

Abby Finan

HON 202

### The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus: a look into leadership

Throughout the play *Julius Caesar*, William Shakespeare highlights each character's leadership style to differentiate each of their contrasting leadership ideologies. While Caesar, Antony, Cassius, and Brutus all possess different leadership styles, they also possess an abundance of flaws. Along with many of his plays, Shakespeare uses this recognition of flaws in the characters to make it difficult for the readers or watchers of the plays to easily pick a side - it is not a simple black and white, or good and bad scenario. Shakespeare wants there to be reasons to sympathize with a character while also remembering the flaws that they possess to build tension between contrasting positive and negative attributes. This tension forces the reader to choose the leader that they truly understand or identify with the most. In this play, Brutus' complex character demonstrates that there are many grey areas regarding a leader's capability to be truly "good", "bad", or somewhere in between. Although Brutus has many flaws, Shakespeare highlights his strengths and depicts him as dying a noble and tragic death to prove that he is a good leader.

As Shakespeare does with all of the plays main characters, he highlights their flaws. Brutus possesses many shortfalls of good leadership including being overly trusting, headstrong, and lacking emotional intelligence. Although being trusting and building trust among others is largely a positive trait seen in leaders, Brutus too trusting of the people around him and can be seen as naive in some instances. He trusts Cassius and is easily manipulated into killing Caesar. As he convinces Brutus that Caesar is worth killing, Cassius reminds him of a story to make Caesar seems more human and similar to them, saying, "Caesar cried, "Help me,

Cassius, or I sink!” I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor, did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder the old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber Did I the tired Caesar. And this man Is Now become a god” (1.2.111-116). This quote depicts Cassius manipulating Brutus to do his bidding while he pulls the strings behind the scenes. Furthermore, Brutus lets Antony speak at Caesars funeral, which can be argued as one of the largest mistakes he makes in the play.

Showing his trust in Antony, in Act 3, scene 1 Brutus says, “You shall not in your funeral speech blame us but speak all good you can devise of Caesar” (3.1.245-246). This depicts how naive Brutus is in thinking that Antony, Caesars good friend, will not turn against him for the crime he just committed or manipulate the citizens behind his back. He is even more naive in letting Antony talk after he, himself speaks and sees how easy it is to sway the perspective of the group of people listening.

Along with being overly trusting and naive, Brutus is very headstrong and lacks an abundance of emotional intelligence. He does not appeal emotionally toward the people like Antony does. During his speech at Caesar’s funeral, he strictly uses logic to explain his reasoning and does not possess as much emotion as Antony does in winning the crowd over. Antony, however, knows exactly how to appeal to the crowd. He cries in front of the citizens and shows them Caesar’s will to portray how much Caesar cared for the people, manipulating them into feeling rage toward the death of Caesar. Additionally, Brutus does not listen to others with opposing views well. When there is a disagreement over whether to kill Antony while they kill Caesar or not, Brutus chooses not to listen to Cassius when it is and instead gives his own word as the final decision. He brushes off Cassius’ suggestion to kill Antony and says, “Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius, to cut the head off and then hack the limbs, Like wrath in death and envy afterwards, For Antony is but a limb of Caesar” (2.1.162- 165). Here, Brutus not

only disregards Cassius' suggestion, but he also compares Antony to merely an arm of Caesar, rather than his own human, and inherently underestimates Antony's power. Additionally, he does not listen Cassius' suggestion in not coming down from the mountains and resting before fighting Antony and Octavius in battle, which ends up leading to their ultimate defeat. These flaws depicted in Brutus by Shakespeare is a way of showing the grayness of each character and the idea that not every leader is perfect and unflawed, they are all human.

Just as Shakespeare depicts Brutus as flawed, his strengths are also highlighted and leaves the decision of whether the leader was "good" or "bad" up to the reader or watcher. A positive trait of leadership is taking action. When Brutus sees something unjust, he takes charge and does something about it. Once he finally makes up his mind about killing Caesar, he says, "It must be by his death, and for my part I know no personal cause to spurn at him But for the general" (2.1.10-12). Although he ponders for a while and needs time to think on his own about whether or not killing Caesar is a good idea, once he thinks it through for himself, he immediately sticks with what he decides and soon hurtles into action with killing Caesar. Unlike many of the plays that Shakespeare writes, where they contemplate killing for long periods of time, Brutus quickly makes up his mind and, the next morning, takes action. Additionally, Brutus is portrayed as a levelheaded, logical leader who knows how to appeal to the people of Rome and explain his actions as to why he killed Caesar. He appeals to the crowd's *logos*, as he explains his steps and reasons for killing Caesar logically and with a cool head. He goes through his actions and thoughts step by step in front of the crowd and says, "As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honor him: but, as he was ambitious, I slew him"(3.2.24-27). This shows the crowd Brutus' thought process and gets them on the same page. This process is key to getting the people to calm down and listen to Brutus as they

wanted to hear why he killed Caesar and what his justifications were. Brutus is also honorable and loyal to the people of Rome – he truly cares about the wellbeing of Rome and justifies his actions

in this way. When explaining that he loved Caesar just as much as they, he says, “If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: —Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more” (3.2.20-22). This shows that he too, cared about Caesar as a friend, but had the wellbeing of Rome in his thoughts as he decided to kill Caesar. Caring about of the people one leads is a quality of a good leader and Brutus clearly possesses this. Shakespeare’s points in highlighting Brutus’ strengths is a way of showing the type of leader that he is and depicting him as a logical, honorable man, who cares about the wellbeing of Rome. This is part of the reason his death is so tragic, as he cared about Rome and justness for the country. Brutus is not acting out of his own personal motives, but instead acts out of what he genuinely thinks will serve his country best.

Shakespeare’s final point in his portrayal of the death of Brutus. He falls upon his sword, not to escape humiliation or defeat, but instead because he believes it is a just and honorable punishment for himself and to avenge Caesar. He says before killing himself, “Caesar, now be still: I kill'd not thee with half so good a will” (5.5.50-51). Brutus uses his final breaths to say his reason for killing himself was for Caesar – furthering the point that he is an honorable man who acts upon what he believes is justified for the good of the country. He dies an honorable death and is known as a respected, noble leader. This is shown by Shakespeare making some of the last words spoken in the play about Brutus. Antony’s last words of the play are about Brutus, he says, “This was the noblest Roman of them all. All the conspirators, except him, Did that they did out of jealousy of great Caesar; Only he, in a general-honest thought And common good to all, made

one of them” (5.5.68-75). This portrays a clear difference between Brutus and the rest of the conspirators. Brutus actually killed Caesar for the good of the people, not for his own personal agenda.

Although he trusted and listened to the wrong people, he was an honorable leader and cared about the people Rome. Shakespeare highlights his strengths while also portraying his flaws to show his noble actions. Shakespeare finalizes his point at the end of the play, with Brutus’ noble, tragic, and heroic death to leave the readers and watchers with the message that Brutus was an honorable man and died for justness and for Rome.