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THE LATEST AMERICAN APPROPRIATION OF WESTERN
UNIVERSALISM: A CRITIQUE OF G. JOHN IKENBERRY'S "LIBERAL
INTERNATIONAL ORDER."

To Joanne Elizabeth who held passionate discussions in the original scene of the 'shrunken heads.'

I. Chatham House Abracadabra.

G. John Ikenberry is one proper name, one among others, of the "disintegration of the Western Cognitive Empire" in the dramatic language of the conference in which I played a double role (*The New Polis*, April 14-16, 2021). His is an unwitting disintegration of such "West" in its American style inside International Relations (IR) domains, although the big civilizational category of "West" always needs a serious interrogation that must convene its European and Latin American counterparts, and some of it is included in what follows. I focus on the Anglo Zone (the U.S. and the U.K.) as the still hegemonic power/knowledge in the world having some troubles, as the recent events in Afghanistan make clear. In this conference, I joined the panel discussion with Walter Mignolo, Catherine Walsh and Tink Tinker.¹ A first elaboration of my thoughts in this discussion should accompany this second elaboration of my singular presentation apropos this noted neo-Wilsonian representative of the liberal school of Foreign Affairs strutting his stuff in high places.² Mine is a "foreign-humanities" engagement, coming from the pitch-thick blind spot, call it "Hispanic" if you wish. I am to show some of the clear shortcomings informing what I will defending is a deleterious internationalism with the U.S. on top until the end of time. Uneven demarcations of meaningful timespaces will be summoned. Sovereignties (who decides, who owns and owes what to whom) too. I say a few things about "decoloniality" (a category Ikenberry ignores) in the end too. On the discussion table, the situation of bringing down the Goliath of a certain American normality operating in the official social sciences.

Ikenberry is but one name in the American monopoly of power/knowledge about the vast expanse of the world. We are dealing with the influential corridors between university-and powerful-state collaborations arrogating for themselves the meaning and history of the world as long as it is amenable and useful to their short-term interests, say a decade or two. In IR fields, temporality is mostly a decade or two, although our person of interest will claim to cover two centuries but we will see how. The colossal noun of the "West," or "Western," is presented as the

¹ Walter Mignolo, et al. *The New Polis*, <https://thenewpolis.com/2021/05/03/what-do-we-mean-by-decoloniality-a-conversation/>.

² Fernando Herrero, YouTube.com,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vE_hKkiUnZQ.

immediate circumstance, natural habitat, platform, launch pad, and we will see how much we like it, although it is really "world" and "order" that make Ikenberry tick. This IR knowledge production is not about to fall for the vast timespaces of Western magnificence explored by Arthur Toynbee, whom he still cites. It is instead guided by the reductive desire to bring the symbolic field to a proper "Anglo" control so that the big game of geopolitics may fall not far away from the capture by the state apparatus of the most powerful nation on this earth. This is Ikenberry's light house to be sure, even in these moments of convulsion and disorientation or because of them. No other than tightening the belt around the totality of that which exists, like a lasso around the horse that already left the barn, satisfies Ikenberry, who remains dutiful and faithful to his discipline, institution and nation-state (this chain of identifications between subject of knowledge, IR, Princeton, U.S.A. remains unbroken to this day in relation to his latest book which I synthesize soon). Diligence, dryness, ambition and drive, filial piety towards the ancestors, also hubris, and other 'dark passions,' underline a paradox: his monopolistic tendencies constitute a willed provincialism precisely in the worldly claims, perhaps an incurable myopia, that will not seek non-Anglo timespaces of knowledge possibility for a different past and a better future. We can almost see Ikenberry providing slogans to the current Biden & Blinken administration as it sets up its international vistas in the following months and perhaps years. The reader should start thinking of Britain as a mirror to the U.S., perhaps an anamorphic one that gives back funny shapes and still meaningful angles, and of London in particular as one option for the extroversion of American interests, the externalizing of a vision of intent that nonetheless confirms, at least in relation to the subject of interest of these pages, what I would not doubt to call the "closing of the American mind" three decades later (I am echoing the phraseology of the conservative cultural commentator, Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (1987). What will crack it open, that is a tricky question.

