

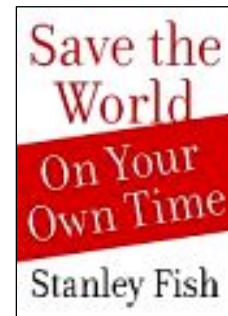
Stanley Fish, **Save the World on Your Own Time**, Oxford University Press, 2008, 208 pp., \$19.95 (hardcover).

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### ***Stanley Fish and The Role of Ought in the Academy***

Listening to current discourse both within and outside of the academy, it seems clear that the university is in a moment of transition. The transition *to what* is certainly the debate, but it seems that commentators, critics, academics, and politicians agree that something *ought* to be done about the contemporary university.

Something *ought* to be done, popular press authors like David Horowitz say, because universities are overrun with “dangerous” liberals who indoctrinate rather than educate students (Horowitz, 2007a, 2007b).



Something *ought* to be done, politicians and policy-makers say, because the imbalance of liberals to conservatives on campuses leads to a lack of “intellectual diversity,” and diversity is, after all, a primary concern for universities (Byrd, 2007, 2008; Simon, 2008).

Something *ought* to be done, professors like Walter Benn Michaels say, because academic and university focus on diversity has diverted attention from the more important and pressing issues of poverty and economic inequality (Michaels, 2006).

Something *ought* to be done, former administrators like Anthony Kronman and Derek Bok say, because the research university model has forced us to give up on the fundamental, bigger questions in life, in favor of limited, disciplinary knowledge (Kronman, 2007), and because the commercialization of higher education has displaced the purpose of education from generating virtuous, socially conscious individuals to generating profit (Bok, 2004, 2007).

Something *ought* to be done, because “higher education has an unprecedented opportunity to influence the democratic knowledge, dispositions, and habits of the heart that graduates carry with them into the public square” (“Presidents’,” p. 2).

That last *ought* is perhaps the most noteworthy of all of the oughts, taken from “The Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education,” a document claiming that universities have a “fundamental task to renew our role as agents of our democracy” (p. 2). More than 1,000 representatives from post-secondary schools have signed the document.

According to Stanley Fish, these signatories and their universities, as well as all of the oughts mentioned above, are wrong. Civic responsibility is not the business of universities, nor is social justice a university concern; these things are not what universities ought to do.

So, what *is* it that universities ought to do? Fish's answer is simple: their job. It is not the job of academics to save the world, he says, and if academics want to address issues of social injustice and civic responsibility, or engage in religious or political activism, they certainly can — on their own time; that is, not in or through the university structure. So, the line by which one can navigate through the contemporary university world of oughts is quite easy to follow, a simple tripartite mantra: Do your job, don't try to do someone else's job, and don't let anyone else do your job.

The competition of oughts in and for the contemporary university is the critical problem addressed in *Save of the World on Your Own Time*, for it is this competition, Fish argues, that only continues to distract universities from their primary tasks: the creation and transmission of knowledge and the equipment of individuals with analytic skills. As he puts it in a succinct, summative passage, teachers

teach materials and confer skills, and therefore don't or shouldn't do a lot of other things — like produce active citizens, inculcate the virtue of tolerance, redress injustices, and bring about political change. Of course a teacher might produce some of these effects — or their opposites — along the way, but they will be, or should be, contingent and not what is aimed at. (p. 66)

Such effects as the forming of a student's social conscience to be sensitive toward, say, global economic inequality, should not be aimed at because such an aim confuses a "hoped for effect — graduates who perform admirably as citizens" with "what can actually be taught" (p. 12). The idea for Fish is that when universities<sup>1</sup> aim so high — at, essentially, changing the world by changing one student at a time — students end up short-changed if their souls are not beautified. Producing admirable citizens is problematic, not because it isn't a desirable outcome, but because such an outcome is immeasurable and largely unachievable in a secular university setting. For Fish, academics are precisely in the opposite business, the business of the measurable and the achievable — thus, the "do your job" part of the mantra.

