

Brutus in an honorable man.

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Estne Virtus? Confucius said that, “ People with virtue must speak out; people who speak are not all virtuous. ” Confucius lived in China around 500 BCE and voiced novel opinions on virtue, politics, ethics, and other abstract ideas. Even today, thousands of years later, many people believe in Confucianism. Confucius was very vocal. In Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar no man is more vocal than Brutus. He assassinates Caesar, pleads to the people for their support, and conducts war with Octavian and Marc Anthony. But is he virtuous? Brutus is not necessarily virtuous; he does all of these actions to gain glory and to show his virtue.

Everyone should aspire to be virtuous. However, as seen by Marc Antony and Cassius manipulating Brutus and Brutus’s death, excessive pursuit of virtue can be detrimental. Brutus’s excessive obsession for virtue leads to his failure. Brutus loves Julius Caesar; however Cassius manages to turn Brutus against Caesar by taking advantage of Brutus’s obsession with virtue. Cassius urges Brutus to “ think of the world” and kill Caesar for the good of Rome (1. 2 329). Cassius explains to Brutus that Caesar must be killed in order to preserve Rome, and not because of any other reason, like Cassius’s jealousy.

Cassius explains that Caesar is unfit, saying that “ Caesar cannot even swim”, and unworthy to rule Rome, saying that Brutus is more fit. Brutus does not respond to the statements made by Cassius, and draws more attention to the “ general shout[s]” of the people (1. 2 139). Brutus avoids the questions and must “ recount hereafter” of Cassius’s reasoning, Brutus needs time to consider if the conspiracy is virtuous or not (1. 2 174). If virtuous, then he will act. Although Brutus does admit that “ Brutus had

rather be a villager / than to repute himself a son of Rome / under these hard conditions at this time / is like to lay upon us" (1. 181-184). Brutus dislikes the dishonor that the tyranny of Caesar brings to Rome. He thinks it detracts from his own virtue. He cares for his virtue. Later on, Cassius also sends letters to Brutus posing as Roman citizens. Cassius gives Brutus the impression that citizens beg him to "speak, strike, and redress" (2. 1 49). When Brutus thinks that the people want Caesar to fall, Brutus tells himself that he joins the conspiracy for the people. In actuality, he joins the conspiracy not to preserve the Republic but to show virtue, to look better, more virtuous, in the eyes of the Roman people.

Brutus is not concerned for the people, but for his image when he joins the conspiracy. Brutus should kill Marc Antony when he has the chance, and not be so concerned for his own image. For instance, when Cassius proposes to Brutus that they kill Antony along with Caesar, Brutus thinks that by killing Antony the people will look to him as "butcher" and not a "sacrificer" (2. 1 179). Instead, Brutus wants the conspirators to "[appear] to the common eyes" as "purgers, not murderers" (2. 1 192 193). This shows that Brutus bases his choices on whether or not people would view him as virtuous.

Although, he acts foolishly, for he not only prevents the conspirators from killing Antony, he allows Antony, Caesar's right hand man, to speak last in Caesar's funeral. To Brutus, Antony "can do nothing more than Caesar's arm / When Caesar's head is cut off" (2. 1 195-196). Brutus lets Antony speak because it would be viewed as an act of kindness and forgiveness to what was an enemy previously. When Antony enters the pulpit after Brutus, he wins

the crowd and convinces them of the conspiracy's evil. The crowd, the Roman people, now want to set " fire [to] the traitors' houses" (3. 269). Brutus thinks he fights for the people, though the people think otherwise. If Brutus had killed Antony, and not been so concerned about virtue, Brutus would have been able to remain in Rome, remain loved by his people. Brutus commitssuicidebecause he believes that doing so will cause people will think of him as virtuous. Brutus is left to fight Antony and Octavian by himself at Philippi because Cassius kills himself. Knowing the circumstances, Brutus would rather " leap in [the pit himself]" than " tarry till they push [him]" (5. 28-29). Brutus would just as soon kill himself than have himself killed. His reasoning come from the Roman belief that when a person faces dishonor, maybe a military loss, killing oneself is a virtuous way to still obtain honor in spite of what occurred. He declares " I love / the name of honor more than [he] fear[s] death" and so he runs onto his sword (1. 2 95-96). In doing so Brutus has now doomed the preservation of the Republic for the people. If Brutus had cared for the people, he would have continued to fight for them. Brutus shows that, ontrary to what he says, he has the most concern for his own image and not the well-being of the Roman people. Brutus is a selfish man, not a virtuous man. Brutus fails not because he obtains an excessive amount of virtue, but because he hunted for virtue excessively. He hunts for glory and virtue so obsessively that he loses sense of what he believes in. Brutus is known to many as the man of great virtue. Although, the virtue of Brutus is forced, unnatural. In the end, this in itself is not virtuous. Virtue, or any characteristic, comes from the manner in which an action is performed and not the result.

Odysseus is a similar man. He does many virtuous acts, although he acts knowingly that his effect, the result of his actions, will be virtuous. Odysseus took on both Scylla and Charybdis, evil sea monsters, so he himself could demonstrate his superior virtue. Many of his shipmates, and nearly himself, are killed. Odysseus survives become more “ virtuous,” more “ honorable,” for surviving both monsters. Although, if one looks towards how these men performed these actions, they see no virtue. After all, it is not what one does, but how one does it.