



Ideas Under Fire: Historical Studies of Philosophy and Science in Adversity

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Since Aristotle's famous declaration that the speculative sciences originated with the emergence of a leisure class, it has been accepted as a truism that intellectual activity requires political stability and leisure in order to flourish. Paradoxically, however, some of the most powerful and influential contributions to Western intellectual culture have been produced in conditions that were adverse—indeed hostile—to intellectual activity. Examples include Socrates' stirring defense of the examined life before a hostile Athenian jury, Boethius writing *The Consolation of Philosophy* under the specter of impending torture and execution, Galileo devising key notions for modern mechanics while under house arrest, and Jean-Paul Sartre drafting portions of *Being and Nothingness* in his war diaries, to name only a few of the most famous incidents—all extraordinary achievements spawned, developed or completed in adversity. In cases such as these, a philosopher or scientist must manage somehow to remain intellectually creative and focused despite living in conditions that are adverse or hostile to thought. In brief, they are working on ideas under fire.

This book is a survey of several momentous cases of philosophers and scientists working under fire. Each chapter of *Ideas Under Fire* explores a particular case or set of related cases. For each case contributors consider two questions: How did the individual at the center of a particular moment of discovery overcome such formidable obstacles to leisure and conceptually abstract thought? And how did adversity shape their thinking under fire?

Each chapter has been written by a specialist on its respective subject, and the book covers every period of Western history. All the chapters are written in an accessible style that is intended to appeal to both specialists and generalists.

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