What follows is the interrogation of a few expansive internationalist themes and issues in the vicinity of our distinguished scholar in direct relation to situations in the Anglo Zone (the U.S. and the U.K., with some insights into continental Europe, EU and NATO). I provide a synthesis of the latest work by Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order* (2020). I make sense of the meanings, implicit and explicit, of the nouns in the elaborate title. I underline the mood or affect of the main (cynical) subject of this work

building on the lengthy conversation I had with him.³ Chatham House (or the Royal Institute of International Affairs) deserves a few extra words soon to follow. The cover of the book includes a photo of St. Paul's Cathedral during the Nazi blitz. Why this picture about WW2 and not graphic pictures of the Barbarossa operation on the Eastern Front that decided the brutal war? (Two recent books bring attention to the Eastern Front, *Barbarossa and the Bloodiest War in History* by Stewart Binns (2021); and *Barbarossa: How Hitler Lost the War* by Jonathan Dimbleby (2021), the last one making the rounds of think tanks in London). Why not a photo of a radiant Wilson enjoying the adulation of the masses? Or a dramatic photo of the 9/11 towers? There will be many options of the "forever wars" in Afghanistan and Iraq. What about beloved, picturesque Oxford where our scholar spent a good year writing the book in question? There is distancing from some situations and approximations to others and the ideological parameters remain clear, also within our post-Cold War moments: Blitz-and-Hitler projection, the Brits remain the ghost projection of the American imagination still fighting the good war (of ideas), at least for our subject of interest. These pages promote a complication to such way of thinking.

Where would you go, in times of global Covid, to read and write and promote your book if you do not know "the languages," as the conventional rubric has it in the contemporary British context? The obvious choice is, besides Oxford, the London metropolis and largely friendly institutions such as Chatham House⁴ and to a lesser degree the London School of Economics (LSE).⁵ The digital archive rescues an *in situ* event at Chatham House in 2014 in which China already looms large.⁶ It is good to have some internationalist papers behind you: Gideon Rachman reviews the latest book very generously in *The Financial Times*,⁷ and some extra coverage for this "political philosophy [which] is guide for future actions," must have happened. It is an ordinary affair to see American authors, ex-POTUS and ex-FLOTUS, ex-Secretaries of State, parading their wares in the British capital, together with Hollywood celebrities, big and small, athletes and entertainers. London gives Americans abroad, high and low, a nice promotional contrast, the softer British modulations rarely

³ Fernando Herrero and G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal Internationalism for Hard Times: An Interview with G. John Ikenberry," Toynbee Prize Foundation, <https://toynbeeprize.org/posts/world-safe-for-democracy/>.

⁴ G. John Ikenberry et al., "The Liberal Project: A Moment of Crisis," YouTube.com, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wgiU5PG26c>.

⁵ G. John Ikenberry et al., "'World on the Edge': the crisis of the Western liberal order," YouTube.com, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S9cOeYV-n8>.

⁶ G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the Liberal World Order," YouTube.com, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lv7TVg1Cfvs>.

⁷ Gideon Rachman, "A World Safe for Democracy by G John Ikenberry – free thinking" *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/9259df30-4c0b-4f7f-aab7-cee195507b53>.

messing up the main dictum of the American idiom. Ikenberry is no exception.

In general, Chatham House does not question Ikenberry too much: the political idiom of "liberal West" is identical. LSE is a bit more pugnacious and "realist," side of things, but the fundamental IR vision of the West is similar. The use of the old European capital will open up the old continent and also the former territories of the British Empire, the so-called Commonwealth, even with Brexit. Chatham House is thus friendly territory for the likes of Ikenberry as my two interviews with Robin Niblett⁸ and Jim O'Neill⁹ demonstrate (Spanish translations in *La Vanguardia*). The connections (Oxford-London-Chatham House and American IR "publicists," in the old sense of the word, exist and stretch to reach a handful of American universities, two or three think tanks and the Council on Foreign Relations, big sister of Chatham House, is in the pole position. Ikenberry's interventions must be inserted inside this very delicate moment of Western think-tank crisis, including its publications, acknowledged by Niblett (*International Affairs* is the outlet of Chatham House). From crisis to crises: an Anglo-framed Western supremacism stipulated by the mainstream social sciences run into the gradual decline of the hegemony of the U.S. and the U.K. in international affairs, the crisis of credibility since 9/11, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the vertiginous Brexit turmoil and attrition and the Trump commotions, followed up now by the 'restorative' Biden administration.

