



GenEd1091



Week 11 Han Feizi

GenEd1091: Classical Chinese Philosophy and Political Theory



GenEd1091



Share your favorite passage from the *Han Feizi*



The Way of the Ruler



What's the relationship between the ruler and minister discussed in the following passage?

Thus, it is said: "A ruler must not reveal his desires, for if he does so, his ministers will carve and polish themselves accordingly. A ruler must not reveal his intentions, for if he does so, his ministers will display themselves differently." So, it is said: "Discard likes, discard dislikes, and ministers will thereupon reveal their true colors. Discard the old, discard knowledge, and the ministers will thereupon take precautions."

Therefore, while [a clear-sighted ruler] has knowledge, he does not employ it to make plans, thus causing the myriad things to know their places. While he possesses worthiness,³ he does not act from it, but observes the reasons behind his ministers' actions. While he has courage, he does not exhibit it through bouts of anger, but rather causes his assembled ministers to exhaust their own martial courage. Hence, discarding knowledge leads to clarity; discarding worthiness leads to achievements; discarding courage leads to strength.



The Way of the Ruler



What's the relationship between the ruler and minister discussed in the following passage?

The Way of a clear-sighted ruler is such that it causes those who are intelligent to exhaust themselves in making plans, while the ruler is able to decide affairs on this basis without exhausting his own intelligence. The worthy organize their talents, and the ruler assigns them posts on this basis without exhausting his own ability. When there are achievements, the ruler takes the credit for their worthiness; when there are errors, ministers shoulder the blame for their faults. As such, the ruler does not exhaust himself in the pursuit of fame.⁶ Consequently, though not a worthy himself, such a ruler becomes the masters of the worthies; though not intelligent himself, he sets straight the intelligent. The ministers do the work, while the ruler achieves success. This describes the guiding principles of the worthy ruler.



The Way of the Ruler



How does Han Feizi incorporate and reinterpret the thought of Laozi? To what purpose?

The Way [of the ruler] lies in what cannot be seen; its use lies in what cannot be understood. Be empty and tranquil without engaging in affairs, and from the darkness observe others' faults. Observe but do not be observed; listen but do not be heard; understand but do not be understood.⁷ Upon understanding others' words, do not change, do not transform, but rather inspect and compare [name and form] in order to assess [their correspondence]. Ensure that each position has only a single occupant and do not permit them to communicate among themselves, and then the myriad things will all reach fruition. Cover your tracks and hide your motivations, and those below will be unable to trace back to your source. Discard your knowledge, leave behind your ability, and those below will be unable to understand your intentions.



Having Standards



What is Han Feizi's conception of law? How are laws related to administrative methods? What specific arguments does he use to establish the priority of laws over self-cultivation?

Now, if a ruler personally examines each of the hundred governmental offices, the days will be insufficient and his strength will not allow it. Furthermore, if those above use their eyes, those below will dress up what those above see. If those above use their ears, those below will dress up what those above hear. If those above use their intellectual faculties, those below will make their explanations more complicated. The former kings took these three things (eyes, ears, and intellect) to be insufficient for governing and so set aside their own personal abilities, relying on laws and techniques and carefully examining rewards and punishments. ... Even those as far as a thousand li away did not dare to change their words, while those in positions of power (shì 勢) in the court did not dare to cover up goodness or dress up wrongdoing. ... As such, the task of ordering the state was insufficient (to exhaust the ruler) and they had a surplus of time in their days. It was the way that these superiors relied upon the power of their position (shi) that made it so.



Having Standards



What is Han Feizi's conception of law? How are laws related to administrative methods? What specific arguments does he use to establish the priority of laws over self-cultivation?

Therefore, it is said: "Skillful carpenters' visual estimations will hit the ink line, and yet they are certain to begin by taking the compass and square as their standard. The snap judgments of the supremely wise will hit the heart of affairs, and yet they are certain to take the laws of the former kings as their standard for comparison." Thus, so long as the ink line is straight, warped wood can be cut straight; so long as the level is even, high spots can be planed down; so long as the steelyard is properly hung, what is heavy will be seen to be greater than what is light; so long as the peck and bushel measures are appropriately calibrated, larger volumes will be seen to be greater than smaller ones.

