SAGESQUOTE

Han Feizi

韓非子

38 QUOTES

Han Feizi (韓非子)

The coldest realist of the Warring States: law, statecraft, and power held in the centre.

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Every entry below gives four things: the saying in English, the original Chinese as it stands in the text, the book or chapter it comes from, and who translated that line. Nothing here is copied from a modern edition.

- **38** sayings from Han Feizi (韓非子).
- Each line is labelled with its translator — either a named public-domain source or SagesQuote's own rendering from the Chinese.
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Han Feizi (韓非子). Han Fei took the Daoist ideal of stillness and turned it into a manual for rulers. Trust no one, he argued; make the law public, certain and severe, and the state will hold. He wrote the fables of “waiting for the rabbit” and “the spear and the shield” to make the point stick.

01 No state is permanently strong or permanently weak. When those who uphold the law are strong, the state is strong; when they are weak, the state is weak.

國無常強，無常弱。奉法者強則國強，奉法者弱則國弱。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Having Standards" 有度, Chapter 6
Translated for SagesQuote

02 The law does not flatter the noble; the plumb line does not bend to crookedness.

法不阿貴，繩不撓曲。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Having Standards" 有度, Chapter 6
Translated for SagesQuote

03 In punishing offenses it does not pass over great ministers; in rewarding good it does not overlook common men.

刑過不避大臣，賞善不遺匹夫。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Having Standards" 有度, Chapter 6
Translated for SagesQuote

04 Where the law falls, the clever cannot talk their way out and the brave do not dare contest it.

法之所加，智者弗能辭，勇者弗敢爭。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Having Standards" 有度, Chapter 6
Translated for SagesQuote

05 What an enlightened ruler uses to guide and control his ministers is nothing but two handles. The two handles are punishment and favor.

明主之所導制其臣者，二柄而已矣。二柄者，刑德也。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Two Handles" 二柄, Chapter 7
Translated for SagesQuote

06 Killing and executing is what is called punishment; conferring rewards is what is called favor.

殺戮之謂刑，慶賞之謂德。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Two Handles" 二柄, Chapter 7
Translated for SagesQuote

07 What enables the tiger to master the dog is its claws and teeth. Let the tiger give up its claws and teeth and allow the dog to use them, and the tiger will be mastered by the dog instead.

夫虎之所以能服狗者，爪牙也。使虎釋其爪牙而使狗用之，則虎反服於狗矣。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Two Handles" 二柄, Chapter 7
Translated for SagesQuote

08 The ruler must not show what he desires; if he shows what he desires, his ministers will carve and polish themselves to fit it.

君無見其所欲，君見其所欲，臣自將雕琢。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Way of the Ruler" 主道, Chapter 5
Translated for SagesQuote

09 Cast off likes and dislikes, and the whole body of ministers will show themselves as they are.

去好去惡，群臣見素。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Way of the Ruler" 主道, Chapter 5
Translated for SagesQuote

10 Affairs are in the four quarters; the handle is at the center. The sage holds the handle, and the four quarters come to serve.

事在四方，要在中央。聖人執要，四方來效。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Wielding the Sceptre" 揚權, Chapter 8
Translated for SagesQuote

11 Do not blow aside the hair to hunt for tiny flaws, nor wash off the grime to pry into what is hard to see.

不吹毛而求小疵，不洗垢而察難知。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Great Body" 大體, Chapter 29
Translated for SagesQuote

12 No benefit lasts longer than simplicity; no good fortune endures longer than peace.

利莫長於簡，福莫久於安。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Great Body" 大體, Chapter 29
Translated for SagesQuote

13 The peril of a ruler lies in trusting others. Trust others, and you will be controlled by them.

人主之患在於信人。信人，則制於人。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Guarding the Interior" 備內, Chapter 17
Translated for SagesQuote

14 People move toward what is safe and profitable and away from what is dangerous and harmful; this is human nature.

夫安利者就之，危害者去之，此人之情也。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Treacherous and Regicide Ministers" 姦劫弑臣, Chapter 14
Translated for SagesQuote

15 Severe penalties and heavy punishments are what the people hate, and are the means by which the state is kept in order.

