

***Quidvis Perpeti*: Resistance and Resignation in Cicero's Lampsacus Affair**

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What should be said of resistance when resistance cannot succeed? In Cicero's account of the Lampsacus affair (*In Verrem* 2.1.65–69), Philodamus and his fellow citizens confront Roman power with little prospect of controlling the consequences of their actions. Yet their resistance carries an ethical significance that survives political defeat. Emerging from the tension between the obligation to resist an injustice and the inability to determine what resistance will achieve, this significance is central to how Cicero constructs the passage. Since Gaius Verres fled into exile after the *actio prima*, Cicero never delivered this second prosecution in court.¹ The Lampsacus narrative consequently reaches its audience as a published forensic composition, inviting readers to judge an episode whose moral and political significance Cicero has carefully shaped. The question the passage poses, then, is not simply whether the Lampsacenes were justified, but what obligation retains when its fulfilment lies beyond the agent's control.

To examine this relationship between ethical obligation and outcome, Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* offers a useful framework. *Infinite resignation*, as Kierkegaard describes it, involves relinquishing the expectation of finite fulfilment while preserving the significance of what has been relinquished.² His *tragic hero*, by contrast, embodies a sacrifice undertaken in fulfilment of a duty recognizable within the ethical community.³ Both concepts illuminate Philodamus's decision to defend his daughter and the Lampsacenes' subsequent refusal to endure Roman domination. Although the citizens' collective

¹ Gildenhard, I. (2011) *Cicero, Against Verres*, 2.1.53–86. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, pp. 8–9.

² Kierkegaard, S. (2024) *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric*, trans. A. Jech. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, p. 50, footnote 25: "What makes resignation finite or infinite? In Danish, 'finite' (*endelig*) often denotes what has definite or specific limits in terms of duration, size, or extent. In a legal context, it specifies reasons or conditions or a time period in which deliberation can take place. What is 'infinite' (*uendelig*) then is the negation of these limits: that which is without limitation, not bound in terms of time, size, extent, conditions; hence it can denote what is absolute and unconditional. Here, 'infinite' resignation seems to mean especially a resignation that is unconditional and not temporally bound."

³ Kierkegaard, 2024, p. 37. "It follows, as a matter of course, that any other interest whatsoever in which an individual has concentrated the whole reality of actuality for himself can, when it is seen to be unrealizable, provide the occasion for the movement of resignation." The tragic hero demonstrates heroism by relinquishing personal desires for an ethically superior end.

resistance cannot be identified directly with Kierkegaard's individual *tragic hero*, their deliberation and actions provide a useful analogy for his account of ethical commitment. However, Philodamus acts within the ethical rather than suspending it and the *tragic hero* supplies the more exact analogue. Through his characterization, Latin syntax, and spatial motifs, Cicero presents resistance as a response to violated obligations whose ethical significance persists beyond the limits of political agency.

The moral structure of the episode emerges from Cicero's contrasting descriptions of Philodamus and the Roman intruders. Philodamus is *in primis inter suos copiosus*, a man of considerable means and standing among his fellow citizens.⁴ Later he is described as *vir primarius et homo honestissimus*, an eminent and thoroughly respectable man; the pairing of *primarius* and *honestissimus* associates social standing with moral character.⁵ Set against this description stand the *legatorum adseculas*, the attendants or hangers-on of the Roman delegation.⁶ Such a contrast prepares the reader to understand the encounter as an inversion of legitimate authority, in which men of inferior standing exploit their association with Roman power to violate the household of a respected citizen. The contrast also anticipates the ethical stakes of the episode, since the reader is invited to measure Roman conduct against the standards its representatives claim to uphold.

Initially, Philodamus receives his guests with generosity. Cicero writes that he *magnifice et ornate ... convivium comparat*, preparing a splendid and elaborate banquet.⁷ The balanced adverbs *magnifice et ornate* lend his hospitality a dignity that contrasts with the guests' subsequent conduct. Through the phrase *humanitatem consuetudinemque suam*, Cicero

⁴ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.67, cited in Gildenhard, 2011.

⁵ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.67, in Gildenhard, 2011.

⁶ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.65, in Gildenhard, 2011.

⁷ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.65, in Gildenhard, 2011.

reinforces this impression, presenting Philodamus' generosity as an expression of established civility.⁸ Hospitality thus becomes a moral practice grounded in customary relations between host and guest. Especially offensive, therefore, is Rubrius' behaviour, since he exploits the very welcome that makes his presence in the household possible.

