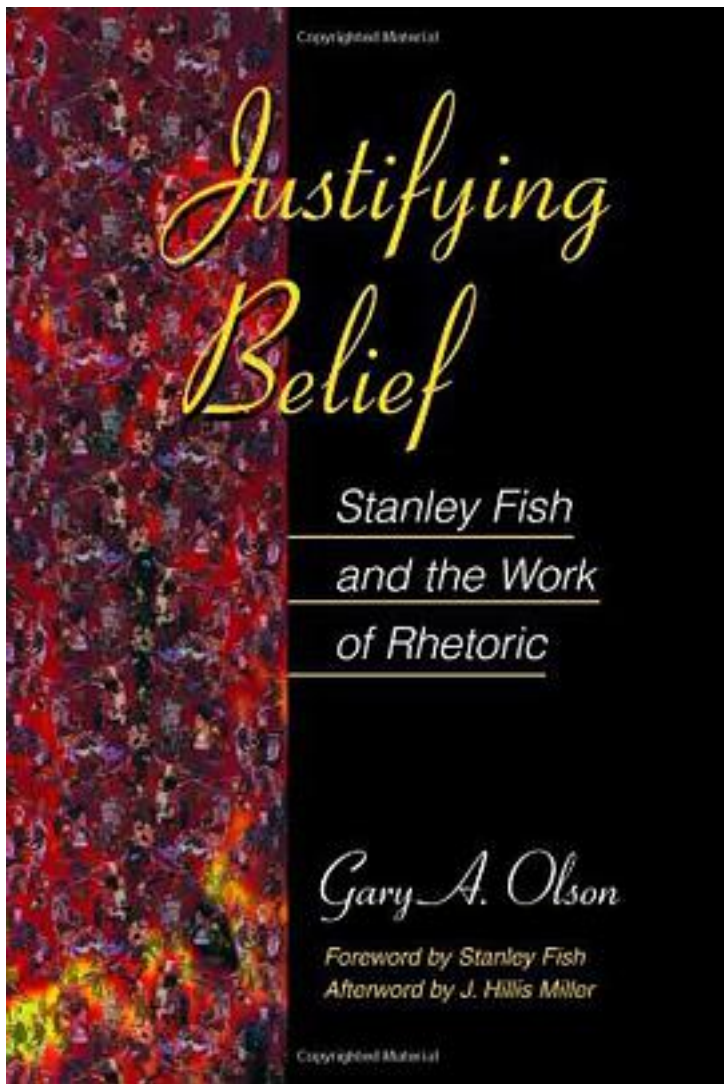


Justifying Belief



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While Stanley Fish has exerted immense influence on the study of seventeenth-century poetry and prose, his most widely read works -- and perhaps his most important -- are his nonliterary writings. In *Justifying Belief*, Gary Olson examines Fish's nonliterary work and explains that what unites Fish's interventions in so many seemingly disparate areas of inquiry is his belief in the centrality of rhetoric. Whether he is discussing how disciplines conduct their work, how political positions triumph, or how practice always derives from specific situations despite the grandiose theories employed to justify them, Fish consistently turns to the specific local, contingent context -- to the rhetorical situation at play -- to explain how something works. For Fish, people "understand" or are "persuaded" by a position because it fits into the structure of beliefs already in play, not because they have been swayed by the "reasonableness" of someone's argument; they then pursue the available means of support to justify that belief rhetorically, both to themselves and to others. Olson demonstrates that this strong relationship between rhetoric and belief is the intellectual foundation of much of Fish's work.

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