

# A true union of seminary, university

## Davood Feirahi opened a path death cannot touch

### OBITUARY

It will never be forgotten that the coronavirus took a pre-eminent Iranian religious neo-thinker. The untimely death of Davood Feirahi, a professor of Political Science at the University of Tehran, on November 11, 2020, has left a hole. According to Feirahi's attending physician, upon initial examination, this great thinker had pulmonary involvement exceeding 80%. The news of his passing immediately precipitated extensive reverberations across media outlets and social networks, and numerous individuals expressed profound sorrow. Nevertheless, even subsequent to the passage of several years, it remains necessary to better comprehend this luminary figure through the perspectives of his colleagues and associates, after a concise introduction has been made.

### In pursuit of dynamic jurisprudence

Throughout his tenure in the capacity of a professor at the University of Tehran, Feirahi attained renown for several components: a profound comprehension of dynamic Islamic jurisprudence, mastery over contemporary human sciences, a democratic disposition, and, ultimately, a peaceful temperament. These components are reflected within the many obituaries of his collaborators, friends, students, and followers of his discourses. He was considered amongst those intellectuals who critiqued tradition and who endeavored to propagate a modern perspective on religion and politics. From this vantage point, one can situate him within the category of neo-religious thinkers.

He maintained that the domain of jurisprudence must coordinate itself with contemporary developments and establish a direct, not delayed, proportionality with society's social, political, cultural, and economic transformations, and underscored that, through this lens, the co-existence of religion and democracy constitutes a feasible phenomenon. Within this identical intellectual framework, according to Feirahi, jurisprudence and religion not only do not contradict the people's right of choice but, through a meticulous examination of this domain, do not even permit such contradiction; and, in the event of a correct interpretation, they themselves can function as an inhibiting agent against the imposition of restrictions upon the incontrovertible rights of individuals. Paraphrased, Feirahi personally belonged to the adherents of a lenient approach to religion, and he undertook efforts toward the practical realization of this approach. He posited that, for the improvement of Iran's internal conditions, attention must be directed toward the essence of governance instead of rulers. In this context, he believed that the essence of the state apparatus in Iran has been poorly constructed; despite various political transformations that have occurred in the period starting with the Constitutional Revolution in 1906 up to the present, no remarkable corrective action has been undertaken concerning this unsuitable structure.

### Feirahi from the seminary to the university

Davood Feirahi was born in the city of Zanjan in the year 1964. He pursued religious sciences until the completion of pre-



liminary studies at that city's theological school and subsequently studied the intermediate and advanced levels (*sath* and *khārij*) of jurisprudence and the *uṣūl* (principles) discipline of jurisprudence at the Qom Seminary from 1987 until 2001. Concurrent with his studies at the Qom Seminary, in 1987, he was also accepted into the undergraduate program in Political Science at the University of Tehran and continued this discipline through the doctoral degree in Political Science with a specialization in political thought at the same university. Feirahi's doctoral dissertation, entitled "Power, Knowledge, and Legitimacy in Islam," was successfully defended in 1999. This dissertation, written under the inspiration of Foucault's methodology and Gadamer's hermeneutics, examines the power-knowledge nexus

during the medieval Islamic period and explores the genesis of medieval political knowledge. Prior to this, during his master's program, Feirahi also wrote a dissertation entitled "Shia Political Thought during the Qajar Period". This earlier dissertation is dedicated to the political thought of renowned Shia jurists in the Qajar era and endeavors to investigate the most significant Shia jurisprudential-political schools that were developed during the Qajar period and had preserved their presence in the Constitutional Revolution and the Islamic Revolution (1979) and thereafter in Iran.

From 1999, he became a faculty member and associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Tehran. The supervision of numerous doctoral and master's theses concerning Islamic political thought constituted an-

other of Dr. Feirahi's activities. He was also a visiting professor at Mofid University in Qom and a member of the Central Council of the Association of Seminary Teachers and Researchers of Qom.

### Feirahi's authored works; enduring relics of his perspective

He is the author of 10 books and, additionally, has approximately 60 articles published in journals and scientific conferences within the domain of Islamic political thought. Among the most significant titles of books by Davood Feirahi are the following: "Power, Knowledge, and Legitimacy in Islam," "The Islamic State and the Productions of Religious Thought," "Political System and State in Islam," "History of the Evolution of the State in Islam," "Methodology and Political Thought in Islam," and "Religion and State

in the Modern Era". One of the principal discourses within Feirahi's oeuvre is political jurisprudence. In his two-volume work, titled "Jurisprudence and Politics in Contemporary Iran," he endeavors to analyze the problem of law and its relationship with political jurisprudence and, in a certain sense, to recount the destiny of this dialogue over the past 100 years.

