

“No man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the sufferings to the others. Such a sensitive heart was possessed by Former Kings and this manifested itself in compassionate government. With such sensitive heart behind compassionate government, it was as easy to rule the Empire as rolling it on your palm.”

Before I begin the essay, I would like to state that my philosophical approach would incline more towards that of an analytical tradition. My goal would be to clarify and illuminate the question and interpret it in a way that offers an informed thought or cause of action for readers. Often in this tradition of writing, the scrutiny of a topic is of priority as to frame a situation in a precise way to avoid any confusion. Nothing is left to ambiguity and the aim is to illuminate readers to the arguments which support a thesis, which are justified by examples or thought experiments. Different perspectives to a situation or statement are offered for readers to consider possible interpretations.

I believe that some context would better provide the thought of Mencius. I shall offer some context for the philosopher in discussion: Mencius was (not-exhaustively) a strategist, philosopher and advisor to the king. His works are influential to the governance in Ancient China, where the goal of an empire is to be ruled by Kings and a striving to constantly expand, thus increasing power and influence over more land so that the kingdom would flourish.

Signpost:

I will begin by scrutinizing the title prompt, and allow readers to be on the same page as my thoughts. I will do this by

- 1) Illuminating the role of governance.
- 2) Question the nature of “ruling” and goals of governance
- 3) Illuminate what it means to be a Compassionate Government, by illustrating how it’s different from a non-compassionate government which runs by Machiavellian values.

Through the above essential foundations being laid, I can illustrate the challenge of governance is to define its compassionate ideals. My thesis would be to argue that a compassionate government driven by compassionate ideals is a necessary condition to good governance. I will present a counter-argument in a charitable way; the counter argument being: A compassionate government is weak and therefore has limited power to rule a country effectively.

I will then conclude by wrapping up the essay, hoping that by the end of this essay, I manage to guide the reader, persuade the reader and lead the reader to a new perspective of the issue of interest.

Scrutinizing the Title:

1) Illuminating the role of governance.

The title mentions the term government. It makes sense for us to explore what it means to govern, and the role of such an act upon society.

The role of governance can be illuminated by the thoughts of Thomas Hobbes, who posited that Mankind when left to its own essentially would be in a state of chaos, cruel, savagery and nasty. He coined the term “State of Nature” to describe this doom and gloomy world where every Man is left up to itself, a perpetual war of self against neighbor, where self-interests are prioritised; basically, a way of living that has no certainty of a future. Because of this state where our future is not secured, Hobbes argued that this is why humans resorted to an authoritative figure ruling over this State of Nature. It was born out of a necessity, not an option, that governance is created, which the process of creating an effective society can take its place. An effective society would mean that humans no longer live in the State of Nature as described by Hobbes. Mankind would convene independent of a force, but as a result of the need to protect self-interests, and discuss how the central authority being placed the responsibility of governance shall carry out its objective.

2) Question the nature of “ruling” and goals of governance

“With such sensitive heart behind compassionate government, it was as easy to rule the Empire as rolling it on your palm.”

The word “rule” contains the basic assumption that an object or thing (people) could be controlled, with the use of the many forms of power. A general definition of “rule” straight out of a dictionary means: to exercise sway or influence over; exercising authoritative power, governance or dominion; keep under control; have sovereign control of or over.

This dictionary definition highlights an essential aspect of ruling: power over something. If you have the power over deciding how a chair is used, you can be said to “rule” a chair. If you have the power over a group of people (i.e. a society), you can be said to rule a nation.

The word “rule” in the context of Mencius’ time refers to the gaining control of a group of people without consent (a typical approach Empires expand in the past). By this definition, a government must therefore possess a means that is able to go against the will and permission of the people. This is typically achieved by the means of a military power, as the refusal of such a medium would result in an unfavourable consequence for a person under the rule of such an authority. This reasoning offers us insights to why the strength of an Empire is largely based on its military power, and explains why even in the modern century, the strength of a nation is often

prioritized and absolutely cannot be left unattended as such an act would only result in the suicide of a nation where a more powerful authority would swoop in ascend to control over a particular group of people (a nation).

For an effective governance to take place, an Authority must be secured in order to carry out its ideals expressed by the people. A way to enforce the government's ideals must therefore be in place to prevent chaos and unpredictability. To rule a society and impose ideals, this largely depends on the strength of a nation and thus explains why a government prioritizes the increase of strength of a nation. The strength of a nation could be achieved by imposing laws by the use of force, diplomatic immunity from other more powerful nations, and generally through the direct ownership of military.

With the Hobbesian view of the role and attitude towards the nature of governance, and the perspective of what it means to "rule" in place, we can continue answering the question: What is this objective of governance that we speak about? The goal of governance is to carry out the interests and wishes of the many, which means that the rules outlined are generally based on "positive" moral principles. For example, a society would like to have rules against rapists who rape another individual without consent and thus should be punished. With this rule based on a positive moral principle that of respecting another individual's rights, the people would proudly support the government to put forward such a policy to prevent rape cases. But on the other hand, I would like to present a counter-example that would shed some light to the difficulty of creating effective policies for effective governance. Inspired by Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *A Handmaid's Tale*, suppose there exists a society with the hypothetical condition that Mankind's population has dwindled and the future of humanity lies in the very few remaining fertile men and women, a policy against respecting an individual might be waived in favor of securing a future for Mankind. The government must now make a decision, and an effective government would be incentivized to prioritize the future of Mankind. This means disregarding the individual's rights to consent which can be achieved by forcing women to mate with different men regardless of how they feel about it, in order for a society to strive towards a higher cause.

