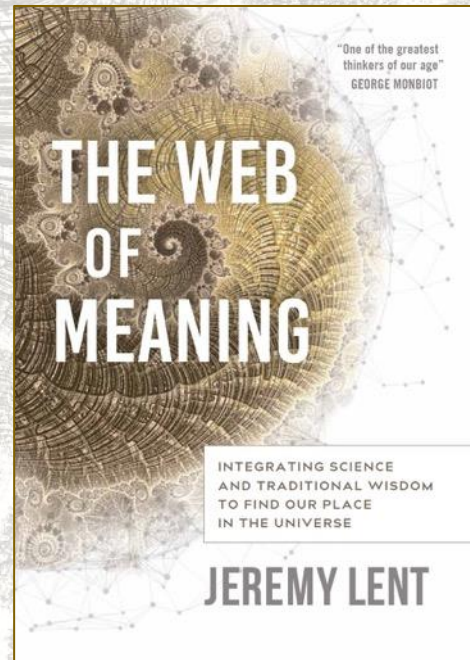
Are there questions or issues the book raised that remain unresolved in your mind?

What question would you most like to ask the author, Jeremy Lent?

What is one of your favorite stories from the book?

Where do you think we are going as a human species? As a web of life?

Has your imagination been inspired to dream new possibilities for our future as a result of reading this book? If so, how?



Chapter-by-Chapter Guide

Introduction

Have you encountered a version of “The Speech” or someone like Uncle Bob?

Are there parts of Uncle Bob’s speech that you agree with? If so, which ones?

What do you see as the foundation of the dominant worldview?

Part 1. Who Am I?

Who are you? Has this section changed how you answer this question? If so, how?

Chapter 1. The Nameless Uncarved Wood

How do you perceive the split between animate and conceptual consciousness in yourself? Does one of them seem dominant? If so, which one?

Where do you experience the kind of *wu-wei* skill of Cook Ding in your own life?

What expression of the Tao inspires you? Do you have your own version of the “nameless uncarved wood” that reflects the Tao for you?

Chapter 2. The Original AI: Animate Intelligence

When have you felt a deep connection with the animate intelligence of a nonhuman being? What did it feel like? How did it affect you?

How does learning about the intelligence of plants and animals affect your sense of self? Which example most resonates with you?

How do you relate to the animate intelligence within yourself?

Chapter 3. The Most Important Relationship in Your Life

Think of a time when you had a strong “gut instinct” about a person or situation. Did it turn out to be right or wrong?

How would you describe your relationship with your “self”? How does your “democracy of consciousness” operate? (Do you have a democracy, or some other form of internal government)?

Are there any practices that you regularly adopt to harmonize the relationship between the “I” and “self”? Can you describe how they affect you?

Part 2. Where Am I?

Has this section changed how you perceive the universe and the living Earth? If so, in what way?

Chapter 4. The Patterns of the Universe

What examples of systems can you think of where “the ways in which things connect” seem more important than the things themselves?

As you think about fractals in nature, psyche, and culture, what are some of your favorite examples?

What is an example of a major phase transition that you’ve encountered in your own life?

Chapter 5. The Harmonic Dance of Life

How have you been influenced by the beliefs that “Greed is good” or “Humans and nature are essentially selfish and competitive”?

What examples of mutually beneficial symbiosis in the natural world are most striking to you? What about in human society?

How might our culture be different if we replaced the metaphors of life as a “machine” or a “marketplace” with metaphors of life as a “jazz ensemble” or a “harmonic dance”?

Part 3. What Am I?

Does an understanding of humans as driven by the same principles as the rest of nature change your sense of what you are? If so, how?

Chapter 6. The Deep Purpose of Life

Where do you see the forces of entropy and/or negentropy playing out in our day-to-day lives (socially, environmentally, personally)?

How do you relate to the Gaia hypothesis? Do you perceive the Earth as a living being? How does this affect your own relationship with the rest of life on Earth?

If humanity were to be invited to join “The United Federation of Planets,” what would we have to do to make ourselves ready?

Chapter 7. The Tao in My Own Nature

What is an attractor of consciousness that you can identify in yourself? How might you want to reshape this attractor through intention?

Consider a current cultural attractor (e.g. consumerism, the #MeToo movement or Black Lives Matter), and how you relate to it personally. Can you identify elements of it that are more general, and those that are more specific to your own unique experience?

Using the adaptive cycle model, which phase do you think our civilization is in right now?

Part 4. How Should I Live?

What are biggest differences you see between how you think we should live and the values of our dominant society?

Chapter 8. Flourishing as An Integrated Organism

How do you experience hedonia and eudaimonia in your own life? What is a practice that might help you experience more eudaimonia?

Where do you experience *dukkha* in your life? To what extent do you think it is reinforced by our dominant culture and economic system?

To what extent do you see your own flourishing as fractal (i.e. interdependent with the health and well-being of the larger world)?

Chapter 9. Cultivating Integrated Values

Have you ever experienced a conflict between your own sense of ethics and the values of our dominant culture? What happened?

Think of an example where the individual pursuit of happiness might come into conflict with the well-being of the larger community. How might this conflict be reconciled?

How does the bodhisattva ideal of alleviating the suffering of all sentient beings resonate with you? How might it be carried out in practice?

Chapter 10. Human/Nature

How did this chapter change your understanding of “nature”?

In what ways does human supremacy show up in your life? How does it shape your sense of self, nonhuman beings, the environment, and society?

What would it mean to identify as an “ecological self”? How might this self act?

Have you experienced personal anguish about the ongoing destruction of the living Earth? How have you responded to it?

Part 5. Why Am I?

Does your life feel intrinsically meaningful to you? Have you ever had moments when everything felt meaningless? How did you respond?

Chapter 11. Everything Is Connected

Do you relate to Yossarian’s and Uncle Bob’s logic? Have you received the cultural message that you should “look out for number one”? What about the Jewel Net of Indra? How do you relate to that understanding of reality?

Have you had an experience of oneness? A mystical experience? If so, how has that shaped you? If not, how do you relate to that (with longing, disappointment, disbelief . . . ?)

“Just as we enact a rainbow by gazing into the rain, we enact meaning by how we attune to the connective rhythms of the universe.” What are some examples of how you enact meaning? Can you think of examples of how meaning is a function of connectedness in your life, community, and society?

Chapter 12. From Fixed Self to Infinite Li: The Fractal Nature of Identity

Do you have a sense of how the li of your loved ones (whether living or deceased) exist within you, and yours within them?

How do you relate to pantheism? What is your own sense of where the sacred resides in the universe?

Considering the different fractal layers of identity (individual, family, community, humanity, Gaia, the universe) what is their relative weight in your own experience of identity?

Part 6. Where Are We Going?

How do your fears or hopes about humanity’s future affect your actions? What is your personal definition of “hope”?

Chapter 13. Weaving A New Story of Meaning

Where do you see the effects of “Windigo, Inc.” in your own life and in our society?

What does an Ecological Civilization mean to you? What might it look like in practice? What does this idea inspire in your imagination?

What is the sacred and precious strand you are weaving in the Web of Meaning at this precarious moment in history?

Glossary

Pick a term from the glossary to discuss. What did you learn? What fascinates you? What questions remain?

Further Reading

Which book in Further Reading are you most inspired to read next?