夫嚴刑重罰者，民之所惡也，而國之所以治也。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Treacherous and Regicide Ministers" 姦劫弑臣, Chapter 14
Translated for SagesQuote

16 A dike of a thousand yards bursts through an ant hole; a house of a hundred feet burns from the smoke of a cracked chimney.

千丈之堤，以螻蟻之穴潰；百尺之室，以突隙之煙焚。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Illustrations of Laozi" 喻老, Chapter 21
Translated for SagesQuote

17 An illness in the pores is reached by hot compresses; in the flesh, by needles and stones; in the stomach and bowels, by a heated decoction; in the marrow, it belongs to the Arbiter of Life, and nothing can be done.

疾在腠理，湯熨之所及也；在肌膚，針石之所及也；在腸胃，火齊之所及也；在骨髓，司命之所屬，無奈何也。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Illustrations of Laozi" 喻老, Chapter 21
Translated for SagesQuote

18 The difficulty of persuasion is not in my having enough knowledge to set out an argument; it lies in knowing the mind of the person being persuaded, so that my words answer to it.

凡說之難，非吾知之有以說之之難也……在知所說之心，可以吾說當之。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Difficulties of Persuasion" 說難, Chapter 12
Translated for SagesQuote

19 Undertakings succeed through secrecy and fail when words leak out.

夫事以密成，語以泄敗。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Difficulties of Persuasion" 說難, Chapter 12
Translated for SagesQuote

20 The dragon as a creature is gentle enough to be handled and ridden; but under its throat it has scales that turn backward, a foot across, and anyone who touches them will surely be killed by it.

夫龍之為蟲也，柔可狎而騎也；然其喉下有逆鱗徑尺，若人有嬰之者，則必殺人。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Difficulties of Persuasion" 說難, Chapter 12
Translated for SagesQuote

21 Therefore the sage does not look to restore antiquity, nor accept what is customary as a fixed model; he examines the affairs of his age and prepares for them accordingly.

是以聖人不期修古，不法常可，論世之事，因為之備。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Five Vermin" 五蠹, Chapter 49
Translated for SagesQuote

22 When the age differs, affairs differ; when affairs differ, the preparations change.

世異則事異，事異則備變。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Five Vermin" 五蠹, Chapter 49
Translated for SagesQuote

23 A man of Song was plowing; in his field stood a tree stump. A rabbit ran into the stump, broke its neck, and died. So he set down his plow and kept watch over the stump, hoping to get another rabbit. No further rabbit came, and he became the laughingstock of the state of Song.

宋人有耕者，田中有株，兔走觸株，折頸而死。因釋其耒而守株，冀復得兔。兔不可復得，而身為宋國笑。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Five Vermin" 五蠹, Chapter 49
Translated for SagesQuote

24 To wish now to govern the people of the present age with the policies of the former kings is nothing but guarding a stump.

今欲以先王之政，治當世之民，皆守株之類也。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Five Vermin" 五蠹, Chapter 49
Translated for SagesQuote

25 The Confucians disorder the law with their learning; the swordsmen break the prohibitions with force.

儒以文亂法，俠以武犯禁。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Five Vermin" 五蠹, Chapter 49
Translated for SagesQuote

26 In the state of an enlightened ruler there are no writings of bamboo and silk; the law is the teaching. There are no sayings of the former kings; the officials are the teachers.

明主之國，無書簡之文，以法為教；無先王之語，以吏為師。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Five Vermin" 五蠹, Chapter 49
Translated for SagesQuote

27 For reward nothing is better than making it generous and certain, so that the people gain by it; for punishment nothing is better than making it heavy and unavoidable, so that the people fear it.