Concerning the political system and state in Islam, various discussions have been advanced. In his book bearing that same title, Feirahi has attempted to examine and investigate the concept and characteristics of the political system and state in Islam. In this same context, he has written: "The state in Islamic society, akin to other human societies, not only signifies the existence of a collection of institutions but also indicates the presence of specific attitudes and modes of action and behavior, which have been called Islamic civility and, in fact, are considered a part of Islamic civilization. The state in Islamic culture is neither an accidental or coincidental matter nor a passive or neutral organization that can be disregarded."

He also maintains that, to date, the concept of the state in Islam has not been adequately clarified or specified because the examination of the concept of the state in Islamic thoughts represents one of the most difficult concepts; whoever addresses it profoundly becomes cognizant of its difficulties. In "Political System and State in Islam," Feirahi dedicates his effort toward acquiring knowledge of the various concepts of the state from the perspective of politico-Islamic theories that have taken shape over the course of time.

## Death does not prevail over this path

By Khosro Talebzadeh  
Journalist

It is difficult to accept the non-existence of Davood Feirahi. At the onset of his illness, I was in contact with him. He expressed gladness that he had no serious problem, but, it appears, coronavirus's stratagem is deception, and it thoroughly deceived Feirahi. They say that coronavirus infiltrates through human beings' vulnerabilities and becomes lethal, and Feirahi's vulnerability was precisely this: he was, like a rustic individual devoid of duplicity and affectation, like an optimistic thinker, and like a well-mannered, virtuous person toward everyone. This very openness of his caused his undoing. He was displeased with anything connoting closure — whether spiritual or physical, intellectual or

political, whether denominated tradition or modernity. The openness of his thought had rendered the boundaries of his intellect limitless; yet, he did possess boundaries, and he knew perfectly well who he was and where he stood. He was criticized from both sides, by traditionalists as well as by modernists, because Feirahi did not exchange thinking for intellectual partisanship. He believed that there exist robust and precious assets and treasures within the repositories of our intellectual history, which we have, with open-handedness, neglected and have turned our faces toward another realm, or have remained ignorant of them. His intellectual openness had problems with the notion of closure itself — of any and every variety. Feirahi exhibited no indications of death — neither in



his age, nor in the freshness of his thinking, nor in his hope for the future, nor in his unparalleled endeavor. His death was an unforeseeable and unbelievable occurrence. But is death anything other than that which is unbelievable and

manifests itself at a place and time when it is not expected? Yet, did death encompass Feirahi, or did Feirahi encompass death? Indubitably, Feirahi's body was ensnared in death's grip and could not escape this trap alive; however,

"Feirahi" vanquished death. "Feirahi" performed the deed that he ought to have performed. He opened a path that originated from the depths of history, especially contemporary history, and that continues to flow until today and persists

into the future. His books and works represented the "quintessence of discourse". Feirahi endures within his works, into which death has no infiltration. Feirahi could, in hundreds of new written and oral works, have retold the path he traversed, expounded upon them, and become his own interpreter. If the truth of Feirahi's word and speech is heard, its length and breadth, its quantity and measure, and its expansion and explication would alter nothing. Feirahi belonged neither to the category of religious neo-thinkers who, throughout their lifetimes, continuously assume novel faces, nor to the category of those who stand upon a trembling ground whereupon time must forgive and correct their past.

Feirahi stood where profound understanding and meticulous wisdom assisted him: the decorum of thought. In actuality, his defining characteristic was decorum and virtuousness, to which he was committed in his individual existence

and intellectual existence — indeed, it was his innate nature. He did not think for his own sake, nor was his thought for his own sake. It was for the sake of opening the closed work of this realm.

If Feirahi had lived for dozens more years — I wish that he had — in terms of foundations and principles, he would have been exactly what he was. Time would not have prevailed over Feirahi because he knew the age perfectly well; indeed, the age was with him. His intellectual horizon possessed a background that would not be altered by time, even though he would have produced greater fruits and more numerous works — and I wish that he had. However, the path Feirahi traversed ended with himself, not with his path. His path remains open for every aggrieved and anguished individual for whom thought, religion, and Iranian-ness constitute a concern, and death does not prevail over this path.