communities (like Sparta, or Geneva), but served it up, in a full-blown universal form, to the eponymous Emile, from which Kant drew direct inspiration. The "romance" of Emile, Rousseau's own common citizen of the world, and Sophie, his venerated and at the same time altogether ordinary companion—that "romance," Rousseau strikingly declares in book 4, "ought to be the history of our species."

It is perhaps no wonder, then, that Kant and others took up the challenge with a series of "ideal" histories of the human race—*novels*, if you will—that could be, or were in the process of being, realized, be they optimistic or dystopian. So construed, Rousseau belongs as much to the first side of the ledger (modernity ascendant) as to the second (modernity in crisis).

And all of this this leaves *me* wondering where, in Smith's view, the problem with modernity ultimately lies. Is our perpetual bourgeois "remorse" in fact "a good thing"—as he states in closing—and if so, why? Or might this not depend (and this not least in this postelection year) on where it leads.

Virtue in America

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The two master categories of Steven Smith's fine book are modernity and the bourgeois. But to these a third might be added. Smith argues that the traits of the bourgeois "have come to be most fully identified with the American way of life" (x), and that "America was the first truly modern nation, that is, the first nation self-consciously established on the principles of modern philosophy" (10). Judging the value and the values of the bourgeois thus requires us to judge the value of America, and indeed the values of Americans.

This is a large and daunting project. But Smith's book reminds us that we are not without guides, devoting chapters to two penetrating students of America's value and values, Benjamin Franklin and Alexis de Tocqueville. Franklin's optimism and Tocqueville's skepticism here balance each other out, exemplifying the "dialectic" between modernity's champions and its discontents at the heart of Smith's book. Yet neither thinker was an ideologue; each knew well modernity's benefits and its costs. As Smith helps us see, not only do Franklin and Tocqueville balance each other, but their respective positions on modernity were themselves admirably balanced.

Smith's treatment of Franklin begins, as it must, with the Franklin of the *Autobiography*, "the classic American success story" (109) that middle-class American fathers have long recommended to their sons, and intellectuals have long excoriated. This side of Franklin seems to place him squarely on the promodernity and probourgeois side of the ledger, and no story in the *Autobiography* captures this side better than the "'bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection'" (119) that so wonderfully illustrates "the American experiment in self-making: material success, moral improvement, and social progress" (114). But Smith shows us that there is yet much more to the man. Three other sides of Franklin receive particular attention. The first is his ambition. Ambition is of course the quintessential bourgeois virtue, and young Ben trying to make a go as a Philadelphia printer had bourgeois ambition in spades. But he also harbored ambitions that far surpassed anything most bourgeois could imagine. Beyond civic recognition and bigger paychecks, Franklin dreamed of fashioning a new nation's morals, imagined science's progress to the point where men might live to be as old as Genesis patriarchs, and hoped the secret society he founded might soon generate a universal brotherhood. The second is his humor. Smith recounts Franklin's worry that were he to become humble, he would likely become "'proud of [his] humility'" (124), and here and elsewhere Smith's Franklin exhibits an ironic self-awareness that goes well beyond the typical bourgeois. Third, Smith's Franklin exhibits a sobriety that many champions of modernity lack, and which informed his deep awareness of the limits of moral reform projects, private and public alike. Smith's Franklin was no naive champion of public enlightenment, but one whose hopes and dreams were tempered by "an awareness and even appreciation of human fallibility and the ultimate failure of all perfectionist plans of reform" (113).

Just as Smith's Franklin is a friend of modernity who yet knows its limits, Smith's Tocqueville is a critic of modernity who yet knows its promise. Smith's chapter on Tocqueville helpfully surveys the many aspects of American democracy that fascinated and troubled Tocqueville, including the specters of democratic tyranny and soft despotism, the stifling of freedom of thought and speech in which Smith finds a harbinger of today's "political correctness" (204), and the problem of administrative centralization. Smith is at his best on Tocqueville's concerns about the American love of equality that both brings up the low and pulls down the high, the American penchant for individualism that threatens to give rise to new forms of alienation, and the American enthusiasm for democratic virtue that comes at the cost of aristocratic virtue. In one of its finest moments, the chapter illustrates Tocqueville's contempt for the notion of awarding honors to farmers with reference to Flaubert's savage portrait of the provincial agricultural fair (209)—though for my money, better than Flaubert is P. G. Wodehouse, whose doddering ninth Earl of Emsworth can think of nothing but bringing home first prize in the Fat Pigs class at the Shropshire Agricultural Show. To prefer Wodehouse to Flaubert is surely to advertise one's own bourgeois limitations:

le bourgeois, c'est moi. But Wodehouse and Flaubert and Tocqueville all tell the story of just how far the noble have fallen.

All of this, it would seem, marks Tocqueville as a critic rather than a champion of modernity. But here again matters are complex. The final chapter of *Democracy in America*, with its cascading clauses and balanced periods, reveals that Tocqueville saw good as well as bad in democracy—fewer great fortunes but many more moderate ones, less elevated genius but more general enlightenment, fewer lofty virtues but more stability. Tocqueville's emphasis on the "middling" sometimes inclines us to focus on his worry that democracy brings "less high" at the cost of underemphasizing his reminder that it also brings "less low" (DA 2.4.8). And Tocqueville posed his questions as carefully as he made his judgments. A sense of caution led him always to be open to the possibility that the future may be better and it may be worse—but in any case, it is impossible for us to predict. This being so, we do better to avoid pronouncement and instead strive to identify and clarify questions, and most of all that "question he posed with unremitting clarity": "what would the democracy of the future look like?" (198).

Taken together, Smith's portraits of Franklin and Tocqueville illustrate a central argument of his book, which ends with the claim that "we remain perpetually gnawed at by our manifold discontents—and that is a good thing" (352). Smith regards this as a "good thing," I take it, because these discontents with their "skepticism, self-doubt, and even despair" balance the optimism, enthusiasm, and self-righteousness that might characterize a modernity lacking this counter. Modernity and its discontents, Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, thus stand at opposite poles, each exerting a gravitational pull that keeps the needle in the middle.

I find myself entirely persuaded both by Smith's claims as to how this balanced gravitational pull emerged and by his argument that this balance is itself a "good thing." Even so, this leaves another question unanswered. Even if we agree that it is best for the needle to be balanced in the middle, is the needle in fact in the middle now, or does it currently incline to one side or the other? For reasons that go beyond the space available here, I suspect that the forces now pulling on the critical pole vastly exceed those on the probourgeois side. And if so, it may be that now, more than ever, we need to rededicate ourselves to the project of rehabilitating bourgeois values—and by "we" I mean not the full-throated partisans of the bourgeois, but even and especially those who have reservations about the bourgeois but yet wish to see the needle brought back to the center. Paradoxical as it may seem, the restoration of the salutary balance so insightfully and eloquently described by Smith is the crucial task falling not to Enlightenment's champions, but especially to that "moderate Counter-Enlightenment" whose aim is not "to deconstruct modernity so much as to find the tools and methods necessary to sustain it, to save it from its worst vices and excesses" (349).