The pretence of behaving *Graeco more* supplies an excuse for continued drinking, after which Rubrius demands, *cur ad nos filiam tuam non intro vocari iubes?*—"Why do you not order your daughter to be brought in to us?"⁹ Crucial here is the phrase *ad nos*. Rubrius speaks as though Philodamus' daughter ought to be summoned to the assembled guests, treating their desire as sufficient grounds for her presence. By the imperative logic of the question, hospitality is converted into entitlement. Assuming that his position as a guest gives him a claim over the host's household, Rubrius erases the obligations that should govern their relationship.

Cicero then describes Rubrius' order *ut ianuam clauderent et ipsi ad foris adsisterent imperat*.¹⁰ The proximity of *ianuam* and *foris* emphasizes the physical restriction of the household's entrance and exit. In consequence, the space of hospitality is transformed into a mechanism of confinement. The domestic setting makes the violation particularly clear: Philodamus' home, established through Cicero's preceding description as a place of hospitality and customary civility, becomes the setting in which those obligations are forcibly disregarded. With the later attack on the embassy, when the Lampsacenes batter the entrance with stones, the door also establishes a spatial connection.¹¹

Between the obligations governing Philodamus and the desires governing Rubrius and Verres, Kierkegaard's discussion of resignation clarifies the distinction. In *Fear and Trembling*,

⁸ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.65, in Gildenhard, 2011.

⁹ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.65, in Gildenhard, 2011.

¹⁰ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.66, in Gildenhard, 2011.

¹¹ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.69, in Gildenhard, 2011.

infinite resignation involves relinquishing the expectation of finite fulfilment while preserving the significance of what has been relinquished; the movement concerns the individual's relationship to an unattainable good, rather than a simple abandonment of desire.¹² Rubrius' conduct illustrates the opposing relationship between desire and restraint. Cicero's description of Verres as *qui una cupiditate raperetur* presents him as a man carried away by a single appetite.¹³ Undermining any suggestion of rational self-command, the passive force of *raperetur* represents desire as something that governs him. On this account, Roman power is exercised through the immediate satisfaction of appetite. While the order to close the door demonstrates the ability to control bodies and movement, the preceding language of hospitality establishes the obligations that such control violates. Cicero therefore makes the exercise of power a test of character: Rubrius possesses the means to compel compliance but disregards the responsibilities that should govern his conduct. Whereas Rubrius violates the obligations of hospitality in person, Verres embodies the appetite that such violations serve. Cicero's syntax thus measures the distance between the power the Romans wield and the obligations they ignore.

A different relationship between desire, duty, and action is introduced by Philodamus' response. When his daughter is threatened, he orders his household *ut se ipsum neglegant, filiam defendant*.¹⁴ The balanced clauses establish a clear hierarchy: they are to disregard his own safety and defend his daughter. While the reflexive *se ipsum* identifies the person whose safety is sacrificed, *filiam defendant* directs the household's protection towards someone more vulnerable. The compressed syntax gives the decision its force. Above the preservation of his own person, Philodamus places the obligation to defend his daughter. Kierkegaard's account of resignation helps explain the significance of this decision. Philodamus can choose to defend his daughter, yet

¹² Kierkegaard, 2024, p. 50.

¹³ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.66, in Gildenhard, 2011.

¹⁴ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.66, in Gildenhard, 2011.

he cannot guarantee her safety or control the Roman intruders' response; his duty remains binding despite the uncertainty of its fulfilment. Insofar as it identifies the limits of finite control and the possibility of maintaining a commitment when its desired outcome cannot be secured, the comparison with *infinite resignation* proves useful.¹⁵

Philodamus' resistance, however, also requires the ethical framework Kierkegaard develops through the *tragic hero*. Sacrificing a personal desire to fulfil a duty that remains intelligible within the ethical community, the *tragic hero* acts as Kierkegaard's account requires. Kierkegaard explains that the *tragic hero* "gives up his wish in order to fulfill his duty" and embodies "a higher expression of duty, but not an absolute duty."¹⁶ Philodamus' decision fits this framework because its justification rests on recognizable obligations: the protection of his daughter, the integrity of his household, and the responsibilities governing hospitality. His action can be understood through the relationships that Roman power has violated. Consequently, Cicero presents Philodamus' resistance as an ethical decision whose justification does not depend on its success.

