modern liberalism, having exposed in a lucid manner how moral virtue resides at the core of the Aristotelian regime.

Taking these two books together, Collins has set for herself the more difficult task. By setting out to recover citizenship, she necessarily undertook a comprehensive account of Aristotle on citizenship that entails, as she shows lucidly, an account of justice, wisdom, and the good. This is no small ambition. However, she succeeds with an uncommon gentility. No question about it, however, where Plato feints, Aristotle punches. No wonder modern liberals avoid the contest with Aristotle. Many years ago, Douglas Bush claimed that a scholar is like a siren that draws attention to the fog without doing anything to dispel it. He was wrong. True scholars, like Rabieh and Collins, do much to dispel the fog. Their scholarship is impeccable and will endure as an example of how to read and profit from the peerless writings of Plato and Aristotle. Both books demonstrate admirably how ancient political philosophy can shed light on contemporary problems in a manner far removed from the prejudices of our own times. These two women scholars have much to teach us about courage and citizenship. However, *caveat lector,* there is an important subtext working here: Both Rabieh and Collins are challenging (Rabieh explicitly and Collins implicitly) a dominant feminist position on courage and citizenship that tends to scorn the need for courage as an extension of the misplaced masculine quest for transcendence. The feminist chant is that men misguidedly seek "honor" and "glory," which frequently lead to war. Unfortunately, Collins fails to show how women can contribute to the manly function of courageous guardians without which male citizens become effeminate, which is exactly what modern feminists would wish.

Reconstructing the Commercial Republic: Constitutional Design after Madison. By Stephen L. Elkin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 416p. $35.00.
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— Andrew Rehfeld, *Washington University in St. Louis*

In this engaging book, Stephen L. Elkin offers an account of the politics necessary to realize the nation's aspirations for an American commercial republic, in which economic inequality is dramatically reduced, citizens engage in meaningful (and surprisingly powerful) local government, and both they and their representatives deliberate to promote the good of all. The starting point for Elkin's analysis is a familiar list of what ails America: growing economic inequality, declining "civic and political involvement," economic insecurity particularly among the middle class, as well as weakening family structure. He argues that we will never resolve these problems until we first have a "compelling and comprehensive theory of republican political constitution" (p. 2). Although no clear explanation is given for what it means to have such a theory, Elkin implies that such a theory would be based on the interrelation of the economic and political order.

Elkin begins by discussing what our aspirations are, making the noncontroversial claim that who we are is in part a product of where we have been, and that the founders were our starting point. It follows that our aspirations are toward liberal justice: an endorsement of limited but active popular self-rule in which free market economics is put in service to the political order, rather than the other way around (pp. 14–16).

This aspirational view is troublesome. Though it may be "likely" that our aspirations stem from the founders, it would seem more pertinent to ask Americans what they aspire to, or infer it from their political behavior, or perhaps interpret the intellectual history of American aspirations as Rogers Smith does through his work on citizenship. Worse still, given the problems that Elkin lists, there is every reason to believe Americans have given up on these founding aspirations, if indeed they ever had them to begin with. Nor is any critical defense offered that these aspirations are ones we ought to have; instead, Elkin argues that we should endorse institutions and practices that have been bequeathed to us and that have won out in the test of public reasoning. More charitably, the argument of the book might be thought of as a companion to the recent work of Cass Sunstein and Phillip Pettit, though Elkin would probably reject the comparison of his work with that of such normative theorists.

In Chapter 2, Elkin turns to the writings of James Madison, for he "is the one we most commonly turn to when seeking guidance about how the American regime is to work" (pp. 19–20). Elkin here presents the best recent summary of Madison's political thinking in *The Federalist* by an American political scientist. On the matter of factions, Elkin argues that Madison's goal was to create incentives for representatives to *transcend* their local constituencies rather than serve as efficient delegates for them (p. 25). "Such [representatives] would thus be relatively insulated from the passions that inevitably roil the citizenry from time to time and would be in a position to consider the public interest" (p. 26). The problem, Elkin argues, was not that Madison was wrong but that property and government have both changed. Where property ownership has shifted and narrowed from land to the means of capital production, government has expanded dramatically to allow these nonlanded interests to control the whole without requiring them to broaden their pitch. Today all sorts of narrow property interests can be pursued without even so much as an attempt at reframing and casting them in the broad public good. As a result, deliberation and debate continue to narrow and focus on a set of private interests.