Doing your job also means not trying to do someone else's job. In echo of Max Weber's (1946) vocation lectures, Fish asserts that the academy should be anything but a collection of political activists or people who feel "called" to be a part of the enterprise. Academics are not in the business of teaching people how to be moral, or how to be good citizens, or of forming characters, because academics are not equipped to undertake these processes. "I can't speak for every academic, but I am not trained to do these things," Fish says, "although I am aware of people who are: preachers, therapists, social workers, political activists, professional gurus, inspirational speakers" (p. 66). The point is that moral character development and the like is not to be taught both because it cannot be taught in secular and state

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<sup>1</sup> Fish's argument throughout the book is focused primarily on public universities, though most of his points are applicable to secular universities at large. Universities with religious affiliations are a different matter, and Fish recuses himself from commenting on this domain.

university settings, as mentioned previously, and because this is not an academic's job; it is someone else's job to teach these things.

The final portion of the saying, "don't let anyone else try to do your job," speaks to the current politicization of education, a movement in which activists and politicians have begun to get involved in university issues. From Horowitz's "Academic Bill of Rights" to instances in the Colorado legislature and the continual culture wars, those outside of the university system are becoming more and more interested in determining the structure and curricula of colleges, often in the name of "intellectual diversity."<sup>2</sup> But, as Fish notes, "the irony is that while intellectual diversity is urged as a way of fighting the politicization of the university, it *is* the politicization of the university," for the redress of political affiliation makes about as much "academic sense" as requiring the proportionate political affiliation quotas in boardrooms or on "the roster of the Boston Red Sox" (p. 123). The argument is that politics/political affiliation are not relevant criteria to university education, performance, or evaluation, because they are *nonacademic*, and that when academics confuse the two activities, they invite criticism upon themselves and their universities' educational practices.

Throughout the book, Fish's arguments make logical sense; that is, if you accept his premises, then one will very well arrive at his conclusions. It is those premises, however, that many will find objectionable, most notably the notion that the educational and research process is not a political one. In order to understand and critique Fish's view, one must understand the answer to the question, "*What is the nature of the academic enterprise?*" To Fish, this is the right question to be asking in our current moment, and it is "the one that [he has] been asking on every page of this book" (p. 107).

#### *The Nature of Education*

The issue of what universities can "legitimately (as opposed to presumptively) claim to be able to do" (p.169), as well as the larger issue of what an education *is*, are of course not new concerns. These debates have been going on for quite some time – and I do not simply mean since the publishing of Allan Bloom's (1987) *Closing of the American Mind* and the canon and culture wars that seemed to follow in the 1980s and 1990s (Kimball,1990; D'Souza, 1991; Graff, 1992; Bernstein, 1994; Menand, 1996; Berman, 1995). Rather, one might find the roots of the arguments in the Platonic-sophists debates of antiquity, back in what Cicero in *De Oratore* called "Athens, that discoverer of all learning" (I.iv.14). Briefly

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<sup>2</sup> The "Academic Bill of Rights" (<http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/documents/1925/abor.html>) is a document that circulated in several state legislatures (Larkin, 2004; Byrd, 2007), operating on the principle: "You can't get a good education if they are only telling you half the story" ("Students for Academic Freedom"). Also, in early 2008, the University of Colorado at Boulder announced that, in an effort to redress the presence of 800 registered Democrats and only 32 registered Republicans on the faculty and the dominance of progressive political course offerings, it is seeking a Professor of Conservative Thought & Policy (Simon, 2008). The purpose of such a post, says Chancellor G.P. Peterson, is to stay true to the university's mission of diversity, which means that "we should also talk about intellectual diversity," he notes (Simon, 2008).

revisiting some of these issues will help shed light on the current situation, as well as aid in understanding of Fish's arguments.