Chatham House is working hard on finding its footing after losing the Brexit debate and there was a big sigh of relief after Biden's victory. The attempt is to broker "global Britain" (going solo) still invoking international cooperation (see Niblett, 2021). The institution is politically on the right, Tory-conservative, or in the conventional language of continental Europe, social-democratic of the German Catholic school of thought a la Angela Merkel. It is official through and through, i.e. near political centers of power and influence, and even further, enrolling ex-Prime-Ministers, ex-Minister, ex-Ambassadors, noted state officials and business men of influence and name recognition straddling politics, the media, the charities and even the House of Lords. The

⁸ Fernando Herrero and Robin Niblett, "The More Coherent the World is, the Less Influential Britain will be," [fernandogherrero.com](https://www.fernandogherrero.com/single-post/2020/04/29/robin-niblett-the-more-coherent-the-world-is-the-less-influential-britain-will-be-interviand); Spanish translation, [lavanguardia.com](https://www.lavanguardia.com/participacion/lectores-correspondales/20200504/48936745091/entrevista-robin-niblett-director-chatham-house-the-royal-institute-of-international-affair-covid-19-brexit.html).

⁹ Fernando Herrero and Jim O'Neill, "International Cooperation does not Require the Same form of Government," [fernandogherrero.com](https://www.fernandogherrero.com/single-post/2020/05/30/jim-o-neill-chatham-house-chair-international-cooperation-does-not-require-the-same-form); Spanish translation, [lavanguardia.com](https://www.lavanguardia.com/participacion/lectores-correspondales/20200504/48936745091/entrevista-robin-niblett-director-chatham-house-the-royal-institute-of-international-affair-covid-19-brexit.html).

internationalist vocation defines the one-hundred-year-old Royal Institute (the other name of Chatham House) building on the expansionist legacy of the British Empire. The English historian and IR scholar Arnold Toynbee was the main researcher in chief at Chatham House in the first half of existence (the 'conservative' American historian William McNeill of visibility during the Great-Books wars of the Reagan era wrote a good biography of the English historian and IR scholar, 1990). Toynbee is now forgotten: this pains-taking kind of expansive historical work of civilizational proportions is now cornered by slimmer and more timely position white papers (Toynbee's ghost will pay a visit further down in these pages). The Europeanist vocation is now logically compromised by the Brexit divergence, but the European Union is different from NATO. It is in any case no longer automatic to put the U.K. "inside" the sign "Europe" (and which one variety do you mean?). Some distancing is already happening and it is already reflected in the geopolitics and the mainstream media. There will be repercussions in Area Study programs, trade, tourism and general culture. A quintessential British insularity is to be reinforced, so this is obviously not a good thing for self-declared internationalists who have typically embraced an Anglo-supremacist attachment to American enterprises since the Cold War Era. These "Anglo Saxon ways" (Toynbee's expression) are less obvious now.

It is important to explain the immediate context of the British reception of Ikenberry's interventions. Chatham House is currently not close to the Boris Johnson government which instigated Brexit and this is a delicate equilibrium, how to impart wisdom without sounding contrarian, impartial without going to the other side of the French, the Russians or, God forbid, the Chinese and those 'barbarians' in the Asian plains that H J Mackinder called the "geographical pivot of history." The guests and audience are surely motley true but the ideological parameters along the lines of the "liberal international order" are clear. The guest speakers typically come from the ideological layers of the former defeated Tories in the post-Brexit "global Britain." Some "realist" touches are of course allowed. The alliance with the U.S. is not in question, also in the identical "liberal-West" formulations of Ikenberry and others like him. But it has been tested of late and it is significant to notice the delegation of the internationalist intelligence exclusively to the American side (Perry Anderson has harsh words for this delegation in "Ukania Perpetua," 2020). Chatham House exemplifies such subaltern disposition that has put them ahead of others in the continental vicinity, but perhaps no longer (see my interview with Chris Nineham).¹⁰ Differences of opinion to

¹⁰ Fernando Herrero and Chris Nineham, "Boris Johnson is a good example of the fragility of the ruling class today in Britain," Fernandogherrero.com, <https://www.fernandogherrero.com/single-post/2020/09/25/chris-nineham-boris->

pluralize the possible options within the same parameters are welcome during cocktails.