This raises a very important and contentious question in the world of ethics which would shape how governance should approach an issue considering its morality: Should people act based on a strong moral compass (duty ethics) or should people act based on what would maximize the total interest (utilitarianism). I will briefly illustrate the debate: Immanuel Kant argued that it is a categorical imperative that one act according to duty, that one must always act with the pure intention of doing good, regardless of the consequences. He argued that one of the criteria for an act to be considered moral, would be an act that an individual would "will it to the world", which suggests that a moral act must be universal. On the side of Utilitarianism largely credited

to Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, argued that a moral act would largely be based on the consequence, one that maximizes the total sum happiness for a society.

Both sides of the argument have its strengths and weaknesses, which would inform us about the challenge of governance and must be clarified, for a positive moral act is generally the best way towards good governance. A compassionate ruler must therefore be well informed in its approach to how it views ethics: Acting out of duty by always carrying out the “right” act for a society? Or acting out of maximizing consequence for a society?

This is a dilemma for readers and the leaders of an effective government, to ponder. For the purpose of this essay, I don't intend to solve this issue but I believe by clarifying the ethical problem facing an effective government, supports my thesis that the challenge of governance is rule compassionately. I hope the both sides of this issue would have highlighted the challenge I was talking about.

3) The “Compassionate Government”

I would like to begin by offering a definition of compassion. Mencius mentioned *“No man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the sufferings to the others.”* He explicitly assumes that Mankind has the capability of considering the perspectives of another individual. “Compassionate” should have the necessary condition of having pity and being sympathetic to a fellow individual's concerns and worries.

“Such a sensitive heart was possessed by Former Kings and this manifested itself in compassionate government.” Mencius meant that the great kings that built the strongest empires are compassionate individuals. The act of the compassionate leaders would manifest itself in the government, which means that Mencius was implying that the all it takes is a King to act compassionately to its people and being sensitive the demands and concerns of the people, even if the entire government is corrupted and faulty.

This goes against the Machiavellian view: 1) if the option of being loved is not certain, it is better to be feared than to be loved. 2) To achieve the goal of being able to impose one's ideals upon a society, one must ascend the ranks (i.e. become King) even if it means carrying out unscrupulous and cunning tactics with the purpose to achieve a goal. [Some context, Nicola Machiavelli is an important figure in political philosophy and his personal convictions are informed by his observations of governance in the time of the Renaissance Period in Europe. The Machiavellian view is outlined in his novel “The Prince”, where he observed why it's often the case that bad people become successful in ascending a throne.]

Machiavelli would for example think that Jesus Christ is the biggest loser in the entire history of human existence: Despite being an omnibenevolent, omnipotent and omniscient being, Jesus suffered greatly by being crucified and being treated with disrespect by the Romans. Jesus could carry out his mission to shape the world into a better place only after He resurrected. But sadly as humans, we don't get the rational privilege to resurrect and rule a second time. With this analogy, what this means is that Machiavelli argues that the ideal human leader should rise to power even if it means not adopting the compassionate way, focusing on the end goal of being able to influence a society.

There are other perspectives that could shed some light to what a society would consider as an ideal leader: Friedrich Nietzsche gave birth to the concept of a "Übermensch", which can be interpreted as "powerful man", that for an individual to impose his/her ideals upon society, there must be a will to power, the desire to achieve more and rise the ranks of society; The Greek philosophers agreed to the idea of an empire being ruled by "The Philosopher Kings", or people who are well-versed with philosophy and affairs of a state to provide good governance.

Adopting the Machiavellian view of a leader with a conscience of how politics work, the leader would be ruthless and cunning in its way to rise to power, before being able to impose his/her values upon society. This contrasts with Mencius view that the ideal leader strives towards being some sort of an omnibenevolent being (i.e. like God), through his/her every act from the rise of power to the imposition of values upon society.

I would answer this issue by illustrating how a government is accepted and conceived.

- 1) A government exists to carry out policies in the best interests of society
- 2) A government must preach its ideals, to garner support (regardless of whether or not the society is democratic or fully authoritative, as without the support of people, the government would always be viewed as an ineffective government. The ideals imposed must align with the first point that a government acts according to the best interests of society.)

Rhetoric is essential when garnering the support of people. Aristotle posited that truth is relative (unlike Socratic truth, where a truth so powerful it would appeal to an audience naturally).

Aristotle states that there are three pillars to what makes a great rhetoric. 1) An appeal to Logos: The logical aspect of an idea. 2) An appeal to Ethos: An authoritative figure giving a statement would be perceived as having more truth and reliability 3) An appeal to Pathos: This focuses on the delivery of the ideal by appealing to the emotions of readers.

To rule an empire, leaders must therefore earn these appeals before being able to be conceived.

Conclusion:

Recalling and emphasizing the discussion on the term “ruling” earlier, I can now argue that the compassionate government driven by compassionate ideals is a necessary condition to good governance. Aligning with the compassionate ideals would mean that the compassionate government must essentially be for the people, instead of protecting the interests of the rulers themselves.

The counter argument that a compassionate government is weak and therefore has limited power to rule a country effectively can be addressed with the premise that a government must garner the support of its people. Without the support of the people even in a fully authoritative state, it is not aligned with the ideal goals of governance and thus means that the governance is ineffective. As illustrated earlier, the goal of governance should strive to be as effective as possible, and going against that would mean it being ineffective.

Conclusion:

I have shown my argument through the meaning and interpretation of the title, namely: the role of governance, the nature of “ruling” and goals of governance and what it means to be a Compassionate Government, by illustrating how it’s different from a non-compassionate government which runs by Machiavellian values.

I have presented my argument that a compassionate government driven by compassionate ideals is a necessary condition to good governance.