Thus, employing the law to order the state is merely a matter of promoting what accords with the law and putting a stop to what does not. The law does not incline toward the noble, just as the ink line does not bend around what is crooked.



Having Standards



What is Han Feizi's conception of law? How are laws related to administrative methods? What specific arguments does he use to establish the priority of laws over self-cultivation?

When punishments are weighty, the noble will not dare to treat the base lightly. When laws are meticulously followed, those above will be exalted and their authority not infringed upon. When those above are exalted and their authority not infringed upon, the ruler will be strong and keep to the essentials. This is why the former kings valued these things and transmitted them. If rulers cast aside the law and follow their own private interests, it will be impossible to distinguish superior and subordinate.



Two Handles



**What is Han Feizi's conception of law? How are laws related to administrative methods?
What specific arguments does he use to establish the priority of laws over
self-cultivation?**

The reason the tiger can subdue the dog is because of its claws and fangs. If the tiger were to cast aside its claws and fangs and allow the dog to use them, then the tiger would instead be subdued by the dog. The ruler controls ministers by means of punishment and favor. Now, if he were to cast aside his control over punishments and favor and allow his ministers to use them, then the ruler would instead be controlled by his ministers.



The Difficulty of Persuasion



What is the main idea discussed in this passage? How does it align with the thought of Laozi?

In general, the difficulty of persuasion is not the difficulty of gaining knowledge and using this knowledge to persuade others. Nor does it lie in the difficulty of expressing yourself in such a way as to clarify your meaning. Nor does it lie in the difficulty of daring to speak out all that you know without impediment. The difficulty of persuasion lies in understanding the heart of the person being persuaded such that you can ensure that your persuasion matches it.



The Five Vermin



What's Han Feizi's critique of Confucian attempts to build a state through benevolence and righteousness, and to promote worthy people into positions of leadership?

Antiquity's [sage] King Wen lived in between Feng and Hao, on land of 100 square li. He implemented benevolence and righteousness, embraced the Western barbarians, and subsequently became king of the world. King Yan of Xu lived east of the Han River, on land of 500 square li. He implemented benevolence and righteousness, and 36 states paid him allegiance by giving him pieces of their territory. King Wen of Jing [Chu], fearful that he himself would be harmed, raised an army to attack the state of Xu and subsequently exterminated Xu. Thus, King Wen implemented benevolence and righteousness and became king of the world, while King Yan implemented benevolence and righteousness and lost his state. This is because benevolence and righteousness were useful in antiquity, but not useful in the present. Thus, I say, "When the age differs, circumstances differ."



The Five Vermin



What's Han Feizi's critique of Confucian attempts to build a state through benevolence and righteousness, and to promote worthy people into positions of leadership?

In upper antiquity, people competed by means of the potency of the Way. In middle antiquity, people expelled one another by means of clever stratagems. In the present, people fight by means of vital energy and power. ... On the basis of these examples, we can say this: benevolence, righteousness, eloquence, and wisdom are not the means by which a state can be maintained. Discard the benevolence of King Yan, cease with the wisdom of Zigong, develop the power of Xu and Lu to the point where they can oppose enemies fielding ten thousand war chariots, and the states of Qi and Chu will no longer be able to do what they want with these two states.

Antiquity and the present are faced with different circumstances. The new and the old require different methods of preparation. If one desires to use a lenient and relaxed government to bring to order the people of an anxious age, this would be like trying to drive untamed horses without reigns or whip. This is the disaster of ignorance.

Discussion: break into pairs

Aspect	Han Feizi	Laozi
Role of the Ruler		
Methods of Control		
Decision-Making		
Success Measures		

Discussion



- Do you agree or disagree with author?
- Why?
- If you were to apply this to a real -world scenario, how would you approach it?
- Do you think this is easy to follow?



Post a reflection on Ed

- Prompt: Apply **one** concept from the *Han Feizi* to a real-world scenario and share your thoughts. You may either agree or disagree with the author's ideas.
- Post it on Ed Discussion under “Sections” and “Week 10 Han Feizi”
- **Submit the link of your post under Assignment**
- If you can't finish it by the end of the section, please finish it by the end of the day.