One of the primary issues in antiquity was whether critical thinking was a method by which one pursues truth (be that a relative or universal truth), or whether it is an achievable state, a place at which one arrives. On the table: the mode(s) of *discovering* truth and the process of *conveying* truth to another.<sup>3</sup> Two key questions divided the camps in the answering of both questions: a) How was an answer to be found (via dialectic or rhetoric)? and, b) Who was equipped, or could be equipped, to find answers to given questions?

At the heart of the first question is the notion of methods, and I'll analyze the methods of both the sophists and the Socratics in turn. The term *sophist* is derived from *sophos* (wise), and it was used in antiquity to refer to a teacher of rhetoric (Kennedy, 1999, pp. 29, 45). For sophists in the fifth century B.C.E., truth was unknowable, or, if it was indeed knowable, the epistemological concern was greater — how would one know truth was or was not found? Thus, the purpose of education was to train people for citizenship, to participate in civic life through instruction in speaking and composition, not to find truth. More important, or more accessible, than truth (not *aletheia* but *physis*: nature, objective, universal) were the laws (*nomos*: societal conventions, relative, malleable). Education consisted, then, of learning and molding laws, and being persuasive speakers, since, as Kennedy (1999) notes, "*nomos* is a human creation, transmitted by education . . ." (p. 30).

Plato's famous problem with sophistic rhetoric, exemplified in the *Gorgias* dialogue, is that "there is no need to know the truth of the actual matters, but one merely needs to have discovered some device of persuasion . . ." (459 C). That is, the sophist "does not know what is really good or bad, noble or base, just or unjust, but he has devised a persuasion to deal with these matters so as to appear to those who, like himself, do not know to know better than he who knows" (459 D). The primary theme here is substance versus appearance. The Socratic philosopher is concerned with *substance*: nature (*physis*), meaning, truth; the sophistic rhetorician is concerned with *appearance*: conventions (*nomos*), persuasion, force. Plato desires truth, beauty, and goodness to reign, not merely the more powerful position — which, in Plato's view, is what inevitably happens if society is ruled by human law and convention. Given that sophistic rhetoric runs on the engines of power whose "substance" is "flattery" (463 A) and not truth, Plato concludes that "rhetoric is of no use to us at all" (480 B).

Instead, truth — irrefutable truth — should be the grounding of human interaction and societal relations. What is necessary, then, is a *method* for discovering truth. In the sophistic framework, truth is not discovered but created, and it is the speaker who persuades society to adopt the truth as he or she sees fit. In Socratic philosophy, truth is discovered via dialectic (*διαλεκτική*) — systematic question-and-answer between interlocutors, turn-takings of proposition and evidence, claim and backing, critique and refutation. This process is evidenced in most all of Plato's dialogues, and made explicitly clear in

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise specified, *truth* will be operationally defined as the best answer to a given question. So, the pursuit of truth means discovering the best answer available to whatever question is posed.

*Phaedrus*. As Kennedy (1999) puts it, the sophists did not give “any generalized rules”; “there was no discussion of technique until Phaedrus encountered Socrates” (p. 32). No matter where one stands on the issue of truth being universal or relative, natural or divine, or human-made or created, Socratic philosophy was the first in Western thought to give us a method of human inquiry.

Dialectic, the first method for inquiry,, is described as a process of discovery with a specific order. Plato, though still vehement against sophistic rhetoric, has begun in *Phaedrus* to outline what a philosophical rhetoric might be. There are two important differences between Plato’s rhetoric and sophistic rhetoric to note before addressing the method itself.

The first major difference for Socratic rhetoric is a concern not with a person’s mind or emotions, but one with their soul. That is, a true rhetoric aims not at persuading another person to believe whatever the speaker says, but to produce “conviction in the soul” (271 A). Thus, one can distinguish between persuasion (temporary, bodily) and conviction (permanent, soul-related) in Plato’s rhetoric. The second key difference between Platonic/Socratic and sophistic rhetoric is the audience. In the sophistic encounter, the audience is generally a large mass of people, usually uneducated. In the Platonic encounter, the audience is either to be a small group or a one-on-one discussion, situations which make it harder to impress or fool listeners. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the rhetoric should be that which would persuade the gods “to act or speak about rhetoric as to please God best” (274 B).