The virtue of this account is to capture the power, promise, and moderation of Madisonian political theory by noting where and how it has gone wrong. Elkin has put

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the economic critique of Madison in conversation with Madison's argument about deliberative legislatures and citizens, and this is no small task. Madison *was* interested in protecting property rights but not to secure some elite privilege in the face of the democratic rabble; rather the promotion of a commercial republic was seen as the best way to secure a public good. The question for modern times is whether Madison's vision can be realized given the changes that Elkin rightly emphasizes.

In Chapter 5, Elkin sets out the core of his argument for the definition of the public interest within a commercial republic. Elkin argues that there is no way to defend *any* institutional arrangement unless one defends it by reference to the public interest. Even the institutions that give rise to pluralism are rooted in the public interest: They are defended by the claim that the public interest is best defined by the outcome of competition among interest groups over scarce resources. The public interest will also include a concern for the private sphere.

Chapters 6 and 7 offer a description of what public interest politics would look like in providing guidance for reform. Elkin focuses on the legislature because only "the legislature can be deliberative in its workings and have the breadth of vision to consider the whole of the public interest" (p. 160). Elkin sees that the transformation of a democratic legislature into a republican deliberative sphere animated by the courageous and the historically minded depends upon a transformation of democratic citizens themselves. Chapter 7 thus suggests developing their "public spiritedness" (p. 180) by cultivating in citizens six kinds virtues (p. 183): 1) realizing that public and private interests are not necessarily the same, 2) a "measure of proud independence," 3) "trust in other citizens," 4) the capacity for judgment, 5) respect for other citizens, and 6) a concern that they be esteemed for their capacities as public reasoners. This list is surely worth endorsing; the question is whether it is realistically achievable.

This in turn brings back the commercial feature of Elkin's analysis: The content of local politics is currently dominated by wooing and pleasing economically powerful interests and the promotion of the best economic deals. The solution is to expand municipal powers modestly, thus expanding the set of interests that are affected and can be incorporated into deliberation. For example, Elkin supports the idea of allowing local governments to "exercise powers of eminent domain to buy businesses threatening to depart" (p. 199). Such expansion will simultaneously attract local citizens to get involved in local politics, because much more is at stake, and provide greater opportunities for public deliberation about these matters.

Elkin concludes with detailed policy proposals for achieving his view of the American commercial republic (Chapter 10), including "full employment at no less than modestly remunerative wages" to secure the kind of secure and stable middle class necessary for the commercial republic. His proposals are laudable because they attempt to make sober those "intoxicating visions" offered. As with the rest of the book, politics, economics, and culture are all intertwined; in making them so, Elkin joins a group of theorists who attempt what has been called middle-level political theory, engaged in both the normative (or in Elkin's case "aspirational") and the practical.

Unfortunately, the policy proposals are platitudinal, pitched at a level of generality and without empirical support, ignoring the messy implications that might attend to such innovations. The assumption, for example, that we could design democratic institutions to foster politicians who would be motivated by courage and honor more than narrow self-interest seems unrealistic; the idea that giving local governments the power of eminent domain over businesses that want to relocate may well be worse than the problems it seeks to solve. The problem is that obvious objections are nowhere considered. To give a single illustration: If all local communities had eminent domain, it seems likely that they would try to out maneuver each other in a race to the bottom, signing away that very right to attract businesses. A Coasean equilibrium might emerge, quite likely not much different from what happens today. Communities sell their souls to attract businesses not because they cannot punish them if they leave, but because it would be strategically stupid to do so. Similarly, why should we seek "full employment" rather than a guaranteed income, which has many of the same economic (and stabilizing) benefits as full employment without as much loss of efficiency (and freedom) that full employment necessitates?

This is not to say that Elkin is wrong. Just that the policy recommendations are far less persuasive than they need to be for our endorsement. In part, this is surely a consequence of the regime-level analysis that Elkin has undertaken; a result that is one of the great virtues of the book. The book is thus most successful in advocating for a reengagement of the public good by putting economics in service to politics through deliberative citizen participation in local politics. This is so whether or not these aspirations are the ones Americans have, whether they can be realized in the way Elkin suggests, or whether, more critically, they are ones worth having at all.

Cultus Americanus: Varieties of the Liberal Tradition in American Political Culture, 1600–1865. By Brent Gilchrist. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006. 314p. $80.00.
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— Joseph Romance, *Drew University*

In *Cultus Americanus,* Brent Gilchrist provides an intellectually challenging account of American political culture. In so doing, Gilchrist staunchly defends the notion of a liberal consensus in American political life. However, this is not merely a restatement of Louis Hartz's rightly famous theory. Instead, we are offered a nuanced and thoughtful

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