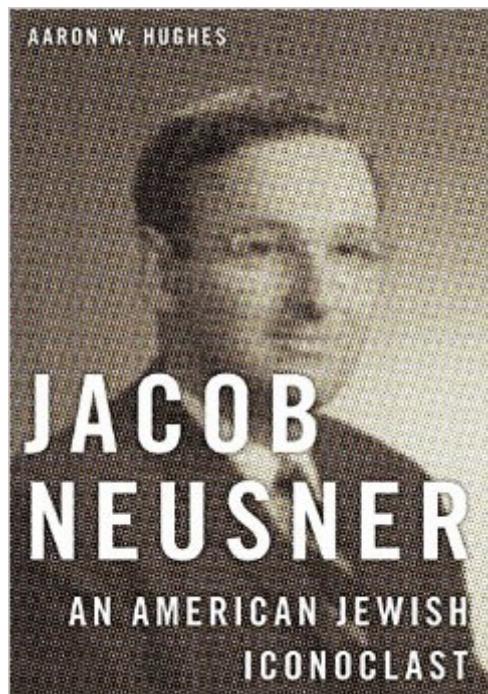


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Jacob Neusner: An American Jewish Iconoclast



Synopsis

Jacob Neusner (born 1932) is one of the most important figures in the shaping of modern American Judaism. He was pivotal in transforming the study of Judaism from an insular project only conducted by "and of interest to" religious adherents to one which now flourishes in the secular setting of the university. He is also one of the most colorful, creative, and difficult figures in the American academy. But even those who disagree with Neusner's academic approach to ancient rabbinic texts have to engage with his pioneering methods. In this comprehensive biography, Aaron Hughes shows Neusner to be much more than a scholar of rabbinics. He is a social commentator, a post-Holocaust theologian, and was an outspoken political figure during the height of the cultural wars of the 1980s. Neusner's life reflects the story of what happened as Jews migrated to the suburbs in the late 1940s, daring to imagine new lives for themselves as they successfully integrated into the fabric of American society. It is also the story of how American Jews tried to make sense of the world in the aftermath of the extermination of European Jewry and the subsequent creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and how they sought to define what it meant to be an American Jew. Unlike other great American Jewish thinkers, Neusner was born in the U.S., and his Judaism was informed by an American ethos. His Judaism is open, informed by and informing the world. It is an American Judaism, one that has enabled American Jews "the freest in history" to be fully American and fully Jewish.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Schrödinger's cat is a well-known thought experiment by physicist Erwin Schrödinger. Using

quantum mechanics, Schrödinger showed how this cat could paradoxically be simultaneously alive and dead. If there could be a term such as Schrödinger scholar; it would apply to Jacob Neusner. Rarely has there been an academic who has been simultaneously called both one of the greatest minds in recent times, and someone ignorant of the subject matter he is dealing with. In Jacob Neusner: An American Jewish Iconoclast, author Aaron Hughes, chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Rochester, has written a fascinating and engaging biography of one of the most influential and divisive scholars of Jewish studies in recent memory. For many, Neusner is simply known as one of the most published authors in history, having written or edited nearly 1,000 books. While the number is indeed staggering, Hughes writes that Neusner's ability to write so copiously has its roots in Neusner's working with his father's newspapers from a young age where he learned the tricks of the trade. That combined with a highly organized mind and the ability to type extraordinarily quickly and accurately enabled him to write so much. It's said of Neusner that he never had an unpublished thought. Some speculate that many of Neusner's books were written by research assistants and students, but Hughes gives no indication to that. Given his extremely high standards and demands, one gets the feeling that Neusner would never have the patience to let a student do the writing. Given that speed at which he was capable of writing, it's likely that it was simply more economical for Neusner to pen it himself. It's not just books that Neusner wrote.

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