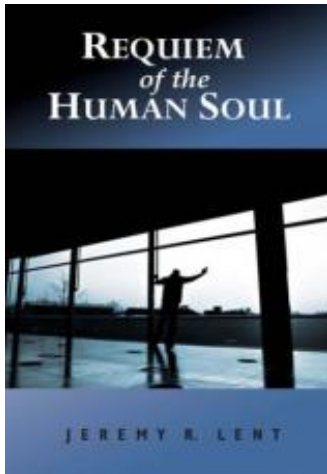


Requiem of the Human Soul

by Jeremy R. Lent



About the Book

The Human Race Is On Trial. At Stake? Its Continued Existence.

Eusebio Franklin, a school teacher from a small community, is faced with the most terrifying dilemma imaginable: should he carry out an act of mass terrorism in order to save the human race?

Eusebio has been chosen to defend our human race in a special session of the United Nations. It's the late 22nd-century, and most people are genetically enhanced; Eusebio is among the minority that remain unimproved, known as Primals, consisting mostly of the impoverished global underclass. The UN is on the verge of implementing a "Proposed Extinction of the Primal Species" and Eusebio's been picked to represent his race in a last ditch legal effort to save the Primals from extinction.

It's a hearing like no other. Our human race is on trial. Our own sordid history --- the devastation we've caused to indigenous cultures around the world, the destruction of our environment and of other species --- becomes evidence in the case against our continued existence.

But as the hearing progresses, Eusebio is faced with a terrible decision. He's secretly visited by Yusef who represents the Rejectionists --- a renegade group of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus refusing to accept the d-humans' genetic optimization because it prevents them from knowing God. Yusef urges Eusebio to take the only meaningful action to save the human race from extinction: detonate a nuclear bomb hidden in the UN building in New York where the session is taking place.

As the story develops to its dramatic climax, Eusebio finds himself increasingly alienated from the d-human world, while Yusef's plot places him in an agonizing moral dilemma: whether to engage in an act of nuclear terrorism to preserve the human race.

In this novel, the reader faces challenging questions about spirituality, history and society: Could our race 'evolve' itself to a higher plane? At what cost and benefit? If we lost what is now the 'human race' as a result, would that be so bad, given our sordid and shameful history? On the other hand, is there something special, our soul, worth keeping at any price? Ultimately, the novel forces the reader to grapple with the fundamental question: *what does it mean to be human?*

Discussion Guide

1. Is the world of the late 22nd century described in the novel obviously a dystopia --- a bad future to be avoided at all costs? Or is it more ambiguous? How realistic does it seem as a scenario for our future? To what extent is it an extrapolation of trends that are already happening today?

2. Harry Shields, prosecutor for the d-humans, bases much of his case for the extinction of the Primals on the fact that we unenhanced humans have made such a mess of the world through the 21st century. Do you think he has a case? Are we as a society acting irresponsibly with the power that technology has given to us? Are we really doing such a bad job, or is Harry's case overstated?

3. One of the characters, Yusef, describes a 'genocide of the soul' that occurred during our own era, saying that each person's soul was 'strangled, starved, left to wither away.' To what extent does our modern society strangle our souls? What does it mean to you to think of a soul strangling or starving?

4. Different characters in the book have conflicting views about the human soul. On the one hand, Dr. Schumacher sees the soul as organically arising in each of us from billions of years of evolution. On the other hand, the Rejectionists hold a more conventional, monotheistic view of the soul as our link to the infinite. Are these views reconcilable? Could there actually be more than one soul? What view of the soul are you most comfortable with?

5. The novel is interspersed with four magazine articles, each roughly a generation apart from the next, showing how society gradually shifts its moral values with respect to human genetic engineering. As you consider the articles, where do you think a line is crossed which differentiates the values of the 22nd century from our present values? How realistic do you see the 'slippery slope' to the d-humans of the 22nd century? What protections could we (or should we) put in place now to avoid slipping down that slope?

