

**Selective Annotated Bibliography on the works of Stanley Fish**  
**Compiled by David Dault, Vanderbilt University**  
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*Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980). This is an early collection of Fish essays where he moves away somewhat from the ‘straight criticism’ line of some of his other early works. He has largely moved on from or repudiated most of the theoretical positions developed here, although the essay “Normal Language...and Other Special Cases”, appearing halfway through the book, is the acknowledged turning point toward the project of antifoundationalism / antitextualism he has been working out ever since.

*The Trouble With Principle* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999). Perhaps the “key” text for referencing Fish on the ‘culture wars’ and the efficacy and place of faith in the marketplace of ideas. Also contains a great deal of reflection on first amendment politics and the state of academia.

*How Milton Works* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001). I’m just starting to get into this one. On its face, a book of Milton essays – however, within its confines he is applying the same theoretical and critical thrusts he sharpens elsewhere. He is very attentive to the way faith is deployed in Milton’s literary and political works, and his extrapolations from this are edifying.

*Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Literature* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972). An early work in which he develops the thesis that Augustine, Plato, and Milton are deploying a type of ‘edifying discourse’ that functions a lot like Wittgenstein’s ladder: as it is enacted, it ‘disappears’ itself, leaving no proper textual artifact beyond the moral change in the reader.

*Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke UP, 1989). Another book I am not completely familiar with, though noteworthy for the pair of essays in which Fish dresses-down Wolfgang Iser, and for an essay outlining his developing anti-foundationalist position.

*Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change* (New York: Oxford, 1995). From the Clarendon Lectures. Fish has often said that the theoretical debates that go on in academic guilds make no political difference whatsoever, and that – to the extent that members of such guilds *desire* to make political difference – they should quit practicing theory and begin enacting partisan advocacy. In this volume, Fish expands upon such notions and fleshes them out.

*Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) An Earlier work on Milton. I have not read it.

*There's No Such Thing as Free Speech...And It's a Good Thing, Too* (New York: Oxford, 1994) Fish again honing his arguments, this time addressing first-amendment and specifically legal-interpretive issues. In the same vein as *Trouble with Principle*, though the rhetoric is even sharper. Fish does a thorough job of demonstrating his thesis that there must always be limits and prior restraint in order for a limited 'free speech' (the only kind we've got) can take place.

"Postmodern Warfare: The Ignorance of Our Warrior Intellectuals." *Harper's Magazine*, July 2002 – The first piece by Fish I read. He takes on the 'culture wars' arising in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, interrogating the statement that the war on terror is 'not a religious war.' He demonstrates pretty convincingly that it is, and that the attempt to say what is 'proper Islam' from outside Islam is a fool's errand.

"There is No Textualist Position." *San Diego Law Review* 42.1 (2005) – This recent work is a full turn again for Fish. He had, in this essay, thoroughly abandoned the 'reader response' positions with which he has been so long identified. A very closely reasoned and densely argued attack on Antonin Scalia and his ilk.

### **Secondary Literature:**

Phillip J. Donneley, *Rhetorical Faith: The Literary Hermeneutics of Stanley Fish* (Victoria: Univ. of Victoria, 2000) An attempt to assess Fish 'mid-career', based largely on earlier works. I find Donneley's reading to be off-the-mark on several points, not the least being his continued attempts to read Fish strictly within the lens of 'reader response'—a position that Fish himself repudiates more and more strenuously through his career.

Gary A. Olsen, *Postmodern Sophistry: Stanley Fish and the Critical Enterprise* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000) I have not had a chance to look closely at this one

Gary A. Olsen, *Justifying Belief: Stanley Fish and the Work of Rhetoric* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002) An attempt to deal with Fish on the question of Religion. Again I feel this writer doesn't 'get' it with regard to the strong anti-liberalist position Fish takes. Olson comes off like the writers critiqued in "Why We Can't All Just Get Along".