The dialectical method is essentially, then, the true process of convincing the soul. In order to do this, one must do three things. Firstly, one must “describe the soul with perfect accuracy ... this is what we call explaining its nature” (271 A). This is necessarily first, because the soul (*psyche*) is immortal (245 C), and thus, to explain the nature of the soul is to explain something immortal and immutable.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the teacher of the true rhetoric will say what a soul’s “action is and toward what it is directed, or how it is acted upon and by what” (ibid). Thirdly, the rhetorician will “classify the speeches and souls and will adapt each to the other” (245 D). Thus, as evidenced in all three stages, rhetoric is primarily concerned with the soul, and the method of proof and conviction is to explain what the soul is, the forces acting upon it and the way it acts upon others, and to meld speeches and souls together, thus arriving at truth.

In this view, method and being are one: The philosopher cannot convey truth without knowing truth, and the philosopher cannot know truth except via this particular method. Thus, the method for uncovering (or more accurately, remembering) truth is also a method of living. For Plato, philosophy is a

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<sup>4</sup> Understanding Plato’s conception of the soul is vital to understanding his philosophy. The details of this are less important for understanding the dialectical method, which is my primary concern. But in brief: Souls exist in the World of Forms, the eternal immutable world of Truth. There is a hierarchy of souls, ranging from the top (philosophers) down to the ninth (tyrants) (*Phaedrus*, 248 C-D), and these souls pass into human form. Access to the immutable world is via memory — “in communion through memory” (*Phaedrus*, 249 C) — and thus, remembering is part of discovering truth. Humans help each other remember and thus access this world — hence, dialectic as the method for discovering truth, or, perhaps more accurately, remembering truth. This is why memory plays such an important role in Plato’s philosophy, why he is skeptical of writing destroying memory, and so forth.

way of life, and philosophical rhetoric is the *method* by which one ought to live. The people who live this way, who have access to the World of Forms, are the (only) ones who can guide students to also live in this way, and it is these initiated folks who should run the society (see Plato's *Republic*).

But the sophistic refutation of the Platonic view, in addition to charges of elitism and epistemological circularity, declares that the melding of method and being is a false assimilation. Plato's view is that there are two forms of persuasion, "one providing belief without knowledge" (sophistry) and "the other sure knowledge" (dialectic/philosophical rhetoric) (*Gorgias*, 454 E). Plato, obviously, has no use for the former, and fears that it not only obscures, but even pushes people away from, the truth; thus, its practitioners *and* its teachers are evil. But, Gorgias defends, sophists "imparted their skill with a view to its rightful use against enemies and wrong-doers, in self-defense, not provocation"; thus, "it is not the teachers who are wicked, nor is the art either guilty or wicked on this account, but rather, to my thinking, those who do not use it properly" (456 E – 457 A). In other words, Gorgias is arguing that rhetoric is a skill, something that can be taught; it is taught in good faith, and its (mis)application is not a responsibility of the teacher or school.

This is similar to the view espoused by Isocrates, whom Cicero called "the Master of all rhetoricians" (*De Oratore*, II.xxii.94). In *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates was indeed interested in the pursuit of truth; however, he did not believe in a "prescience" that could know what was right and true or would lead to happiness and success in all situations (p. 291.2). In *Antidosis*, he remarks, "the kind of art which can implant honesty and justice in depraved natures has never existed and does not now exist" (p. 274). As translator Norlin (1929) notes, for Isocrates, "All that education can do is to develop a sound judgment (as opposed to knowledge) which will meet the contingencies of life with resourcefulness and, in most cases, success" (fn d, p. 163). In this view, the sort of things Plato was interested in teaching are viewed as unteachable; that is, one cannot teach someone to be good. Thus, one should not waste time attempting to teach such things. But a formalized education can make people "more skillful and more resourceful in discovering the possibilities of a subject," and, while it cannot take those without any talent and turn them into geniuses, "it is capable of leading [ungifted people] on to self-improvement and to a greater degree of intelligence on many subjects" (*Against the Sophists*, p. 294.15).

