Exemplar Paper – Choosing the Best of Three Options

Q: Which of the following would be the best leader for Rome: Caesar, Brutus, or Mark Antony? Describe the strengths and weaknesses of each character as a ruler and determine which one would have been best for Rome.

A: It takes many things to be a wise, just, and strong ruler. The Tragedy of Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare is a fascinating study into the personal and political motivations of the characters who seek power in ancient Rome. The play also suggests the question of which of its main characters would be the best leader for Rome: Mark Antony, Marcus Brutus, or Julius Caesar. Despite his flaws, Caesar’s concern for the people and his strong leadership make him the best leader for Rome.

If heartfelt concern for the republic were the only qualification for leadership, Brutus would be the best choice as a leader. Through the play, it is clear that he places his loyalty to his country above his personal ambitions and even above his loyalties to his friends. It is this concern, and the trust that others place in Brutus, that led Cassius to seek Brutus’s support in his plans against Caesar. Brutus fears that Caesar will become a king, destroying the Roman republic. He tells Cassius, “I do fear the people choose Caesar for their king... yet I love him well” (I.2.85-90). However, Brutus is easily manipulated. Cassius easily convinces Brutus that Caesar wants to be a king and also convinces him that murdering his friend Caesar is the best solution to the problem. While Brutus is loyal to Rome, he is too easily influenced by others to be a wise leader.

Mark Antony’s greatest strength lies in his ability to lead effectively. At Caesar’s funeral, he cleverly undermines Brutus’s justification for the murder of Caesar and stirs the Roman people to rise up against Cassius, Brutus, and the other conspirators. Nevertheless, his motivation for doing this is not for the good of the country but to seek personal vengeance for his friend Caesar. This is shown when he takes delight in the riot that he has sparked, saying “Mischief, thou are afoot” (3.3.275). He also takes bribes, showing that he puts his own personal gain ahead of the good of the people. Mark Antony is too selfish to be a leader that will rule fairly.

It is not hard to understand why Caesar was a popular ruler. Despite his popularity, he chose to maintain the republic by refusing to accept the title of king. In his will, he left his orchards and private gardens to the people of Rome to be used as public parks. Caesar’s most glaring fault is his arrogance: he claims that he is “constant as the Northern Star” (3.1.66) and dismisses his own suspicion of Cassius by proclaiming that “I rather tell thee what is to be fear’d Than what I fear, for always I am Caesar” (1.2.221-222), which means that he sees Cassius’s ambitions but does not fear them because he is invincible. While Caesar’s arrogance is a flaw, it ultimately causes harm only to himself by blinding him to Cassius’s plans. He remains a good leader because he never allowed his arrogance to outweigh his loyalties to the Roman people.

None of these three men is perfect, and no perfect ruler ever exists. However, a good leader must be loyal to his or her country and confident enough not to be overly influenced by others. Of all of the men in The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Caesar is the best ruler because of his strong will and his love for Rome.