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.
The Patterning Instinct provides a new answer to this question with a simple but compelling theme: Culture shapes values, and those values shape history. So even if Zheng had discovered America, the Chinese would never have conquered the New World because they were driven by a fundamentally different set of motivations from European explorers. Pioneering the new field of cognitive history, The Patterning Instinct provides a fresh perspective on other crucial questions of history. Author and integrator, Jeremy Lent, investigates the patterns of thought that have led our civilization to its current crisis of sustainability. In his book, The Patterning Instinct, Jeremy covers a vast expanse of territory. In time: from the dawn of homo sapiens to the present day and possibilities for our future. In geography: across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. In ideas: investigating key questions about who we are... and where we're headed. 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