In this regard, Fish clearly represents the continuation of the Isocratic-pragmatist position — teach what can be taught, and what can be taught are skills. But where Fish and the Isocratic-rhetorical tradition sharply part company is that Isocrates and the sophists believed that what they were providing was *precisely* citizenship training (in fact, several books have been written attempting to revive Isocrates' views on education, rhetoric, and civic participation; e.g., Poulakis, 1997; and the essays in Poulakis & Depew, 2004).

The argument is that, in teaching rhetoric — that is, in teaching the skill of public speaking and persuasion — more was being taught than the rote mechanics of arrangement and diction. For Isocrates, "the power to speak well is the surest index of a sound understanding" (*Antidosis*, p. 255). This is a bold and important move. In this view, Isocrates has *linked the forms of language with the forms of thought*,

having declared that clear speaking is a result of clear thinking, while fuzzy speech would indicate fuzzy thought.<sup>5</sup>

Instilling civic responsibilities and collective mindedness through rhetoric, defined as the rules of language and speaking well as to produce conviction, is important not just for the physical, material perpetuation of a given society, but also because these tools actually teach one to *think more clearly*. Thus, the method of rhetoric acquires one wisdom (φρο/νῆσις) — defined as one “who is able by [his or her] powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course” of action (*Antidosis*, p. 271). By teaching language, systematized rules of grammar for writing and speaking, one is also teaching how to more carefully listen and perhaps even see; in short, one is teaching *how to think* — a formalized skill, not a gift or talent.

So the skill, knowledge — a transferable good — was *internalized* by the student; the knowledge (re)shaped the student’s conscience by connecting new synapses and forming new convictions, and thus becoming the student’s (new) instincts. In short, education in the Greco-Roman tradition was the forming of one’s interior life, the training of one’s conscience to respond properly to any and all given exigencies, be they matters of law, politics, friendship, love, or war. In this view, education is hardly neutral, or objective, or unable to shape a student’s life; on the contrary, education *is* the process of (re)shaping an individual. *This is precisely why education is so vehemently debated, especially on political and religious grounds, and why matters of character, the good, and truth are so prevalent in the context of education.* In other words, the internalization of knowledge, of information and skills, is not, contra Fish, a hoped-for effect; it is, for better or worse, what an education *is*: a process of cultivation.<sup>6</sup>

Fish seemingly recognizes this truth to some degree, noting that the liberal arts are like poetry or a virtue, in that engagement in them is its own benefit, in that education is its own reward and not something to take part in because it will give you something else later on down the road. “If you are committed to an enterprise and have internalized its values, you don’t spend much time asking questions like, ‘what is this good for?’” (p. 59).

Given that education is a process of internalization, the questions are entirely begged: what should be taught, what are we cultivating? The answers to what *ought to be cultivated* quickly slip into the varieties outlined at the top of this paper: diversity, social justice, sympathy, etc. But it is this slippage — from education being an internalization of knowledge and thus a (re)forming of conscience to a

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<sup>5</sup> Cicero echoes precisely this concept in *De Oratore* (I.xi.48): “If, on the other hand, you would narrow the idea of oratory to nothing but the speaking in ordered fashion, gracefully and copiously, how, I ask, could your orator attain even so much, if he were to lack that knowledge whereof you people deny him possession? *For excellence in speaking cannot be made manifest unless the speaker fully comprehends the matter he speaks about.*” (Emphasis added.)

<sup>6</sup> This is part of Nussbaum’s (1998) argument in *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Consider the landmark work of George Gerbner and Larry Gross on the subject of cultivation as well (e.g., 1976) for a broader understanding of the relationship between exposure and beliefs.

fight over what the conscience of a society (or university or individual) then ought to be — that is *exactly the problem*, and it is here where Fish's argument shines the brightest.

