Christopher A. Colmo: *Reason's Inquisition: On Doubtful Ground*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2023. Pp. ix, 267.)

As his title suggests, Christopher Colmo's *Reason's Inquisition* takes its inspiration from Hobbes. While in his earlier *Breaking with Athens: Alfarabi as Founder* (Lexington Books, 2005), Colmo argued that Alfarabi was in a class by himself, standing apart from both premodern and modern; in *Reason's Inquisition*, Colmo attempts to argue that Alfarabi is what Lucien Febvre calls a "precursor" to modernity and perhaps in particular to Hobbes (1, 135). That thesis is the golden thread running through the eighteen chapters and four appendices of this book. This reader is less impressed with the book's thesis than with many of its striking readings of a stunning array of authors, including Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Alfarabi, Maimonides, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Voegelin, and Strauss. Colmo has a highly dialectical manner of writing. For the most part, this results in relentless questioning and doubting of all assumptions, including his own, with the exception of one: the suspicion that Plato and Aristotle are barking up the wrong tree. As in *Breaking with Athens*, Colmo appears convinced that Plato and Aristotle are wrongly engaged in an "ascent from opinion to knowledge," which he contrasts in *Reason's Inquisition* unfavorably with what he characterizes as Alfarabi's (and the moderns of whom he is supposedly a precursor) view that "opinion [can serve] as a basis for action" (169, but cf. 90). Although we understand why he might argue this about Alfarabi, it is not clear why or how this would encapsulate modernity. Colmo would need to show that moderns start from opinion. That Alfarabi appears to do so is readily apparent. In what way Descartes and Hobbes, whom Colmo frequently pairs up, do so is far less so. Indeed, what does Descartes do in his opening two *Meditations* other than to repudiate the opinions that the ancients had used as their starting point?

The smoking gun for Alfarabi's purportedly radical departure from Plato and Aristotle is what Colmo takes to be Alfarabi's leading role in distinguishing essence from existence together with his strange understanding of form as the "how" of a being. Of course, Aristotle is renowned not to have distinguished essence from existence in the way that many medievals eventually would. Colmo points to Alfarabi as the first medieval to take this novel turn on the basis of Nicholas Rescher's "Al-Farabi in Logical Tradition" (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, no. 1 [1963]: 127–32, cited by Colmo on p. 92). This reader could not find this argument in the cited article. There is some possibility that Rescher makes such an argument in another of his articles; however, Avicenna is usually credited with having championed or made more rigid this distinction between essence and existence. Leaving that aside, the stronger piece of evidence seems to be Alfarabi's claim in the *Attainment of*

Happiness (in *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi [Cornell University Press, 1962]), sec. 6, that the form of a thing is its *"what, by what, or how."* The apparently odd appearance of "how" in *Attainment* prefigures Colmo's elaborate argument toward the end of *Reason's Inquisition* about the interplay between what and how from Socrates's forms to the existential interests of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. The difficulty, though, is that the resources of English and Arabic are different—and one might argue that Alfarabi has used Arabic's to greater effect. At times Aristotle defines the form as the what, yet he also connects it to what we in English refer to as "qualities." After all, when explaining what the form or substance is in the *Categories* (chap. 5) he suggests that the first definition is "the differentia of the substance," for example, a man is an animal of a certain quality—such as rational or political. As it happens, the Arabic for "quality" is *kaifiyya* from the particle *kaifa* (how). *Kaifiyya* parallels almost exactly Aristotle's *hē poiotēs* (quality) from *pōs* (how). Muhsin Mahdi implies all this when he offers in his notes the alternate translation "form or shape or *state*." One of the meanings of quality is the state of a thing but another is a differentia that points to the form. However one looks at it, what might at first appear to be a radical departure from Aristotle's understanding of the formal cause to *"what, by what, or how"* is not a departure at all.

The last piece essential to the thesis that Alfarabi is a precursor to Hobbes is the connection Colmo draws between their approaches to mathematics in chapter 7—indeed, all these key arguments are lined up in that all-important chapter. Here it is less clear exactly what Colmo is arguing is peculiar to Alfarabi and Hobbes in contradistinction to Aristotle. It seems to have to do with the existence of mathematical objects as constructions. The main difficulty is that Aristotle's way of treating mathematical objects—though it does not permit many of the innovations of Hobbes—is unique among objects of knowledge. Aristotle treats them as the result of a process of abstraction (*aphairesis*) which in the medieval period was sometimes applied broadly to other objects of thought. Why then Colmo considers it necessary to turn Alfarabi's account of just such a process of abstraction into Appendix A is not especially clear (cf. 94 with 239–40). There is one other piece of this particular puzzle. Colmo claims there are two primary forms of demonstration: one in which the principles of instruction coincide with the principles of being in which one can know both that and why something is (that is, mathematics) and one in which one must begin with the principles of instruction and is able to argue only that something is (that is, first philosophy). Colmo is puzzled by a third option that Alfarabi assumes "again and again" in the "first part of the *Attainment of Happiness*," namely, the possibility of moving from the principles of instruction to the principles of being. This is after all the hope of Aristotle's *Physics*—and some would argue even of his *Metaphysics*.

We have spent altogether too much time arguing over the finer points of essence and existence, form's connection to how, and different kinds of demonstration. For better or worse, this is the crux of Colmo's argument. Let us

leave aside these technical depths to consider the broader implications of these arguments. As in *Breaking with Athens*, Colmo wants to challenge Leo Strauss's interpretation of Alfarabi's *Philosophy of Plato*. Colmo is convinced that Alfarabi has much more practical aims than did Plato. He takes this opposition so far that he denies Strauss's simple claim that knowing that philosophy is the right way of life is not itself part of "philosophy proper"—the inquiry into happiness is a part of political philosophy (10, 91–92, 227, 235). Colmo wants philosophy's proper object to be action. Unfortunately, we can't always get what we want.

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Amar Sohal: *The Muslim Secular: Parity and the Politics of India's Partition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. x, 328.)

Amar Sohal's *The Muslim Secular* makes a powerful intervention in Indian political thought, especially in the body of literature known as Indian secularism. The dominant conception of Indian secularism, in contrast to its European counterparts, holds that religion continues to operate in the public sphere and the state maintains a "principled distance" from the various religions operating in the public domain. This understanding, while plausible in many ways, views secularism through a certain lens that *The Muslim Secular* contests. Two aspects of Indian secularism that Sohal particularly problematizes are its state-centricity and the state's establishing and sustaining of a dichotomy between religious majorities and minorities to manage religions in public life. Sohal does so by reconstructing Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958), Sheikh Abdullah (1905–1982), and Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890–1988) as political thinkers, the scholars who are otherwise read as Muslim political actors. These Muslim scholars who resisted the Pakistan demand and remained with the Indian Congress, Sohal argues, while resisting Indian Partition for a united India, imagined a secularism engendered within the social interactions of religious communities.

Sohal implies that these scholars defy the common supposition that an irreconcilable Hindu-Muslim rivalry already exists in the public sphere and the state must intervene to manage the conflict. For Sohal, these scholars rather argue that a distinct secularism has evolved with an inseparable, organic blending of Hindu and Muslim cultures from medieval and early modern India. In other words, an organic cultural blending produced a secular cultural unity in the social realm. Sohal views secularism as a culture by making a distinction