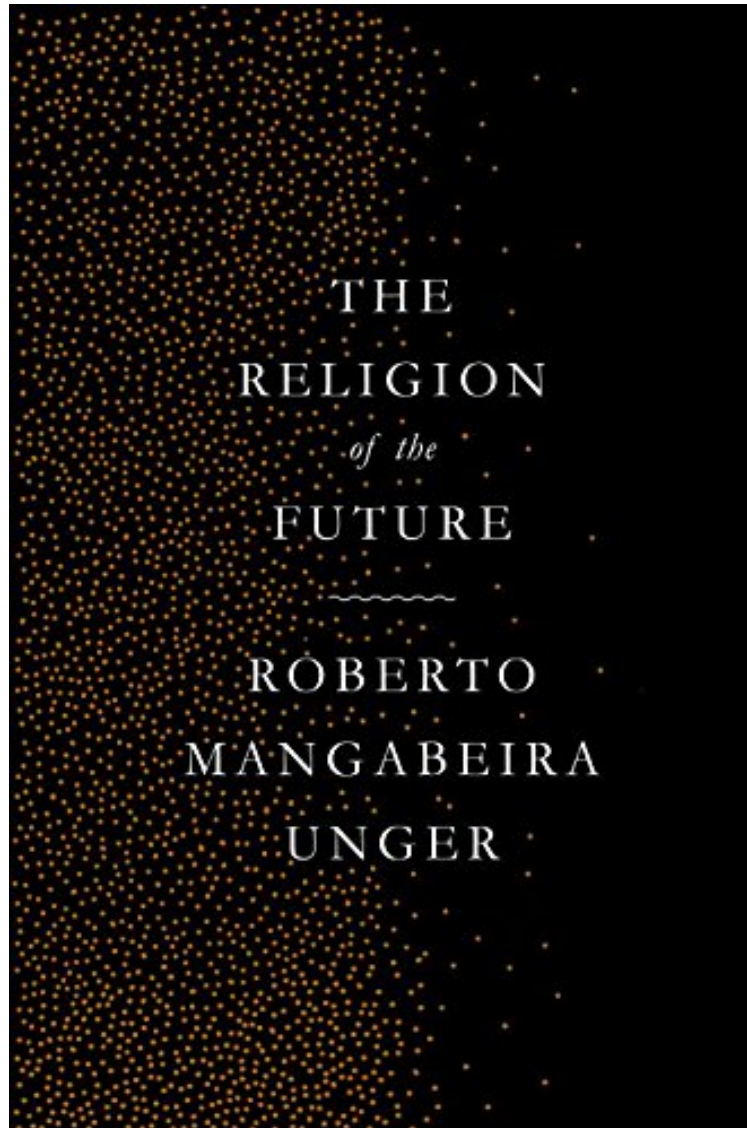


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The Religion of the Future

Roberto Mangabeira Unger

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Roberto Mangabeira Unger : The Religion of the Future before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Religion of the Future:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. In-depth reviewBy John L MurphyFor those who dismiss secular humanism as weak and non-committal, The Religion of the Future encourages emancipation from the mediocre aims of liberal democracy. Harnessing the power of the three monotheistic systems towards liberation, this book redirects that energy towards personal fulfillment and collective freedom. Acknowledging the futility of belief in any afterlife, the goals of men and women need to be guided towards prosperity and achievement, outside institutional frames.Rio-