***"Everything is Political"***

The slippage is what Fish refers to as the "everything is political" argument. The line of reasoning goes something like this: "Because there is no avoiding imposing values in one direction or another, we might as well impose the values in the direction we prefer," or put bluntly, "if we don't push our politics, the classroom will be taken over by someone's else's" (p. 172). The idea is that, because choice is involved, and choice requires drawing a line which marks inclusion and exclusion and thus is a manifestation of power, then education, and teaching, is a political act. Thus defined, indeed, everything is political. But this is a different type of politics than politics *as such*. As Fish puts it:

If by 'political' we mean the presence in a situation of competing visions of the good and the true, then of course everything is political, for no form of socially organized life — be it marriage, industry, church life, the military, in addition to politics *per se* — is free from ideological conflict, and even when conflicts are (temporarily) resolved, the shape of the resolution will at some level be political too. But the fact that politics marks every context of human action doesn't mean that it is legitimate to import the politics appropriate in one context into another which, while no less political, will be home to a quite different politics. (p. 172)

The type of politics that is appropriate to academics is the type of politics associated with any social or occupational situation (office politics, locker-room politics, domestic politics). Academic politics are things like "what texts should be taught, what methodological approaches are legitimate, what courses should be required, and which reading of a poem is correct" (p. 173). Now, in reading this list one might be tempted to say, "Yes! And all of those things are political!", or, as Fish anticipates a reader objecting, that all of these things are designed to garner particular views or particular responses and are therefore political. His response is not to deny the politics of choice, but rather to affirm it, and to do so in a very specific and concrete way:

. . . if we are teaching rather than proselytizing — doing academic politics and not ballot box politics — the particular responses we hope to elicit are responses to an academic question (What is the structure of the argument? Is this text unified? Is this account of the event complete?) and not the question of what we should do about the economy or the AIDS epidemic or the pollution of the environment. (p. 174-175)

Fish argues that academics often conflate these two things — politics *per se* and the politics of choice in an academic environment — to pursue partisan agendas while maintaining a clear conscience about their political agenda. But regardless of motive, the salient point is that teaching of this variety is not education but indoctrination, and Fish believes that critics on the political right are entirely founded in charging professors of this variety on those grounds. But, contra most of those on the political right, Fish,



a man dedicated to liberal education, pragmatism, and a form of antifoundationalism,<sup>7</sup> is hardly arguing for *ideological diversity*, a redressing of the balance between right and left politics in the classroom. Rather, he argues for the elimination of politics of any ideological stripe, from clear left- or right-leaning politics even to the more subtle talk of social justice and multicultural tolerance, from the classroom altogether.

What exactly, then, is the difference between education and indoctrination? Fish clearly defines the difference being a process of “academicizing,” a word he coins in the book. To academicize is to take a topic, “detach it from the context of its real-world urgency,” and then “insert it into a context of academic urgency, where there is an account to be offered or an analysis to be performed” (p. 27). Fish

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<sup>7</sup> Fish, apropos of the earlier discussion, is content being called “a contemporary sophist” (Fish, 1994, p. 281), by which he means to communicate a commitment to the epistemological concerns of what is usually called postmodernism or strong pragmatism in the contemporary era. But Fish’s postmodernism is by no means the type usually painted by critics setting up straw men arguments. As he notes in *The Trouble With Principle* (1999),

. . . there is no specification of the facts of a matter independent of some or other comprehensive background already assumed and in place. Indeed, independently of any comprehensive doctrine there is neither perception nor judgment; and therefore when someone urges a conclusion that supposedly follows from the setting aside of comprehensive doctrines, it is really a conclusion that follows from a comprehensive doctrine . . . (p. 286)

In other words, this is not an assault on truth. Rather, the essential point is that epistemological accounts, contra to the claims of relativity and circularity, tell someone nothing about how one will, or should, act or what even they believe.