The limits of Philodamus' power are made visible by the violence that follows. Cicero writes that *iactatur domi suae vir primarius*, describing Philodamus as being manhandled in his own house.¹⁷ Placed at the receiving end of violence by the passive *iactatur*, he suffers it within the very location emphasized by *domi suae*. His house, previously associated with his standing and hospitality, becomes the setting of his humiliation. The sentence reaches its culmination in *aqua denique ferventi a Rubrio ipso Philodamus perfunditur*.¹⁸ Marking the boiling-water assault

¹⁵ Kierkegaard, 2024, pp. 40–41. "Infinite resignation is the last stage preceding faith; thus, everyone who has not made this movement does not have faith; for in infinite resignation, for the first time, I prepare my self in my eternal validity; and only then can there be talk of seizing existence in virtue of faith."

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, 2024, p. 76.

¹⁷ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.67, in Gildenhard, 2011.

¹⁸ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.67, in Gildenhard, 2011.

as the climax of the preceding violence, the adverb *denique* intensifies the sequence, while *a Rubrio ipso* assigns responsibility emphatically to Rubrius himself. Placed by the passive *perfunditur* in the position of the person acted upon, Philodamus exposes the disparity between his willingness to defend his daughter and his inability to prevent the violence inflicted upon him.

The contrast between Philodamus' initial command and his subsequent treatment establishes the relationship between ethical commitment and finite power. Expressing a duty he can recognize and act upon, his decision nonetheless cannot determine its consequences.¹⁹ Cicero extends this ethical conflict from the household to the civic community. The following morning, *homines mane in contionem conveniunt*.²⁰ The citizens assemble and *quaerunt quid optimum factu sit*: they consider what course of action would be best.²¹ Presenting the Lampsacenes as a civic body assessing its circumstances, the vocabulary of assembly and deliberation frames their resistance as a collective judgment. From a collective judgment about the conditions under which they are living, their resistance emerges.

The assembly's conclusion is expressed in the formulation *quidvis esse perpeti satius quam in tanta vi atque acerbitate versari*: it is preferable to endure anything rather than remain subject to such force and cruelty.²² Conveying the extremity of their position, the hyperbolic *quidvis* is reinforced by *vi atque acerbitate*, which characterizes their circumstances through both the exercise of power and the suffering it produces. Weighing their continued subjection against the risks of resistance, the citizens conclude that the existing conditions have become intolerable.

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, 2024, pp. 53–54. "For if the ethical—that is, ethical community—is the highest, and there is nothing incommensurable left over in man of a kind other than that incommensurability which constitutes evil, that singularity that should be expressed in the universal, then one needs no categories other than those possessed by Greek philosophy, or those which can consistently be logically derived from those."

²⁰ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.68, in Gildenhard, 2011.

²¹ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.68, in Gildenhard, 2011

²² Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.68, in Gildenhard, 2011.

Out of this decision develops the ethical conflict established in Philodamus' household: both confront a situation in which accepting the immediate conditions carries its own moral cost.

Kierkegaard's account of the *tragic hero* provides a way to interpret this collective decision, provided the comparison remains analogical. Deliberating as a community, the Lampsacenes reach a decision that arises from obligations and injuries their fellow citizens can recognize. Their conduct differs from the *tragic hero*'s individual sacrifice, yet it similarly tests the relationship between ethical commitment and uncertain consequences.²³ While the ultimate outcome of their resistance remains entirely beyond their control, the citizens retain sole authority over their willingness to endure such conditions. This distinction transforms their deliberation from mere desperation into a deliberate judgment about the terms of their lives rather than a calculation of probable success.

Action against the Roman delegation's quarters translates that deliberation into violence: *caedere ianuam saxis, instare ferro, ligna et sarmenta circumdare ignemque subicere*.²⁴ Striking the embassy's door with stones, the citizens press forward with weapons, surround the building with brushwood, and set it alight. The accumulating infinitives convey the escalation of the attack. The movement from one action to another presents the riot as the culmination of the citizens' decision, connecting their deliberation to the violence that follows. The recurring motif of the *ianua* strengthens this connection. Earlier, Rubrius orders Philodamus' door closed, using the household's entrance to restrict movement and facilitate coercion.²⁵ Subsequently the Lampsacenes attack the embassy's door, directing their violence towards the building in which the Roman representatives are lodged.²⁶ The two doors connect the private and public

²³ Kierkegaard, 2024, p. 105. "The genuine tragic hero sacrifices himself and everything he has for the universal; his deed and every feeling in him belongs to the universal; he is disclosed, and in this disclosure he becomes ethics' beloved son."

²⁴ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.69, in Gildenhard, 2011.

²⁵ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.66, in Gildenhard, 2011.