6. Eusebio's primary role is to defend our race against PEPS --- the Proposal for the Extinction of the Primal Species. However, his arguments keep failing. If you were Eusebio, are there arguments you would use to defend our race that he didn't think of? Or is it, as he said, because 'we'd always been the ones in charge' we could get away with believing that we're more special than other creatures?

7. Each day, when Yusef secretly visits Eusebio, he pulls him inexorably into a conspiracy to commit a horrendous act of nuclear terrorism. At first, Eusebio is horrified at the idea, but as he gets increasingly alienated from the d-humans he realizes that the future of the Primals is truly at stake, and he begins to believe it's the right thing to do. If you were

Eusebio, how would you deal with his dilemma? Is there anything that justifies murdering innocent people ? even saving the human race from extinction?

8. Dr. Schumacher, the double Nobel Prize winner, interprets human history in terms of the increasing domination of the prefrontal cortex over the rest of human consciousness. Eusebio continues this theme when he accuses Harry Shields and the d-humans of trying to complete this domination with their PEPS proposal. Do you think there's any validity to Dr. Schumacher's theory? Do you see a continuing move towards abstraction in our society, in areas such as artificial intelligence and the transhumanism movement? If so, do you think this trend is good or bad?

9. The novel is dedicated to "Chief Joseph and the countless unnamed souls like him" with the quote "History is the story told by the victors". To what extent do the passages in the book on the destruction of indigenous populations challenge our conventional view of history? Is it true that, in fact, our history books would be very different if they were written by those indigenous groups who were defeated? In what ways would they be different?

10. Eusebio's Humanist community, which has avoided any genetic enhancement, represents a rather quirky alternative to modern 22nd century society. How attractive does their community appear to you? Do you think they would have had a greater impact on the world if they had followed Jason's approach rather than Jessica's, and permitted some genetic enhancement for their members? If so, where would you draw the line?

11. Eusebio's wife, Sarah, dies tragically from ovarian cancer, a disease that d-humans had long ago eliminated from their genome. However, she could have been saved if she'd accepted funds from the Humanist community that would have required selling some of their treasured ancient artifacts. Should Sarah have taken the funds to save her own life, even if it meant the beginning of the end of her Humanist community's special identity?

12. On one his virtual field trips, Eusebio is awed by his visit to a recreated African nature reserve. However, he's then disgusted to find out that every creature in the reserve is monitored and controlled by the d-humans' technology. As our society increasingly destroys the natural environment, is it right to try to recreate Nature even it requires extensive artificial intervention? At what point does Nature stop being "Nature" and become something man-made?

13. In the late 22nd century, our era is known as the Age of Denial. Do you think this an appropriate name? What is it that the people of the late 22nd century would think we're denying?

14. Author Jeremy Lent claims that, although the book is set in the future, it's not a typical science fiction book, "because it's really about our society, our time. Because what we do now --- the decisions we make --- are what create our future." How did reading the book make you reflect on trends in our own society?

Author Bio

Jeremy R. Lent was born in 1960 in London, England, where he grew up. He attended Emmanuel College, Cambridge University, where he attained his BA and MA in English Literature. He left England in 1981 to come to the United States, and married his wife, Molly, in 1983. He earned an MBA at the University of Chicago and spent the next fifteen years raising his family and pursuing a career in business, founding an online financial services company called NextCard.

Requiem of the Human Soul is Jeremy's first novel. Currently, he is working on a non-fiction book continuing some of the themes raised in the novel. Specifically, he is following up on Dr. Julius Schumacher's thesis of the "tyranny of the prefrontal cortex", identifying the stages of the prefrontal cortex's ever-increasing dominance in human history, from the beginnings of language to the emergence of agriculture, the development of Western dualism and the ensuing dominance of the scientific method. His current research is exploring whether other cultural traditions, such as traditional Chinese and Buddhist thought, can be combined with recent discoveries from complexity theory and cognitive science, to offer ways to bridge the chasm created in our society between scientific reductionism and spiritual meaning.

Jeremy currently lives with his wife in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Critical Praise

"A philosophical suspense story that exhibits quick pacing, moral nuances and unexpected twists."

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