If you know that someone has a pragmatist account of belief, you know nothing about what he or she will do in a moment of crises or decision. Indeed, this is true of all epistemological accounts . . . [...] your preferred vocabulary will take you neither to heaven nor hell. That’s the bad news, at least for those who either harbor high hopes or entertain dark fears. (Fish, 1999, p. 295)

As *Trouble With Principle* highlights, Fish has been tackling the larger issue of the is/ought problem for years and has recently continued his argument that nothing necessarily follows from general propositions (Fish, 2000; Fish, 2003). The tie-in to the academic moment is this: Given that nothing necessarily follows from a given proposition, “one is neither directed to do something or refrain from doing something” (2003, p. 390). Or, as he notes at the conclusion of “Theory Minimalism” (2000):

I am not in the business of promoting anything. I merely want to explain to you that whatever you might want to promote, no general theory is going to help you; and, for that matter, no argument that theory is not going to help you will help you either. If it has been my argument that theses on the level of general philosophy do not dictate answers or strategies on the level of practical behavior, it must be the case that no form of behavior follows from that argument, which is itself general. Indeed, if there is anything I have said here that moves you in some direction, if after hearing me you go away in possession of something useful, I will have failed. (p. 776)

gives several examples of academicizing, such as George W. Bush being the worst president in history (by turning the question itself into an object of study — American obsession with rankings and themes of upward mobility, what makes a president's stock to go up or down over time, etc.) or the legal and moral concerns of the Terry Shiavo case (by casting it as a debate between substantive and procedural justice, then having Locke, Kant, Mill, Berlin, and/or Rawls weight in).

Academicizing most certainly does not negate or ignore the vital questions of a particular historical moment, or of an individuals' life; rather, it casts these questions in ways that allow for them to be interrogated on academic grounds (quality of argument, historical context, accuracy, etc.), as opposed to political, religious, or ethical grounds. This, Fish argues, is what the academy is for, and this is our job as academics. To argue issues on political, religious, or ethical grounds is not problematic in and of itself; it just isn't our job. And if we do feel as if it is our job, as if there is a moral imperative to act, to correct an injustice or stop a harm, we are not bound by our occupation to remain silent on the issue in society at large (i.e., protesting, writing letters to the editor, etc.). By all means, save the world, Fish says. But do it on your own time.

### ***The Academic Ought***

Fish, like Isocrates and Plato, believes that truth is still the primary goal of education. But the truth universities and scholars are to seek in the academic enterprise is *academic* truth, not Universal Truth. *Ought* is not to be eliminated from the academy by any stretch; rather, claims of truth, be they by Plato or Jesus or Nietzsche or Obama or by Fish, should indeed be argued for or against by academics, but they should be subjected to *academic oughts*, and not political, religious, or moral oughts.

Now, of course, Fish is advancing his own *ought* throughout this book. But lest one should think Fish is caught in a bind of claiming objectivity or the higher ground — a *true* vision amongst imperfect or impure visions for education — Fish would well admit that his *ought* is not to be considered as a metaphysical imperative but merely as the best argument in the current public and university debate. Indeed, his *ought*, if his arguments are taken seriously, is the *ought* that makes the most sense for secular education. Fish's *ought* gives a clear, unified sense of purpose for the academy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (thus solving internal tensions of politics and morality), keeps us as experts over our own fields (and thus not subject to external pressures from political constituencies), and provides us with measurable, achievable goals that serve as a concrete basis for evaluation. The *ought* of no *oughts*, or the *ought* of questioning *oughts*, is the academic *ought*.

Regardless of whether one views education as an external process, one in which knowledge and action are severed in the Enlightenment-pragmatistic tradition, or whether education is an internal process, one in which knowledge and action are inexorably linked in the Greco-Roman tradition, Fish's ultimate argument remains strong: what *ought* to be taught, what *ought* to be cultivated in secular institutions of higher education *is how to think academically*. In this respect, Fish's book *ought* to be required reading for administrators, faculty, graduate students and policy-makers alike, for it argues clearly and forcefully *the academic ought*.

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