born, educated in Manhattan and at Harvard, where he has long been employed by its law school, Roberto Mangabeira Unger combines the profession of a philosopher with the career of a Brazilian leftist politician. This dense study follows his works on social theory and critical legal studies. Unger concocts radical experiments to spur change beyond calls for wage labor and property rights repeated by progressives. Favoring drastic upheaval, he urges experiments. He cheers an upheaval of the norm. He begins his latest critique by acknowledging a harsh truth. The "free-floating anguish" within us has been quelled by neither speculative thought nor religious practice. Annihilation cannot be escaped. An existential groundlessness persists. Meanwhile, humans possess an insatiable appetite to surpass their circumstances. These three factors comprise the first of two themes Unger elaborates. Living in the present pulls people into a harsh situation. That is, this anti-theology "sees all of our ideas of God--as person, as being, or as non-person and non-being--as incoherent and unusable." Rejecting consolation, Unger substitutes the "ineradicable defects in our character." Terrorized by death, feeling vertigo while surviving without any support from above and trapped "on a treadmill of desire and frustration," humans remain "aggravated by our susceptibility to the insult of belittlement." Confronted by these circumstances, Unger offers life lived wide awake, at the edge of this precipice of absurdity. This shock, he avers, will transfigure our longings. Within those monotheistic belief systems, struggle against the world serves as a model that post-Christian societies can incorporate. "The value of a machine is to do for us everything that we have learned how to repeat so that all our time can be preserved for that which we have not yet learned how to repeat." This sentence conveys the essence of Unger's approach. It lingers in the mind, and it conjures up a utopian confidence in the ability of humankind to overcome barriers and to redistribute the spoils of leisure fairly and fully. Yet, as with much of the second half of *The Religion of the Future*, skeptic David Hume's key question of how to advance from ought to is dogs Unger's dreams. He wants us to face the real present rather than any unreal future. He tires of his academic and legislative peers who languish as if content with re-describing the world rather than changing it, paraphrasing Karl Marx. He rejects G.W.F. Hegel's contentment with fixed stages of historical evolution as well as Marx's insistence on the inevitable fruition of his rigid plan. Unger, as with these forebears grounded in theory and wedded to speculation, encourages us to turn this transforming quest away from religion, a "lullaby and a deception," towards the quotidian. He shifts our innate tendency for delusion back to a refusal to "deny the irreparable flaws in human life." We hold a "two-sided ticket to either escape the world or to change society." There is no cure for death, nor can there be invented any way of technologically overcoming, in Unger's vision, this end. Shaking up sleepwalkers, Unger blends into his religion of the future various if vague ambitions. Remembering the preciousness of our brief existence shatters our fantasies. Self-transformation starts there. Looking outward, social organizations must reflect this interior reorientation. "The longing for a larger existence" emanates as the central idea of his reformation, showing humans what "we are entitled to hope for." Acceptance of mortality, inner unease and innate yearnings endure as givens. Neither philosophy nor theology can replace religion. "All they have is ideas. What they lack is incandescent experience." Unger dismantles the "scandals of reason" undermining salvation religion. He also abandons the "halfway house" of a demythologized saving grace afforded by secular humanism, impotent between belief and disbelief. His replacement faith, however, offers no more conclusive reason than "follow me" as its justification. Confucianism tried to humanize this world; Buddhism and Hinduism sought to overcome it. They possess their own merits and defects, but as with monotheistic systems, traditional faiths rest on only belief, devoid of logic or reason, for Unger. His religion wants to "reconcile transcendence with solidarity" as people live together for the better. For them, the future does not promise divine approval but a means to overcome "alienation from the present." The religions of struggle, derived from the combat between the sacred and the profane, suggest a new justification. Living in a dignified manner, in freely chosen tasks that reward our own talents, this condition will result in a "godlike" evolution, in this mortal life. Eternal life will be renounced, forever. Promethean worship of a super-human or the power trip of elevated humans earns Unger's contempt. He reaffirms "a promise shared by the higher religions: the devaluation of the reality and the authority of the divisions within mankind." In a far too rare example of a practical application of such a program, Unger points to the difficulties of the Brazilian Indians in staying autonomous from the government in which he has worked as a minister and presidential adviser. In conclusion, *The Religion of the Future* reflects Unger's own curriculum vitae. Tenured before he was thirty at his alma mater, highly placed among the most powerful leaders of his native land, Unger produces a formidable statement. But its nearly five-hundred closely packed pages append very few notes and no bibliography. The critique speaks to his cabal of scholars and think-tanks. How these correctives can be translated into an appeal for ordinary readers, and non-readers even more, who he seeks to motivate most remains unsaid. We are left with a promising, if wanly theoretical, critique.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An amazing book that tackles the incoherences and inconsistencies of religion ...By Darrel Rhea An amazing book that tackles the incoherences and inconsistencies of religion head-on. Unger is a professor of law who surgically, rigorously, and deeply considers why religion matters. This is not an easy read. He is a master of language, but is dense, deep and philosophical. His assessments often contain brutal truth about the human experience. His encyclopedic knowledge of all the world's religions informs his work. All religions tend to be focused on history, or are fundamentally backward looking. He asks how religion should evolve. I am in a small reading group with a Rabbi, a muslim, Christians, a historian, a prominent scientist, etc. This book is challenging all of

them in a satisfying way. As an atheist, I find reading it inspiring and spiritual. It puts me in a hopeful mood. Now, that's an accomplishment!

A new philosophy of religion for a secular world
How can we live in such a way that we die only once? How can we organize a society that gives us a better chance to be fully alive? How can we reinvent religion so that it liberates us instead of consoling us? These questions stand at the center of Roberto Mangabeira Unger's *The Religion of the Future: an argument for both spiritual and political revolution*. It proposes the content of a religion that can survive without faith in a transcendent God or in life after death. According to this religion the religion of the future human beings can be more human by becoming more godlike, not just later, in another life or another time, but right now, on Earth and in their own lives. They can become more godlike without denying the irreparable flaws in the human condition: our mortality, groundlessness, and insatiability.

The Religion of the Future ought to serve as the point of departure for a major global debate about the nature of religion and its place in the twenty-first century. Deeply informed by the best scholarship and unflinchingly radical in its originality and socio-political vision. Paul Monk, *Quadrant* Excels by depth as well as by a wide-reaching erudition. A powerful work. Louis Dupr, *Journal of Religion* Praise for Roberto Mangabeira Unger: A philosophical mind out of the Third World turning tables, to become a synoptist and seer of the First. Perry Anderson A restless visionary. *New York Times* One of the few living philosophers whose thinking has the range of the great philosophers of the past. Lee Smolin, *Times Higher Education Supplement* His ideas are wide-ranging but essentially amount to a passionate call to stop thinking about everything in terms of economics and finance, what he calls the dictatorship of no alternatives. *Financial Times* About the Author Roberto Mangabeira Unger is one of the leading philosophers and political thinkers in the world today. *The Religion of the Future* develops a vision that Unger has also advanced most recently in *The Self Awakened* and *The Singular Universe and the Reality of Time* (with Lee Smolin) as well as in his earlier work, *Passion*.