²⁶ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.69, in Gildenhard, 2011.

dimensions of the episode: the first marks the violation of a household, while the second becomes the focus of a civic response to that violation. The correspondence does not make the two acts equivalent. Rather, it establishes a causal and spatial relationship through which Cicero presents the riot as a response to the abuse of Roman power.

The violence of the attack also complicates the ethical significance of the citizens' resistance. Making the reasons for their actions intelligible, their deliberation nonetheless exposes them to consequences they cannot control. The collective analogy with Kierkegaard's *tragic hero* therefore concerns the citizens' commitment to resisting intolerable conditions, not an automatic justification of every act they perform.²⁷ Whether the original grievance was legitimate their political defeat cannot determine, just as their ethical rationale cannot guarantee that their chosen response will succeed. Cicero's narrative holds these questions together by tracing the riot back to the circumstances that produced it.

The Roman traders' appeal to the *nomen legationis* introduces a further conflict over how the events will be judged.²⁸ Invoking the status of the delegation, they frame the attack in terms of the *iniuria legati*, the wrong committed against a diplomatic representative.²⁹ This institutional claim threatens to make the citizens' violence the defining feature of the episode, displacing the misconduct that preceded it. Cicero's narrative challenges that interpretation through its ordering of events. By establishing Philodamus' hospitality, Rubrius' conduct, and the citizens' subsequent deliberation before presenting the institutional claims surrounding the embassy, Cicero gives readers the context needed to assess the riot. The delegation's status remains relevant, but it cannot by itself settle the moral interpretation of the confrontation.

²⁷ Kierkegaard, 2024, p. 59. "If one who must act were to judge himself according to the outcome, he would never come to the point of beginning. Even if the outcome is able to bring happiness to the whole world, it cannot help the hero; for he first came to know the outcome when the whole affair was finished, and it was not by this that he became a hero, but he became one by the fact that he began."

²⁸ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.68–69, in Gildenhard, 2011.

²⁹ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.68–69, in Gildenhard, 2011.

This narrative arrangement is especially significant because Verres' exile prevented Cicero from delivering the *actio secunda* in court. Preserving an episode that would otherwise have been judged through the immediate exercise of Roman authority, the published speech constructs a readership that must evaluate the conduct of the Roman representatives alongside the response of the Lampsacenes. Written for circulation rather than oral delivery, the speech addresses readers free to weigh the whole sequence of events. The account is a forensic argument, shaped by his prosecution of Verres, rather than a neutral record of events. Its rhetorical construction nevertheless makes the relationship between Roman institutional power and the obligations it violates available for scrutiny.

A final connection between ethical commitment and Cicero's forensic project is provided by Kierkegaard's discussion of disclosure. In *Fear and Trembling*, the ethical becomes intelligible through its relation to the universal, making the individual's commitment recognizable within a shared ethical framework.³⁰ Philodamus' defence of his daughter rests on an obligation his community can understand, while the Lampsacenes' assembly similarly makes their collective grievance a matter of civic judgment. Preserving both the reasons for their resistance and the violence through which it culminates, Cicero's published account allows readers to assess the confrontation beyond the institutional judgment that the Roman delegation seeks to impose. The narrative thus extends the conflict between Roman authority and Lampsacene resistance into the act of reading itself: the audience must consider what the citizens opposed, why they opposed it, and what their defeat can establish about the justice of their actions.

³⁰ Kierkegaard, 2024, p. 86. "Ethics does not have coincidence, consequently it does not arrive at an explanation, it does not fool about with dignities, it lays a monstrous burden on the hero's frail shoulders, it condemns as presumptuous the intention to play Providence by his act; but it also condemns the intention to do this by his suffering."

The movement from Philodamus' household to the civic assembly and finally to the riot reveals the limits of political power without making those limits a measure of ethical obligation. Philodamus cannot ensure his daughter's safety and the Lampsacenes cannot ensure that resistance will free them from Roman domination. Yet both confront circumstances in which preserving themselves through submission carries its own moral cost. In the end, the Lampsacenes choose resistance not because they expect victory, but because submission has become a form of complicity. Illuminating the commitment to a duty whose fulfilment demands sacrifice is Kierkegaard's *tragic hero*, while *infinite resignation* clarifies the relinquishment of control over what that commitment can achieve. The Lampsacenes' riot remains open to moral scrutiny, but its failure cannot retroactively make their deliberation meaningless or their grievance disappear. Preserving the moment in which a community, having judged its circumstances intolerable, chooses to resist them, Cicero's account leaves history to judge an act of resistance defined not by its outcome, but by its necessity.

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