

Decius vs. Calpurnia: Argumentation and Caesar's Choice

[History](#), [Ancient History](#)



Arguments are the pinnacle of progress, development and change. People with conflicting ideas and beliefs engage in this activity constantly. However, did you know that arguments actually come down to a science? In 4th century B. C. E, Aristotle theorized that a well formed argument must include the following: ethos (an appeal to ethics, what is right vs. what is wrong), pathos (an appeal to emotion), and logos (an appeal to logic and sense). This theory, so widespread, has even shaped the success of arguments in Shakespeare's plays. In act II of Julius Caesar, Decius and Calpurnia butt heads on whether Caesar should attend Senate. Although Calpurnia used strong pathos, Decius used pathos and logos in combination which turned out to be more powerful (as he appealed to Caesar's pride and provided logical reasoning), and ultimately led Caesar to attend Senate.

Calpurnia's first attempt to convince Caesar to not attend Senate comes in the form of very detailed imagery of her terrifying dream. She hopes that by using pathos, she can scare him out of attending the meeting. One part of her description says, " Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol" (9). She is trying to tell Caesar that her dream foreshadows the death of him in a way that would provoke fear. Although Caesar is a man of war and violence she recognizes he has a softer side and she wants to appeal to that aspect of him. However, Caesar responds that he does not fear death which forces Calpurnia to try from a different perspective. Calpurnia's second attempt to convince Caesar comes in the form of another Pathos appeal. She begs him to not go forth to the senate and pleads, " Let me, upon my knee, prevail in this." (34). After realizing that Caesar does not care about his own safety, Calpurnia informs him that it will upset her very much if he goes and she is

willing to take any blame for his absence. She is hoping that Caesar will care more about the feelings of his wife and be willing to change his mind for her.

Decius, on the other hand, takes a different approach than Calpurnia. He begins his argument by providing an logical, alternate interpretation of Calpurnia's dream, "Your statue spouting blood in many pipes, in which so many smiling Romans bathed, signifies that from you great Rome shall suck reviving blood" (47-50). Decius' use of simple logos to explain the meaning of the dream is very powerful in convincing Caesar. If the dream was actually a prophecy of Caesar's success, why would he attempt to challenge it?

Decius' argument is also supported by the fact that he is known as an intelligent man and has advised Caesar closely in the past. Moreover, Decius also uses pathos to counteract the pleas made by Calpurnia. He uses his knowledge of Caesar's desires and foreshadows, "To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar." (56). Not only is Decius telling Caesar that if he goes to senate he will be rewarded with what he wants most, power, he is also playing to his pride by calling him, "mighty Caesar." Decius is very clever with the way he structures his words which make Caesar desperate to follow his advice. By using such personal and powerful pathos, Caesar plays right into Decius' hands.

Decius had a more persuasive argument because he utilized both a strong pathos and logos whereas Calpurnia only had a semi-strong pathos argument. Decius' argument was quick, clever, logical and exactly what Caesar wanted to hear. There are a lot of examples of Decius' intelligent persuasive tactics but one that stands out from the rest is, "If you shall send

them word you will not come, their minds may change [in reference to crowning Caesar]." (58-59). This small fragment of his argument is the epitome of Decius' genius. Here he has appealed to Caesar's desire to be crowned king and at the same time, logically stated that his most extreme desire will no longer be possible without his attendance. It is due to the powerful combination of tactics in Decius' arguments that allow him to successfully convince Caesar to go to Senate.

The arguments made by Calpurnia and Decius highlight the potential that Aristotle's ethos, pathos and logos carry. Arguments must include a variety of perspectives to be influential, persuasive and convincing. A powerful argument will include an appeal to a person's feelings and emotions and a logical reasoning behind each of their statements. An even more powerful argument will include ethos, it will vouch for what is "right." Arguments are a vital part of human interaction and it is obvious that they are an art rooted in a powerful psychological science.