

LEGALISM

Basic Facts/Origins:

Han Fei Tzu lived in the third century B.C. There were many warring states within China at that time. Then nation was in danger of being torn apart. Han Fei Tzu and others thought that only a single all-powerful ruler could hold it together. Because Han Fei Tzu wrote so much about law and order, he became known as a legalist. Because he said it was important to face facts, he was called a realist.

Basic Beliefs on Life:

According to Han Fei Tzu, "the nature of man is evil. His goodness is acquired." Greed, he declared, was the motive for most actions and the cause of most conflicts. He believed that all people were selfish, and only interested in themselves. Han Fei Tzu disliked Confucius's idea that people would follow the example of a good ruler.

Basic Beliefs on Government:

Han Fei Tzu believed that the only way to achieve order was to pass strict laws and enforce them with strict punishments. Legalists believed that strength, not goodness was a ruler's greatest virtue. Han Fei Tzu thought that because people could not be trusted, a strong government was needed to make them act as they should. Every person had to be forced to live, work, think, or even, perhaps, die for the government. Han Fei Tzu said, "What the emperor thinks is right, all shall think is right. What the emperor thinks to be wrong, all shall think to be wrong." The laws were a means for taking and keeping power over men.

The emperor of the Qin Dynasty, Shi Haungdi, united China with Legalist principles. He believed that legalism was the most effective way to keep order and that all books should be burned, except a few on medicine and farming.