賞莫如厚而信，使民利之；罰莫如重而必，使民畏之。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Five Vermin" 五蠹, Chapter 49
Translated for SagesQuote

28 For law nothing is better than that it be uniform and fixed, so that the people know it.

法莫如一而固，使民知之。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "The Five Vermin" 五蠹, Chapter 49
Translated for SagesQuote

29 Method is this: grant office according to capacity, demand results according to the title held, hold the handles of life and death, and test the abilities of the ministers.

術者，因任而授官，循名而責實，操殺生之柄，課群臣之能者也。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Fixing the Laws" 定法, Chapter 43
Translated for SagesQuote

30 Law is this: statutes and orders are posted in the offices of government; punishment is certain in the minds of the people; rewards are kept for those who heed the law, while punishments fall on those who violate the orders.

法者，憲令著於官府，刑罰必於民心，賞存乎慎法，而罰加乎姦令者也。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Fixing the Laws" 定法, Chapter 43
Translated for SagesQuote

31 When a tree snaps, it is always along worm rot; when a wall crumbles, it is always along a crack.

木之折也必通蠹，牆之壞也必通隙。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Signs of Ruin" 亡徵, Chapter 15
Translated for SagesQuote

32 A man of Zheng was about to buy shoes. He first measured his foot and left the measurement on his seat. Arriving at the market, he forgot to bring it. Having picked out the shoes, he said, "I forgot to bring the measurement," and went back home to fetch it. By the time he returned the market had closed, so he never got the shoes. Someone asked, "Why not try them on your feet?" He said, "I would rather trust the measurement than trust my own feet."

鄭人有且置履者，先自度其足，而置之其坐。至之市，而忘操之。已得履，乃曰：「吾忘持度。」反歸取之。及反，市罷，遂不得履。人曰：「何不試之以足？」曰：「寧信度，無自信也。」

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Collected Persuasions, Outer" 外儲說左上, Chapter 32
Translated for SagesQuote

33 A man of Chu was selling shields and spears. He praised them, saying, "My shields are so hard that nothing can pierce them." Then he praised his spears: "My spears are so sharp that there is nothing they do not pierce." Someone said, "What if your spear pierced your shield?" The man could not answer.

楚人有鬻盾與矛者，譽之曰：「吾盾之堅，莫能陷也。」又譽其矛曰：「吾矛之利，於物無不陷也。」或曰：「以子之矛陷子之盾，何如？」其人弗能應也。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Hard Sayings I" 難一, Chapter 36
Translated for SagesQuote

34 A shield that nothing can pierce and a spear that pierces everything cannot both stand in the same world.

夫不可陷之盾與無不陷之矛，不可同世而立。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Hard Sayings I" 難一, Chapter 36
Translated for SagesQuote

35 That there is no tiger in the market is obvious; yet three people saying so makes a tiger.

夫市之無虎也明矣，然而三人言而成虎。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Collected Persuasions, Inner" 內儲說上, Chapter 30
Translated for SagesQuote

36 When fire breaks out and you fetch water from the sea, though the sea holds plenty of water, the fire will certainly not be put out. Distant water cannot save from a near fire.

失火而取水於海，海水雖多，火必不滅矣。遠水不救近火也。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Forest of Persuasions I" 說林上, Chapter 22
Translated for SagesQuote

37 They let the old horse loose and followed it, and so found the road.

乃放老馬而隨之，遂得道。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Forest of Persuasions I" 說林上, Chapter 22
Translated for SagesQuote

38 To hold ministers too close is sure to endanger the ruler's own person; when ministers grow too exalted, they are sure to take the ruler's place.

愛臣太親，必危其身；人臣太貴，必易主位。

Han Feizi (韓非子), "Cherishing Ministers" 愛臣, Chapter 4
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ONE TO KEEP

The law does not flatter the noble; the plumb line does not bend to crookedness.

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