There are no significant alternatives to Ikenberry's "liberal West" visions in this official Anglo Zone that I can see (the bigger cousins of the European family, the French and the Germans, are not really present, let alone the other cousin nations of small purchasing purse). The transatlantic traffic does not work both ways: the American side will not be receiving input from their allies with the same interest. The unevenness inside the "West" must be duly noted inside IR circles, but also other circles, including other disciplines in the social sciences and even the maligned humanities (Latin America is conventionally not part of this picture, not part of the civilizational and IR West, inside the 'natural' modernity/modernization paradigm Ikenberry exemplifies; the region is instead part of the Third World, now Global South, and we will have to watch carefully for the Post-Cold-War mutations of the "Three Worlds" partitions, not only in relation to the precarious locus of the Hispanic and Latin categories in the conventional Anglo imaginary; see Pletsch, 1981). For the time being, I would simply to point out the *modus operandi* of "resource nationalism" made evident by Ikenberry that is underpinning his IR knowledge close to the nation-state interests of "policy" priority in relation to his unambiguous nationality, which happens to be also mine. Ikenberry matters not so much for his "history lesson," which is profoundly unoriginal in its conventional U.S. rise to superpower status, "we are the winners of history" so to speak, but for the lever that he and others may pull to create an effect on policy in the next ten years or so. It is overdetermined that our American scholar of IR discipline finds everything that is "good" (knowledge, history, might and right) in the vicinity of the superpower nation which happens to be his own nationality in conterminous timeframe with his own biographical life, say, sixty-five years. There is a nationalistic methodology at work here, an identification of subject of enunciation with his superpower nation sharing the same intent, an identity politics through and through, but not in the usual sense of minority populations, but instead in one of minority, white ("Anglo") elite privilege invested in IR disciplines of alleged world coverage ("I identify thoroughly with my nation in its powerful state configuration as a force for good, with or without blemishes which will be corrected or the future will decide"). This methodological nationalism grounds Ikenberry's internationalism, which is essentially an ideological projection of the same unto some "different other," left begging for meaningful content. The operation is one of externalization, extroversion, the phantasmic

johnson-is-a-good-example-of-the-fragility-of-the-ruling-class-today; Spanish translation <https://www.lavanguardia.com/participacion/lectores-correspondales/20201009/483937982540/entrevista-chris-nineham-libro-fragilidad-estado-britanico-gobierno-boris-johnson-brexit-covid.html>.

projection of a "res extensa" by this "res cogitans," in Cartesian lingo, that our (cynical) speaking subject, institutional through and through, occupies with no fissures, absolutely.

There is no need, for Ikenberry, to go outside such Anglo-restricted symbolic field. His are the precincts of relative privilege, not necessarily epistemic. There is little or no traffic with deep-history that deviates from this "American leadership" as the polite diction has it. There is no desire to break open political theory and look into plural conceptions of democracy, by far an obvious term; and even less there is the carefree venturing into the foreign humanities that might take all of us to very strange domains indeed inside which abundant disagreements must grow passionately. Inside these London think tanks, and I do not doubt to add the mainstream media and the conventional Anglo classrooms, I fail to see substantially differing vistas from this "Anglo-Zone First." Only a few brave voices in it are dealing systematically with its worst excesses. Chatham House does not linger in these either. Time is ripe to submit the working proposal to the reader: that this Foreign-Affairs vision of the world at large, call it the "liberal world order" of the "First World," the "Anglo on top," is the dominant narrative, propped up by a selection of tools (the modernity/modernizing attributes) that we will see shortly in relation to Ikenberry. The "world" undergoes the disciplining of "order," always according to the official-management operation that privileges the immediate "nationalism" above "foreignness," and some are more foreign than others, following the rule of North over South, the allies first, and all others scattered along the subordinate positions. The typical identity chain in IR circles, less so in the humanities, is one of representation: the scholar produces his immaterial labor that is sanctioned by the institution and such knowledge production may or may not be used by the nation that envelop him, but in any case cannot be a frontal questioning of officialdom (discipline, institution, state). "Goodness" travels through this unbroken chain: the knowledge of the institution must declare to be benevolent to the best interests of the state. "Badness" is "others," exteriority ("hell" in the Sartrean line). "Good" self-positing identifies the individual subject, the institution and the nation and makes the claim, in this IR case, to reach an incremental dimension of the totality of the "world." *Et plus ultra*: the expansionist ideal. Ikenberry does that, time and time again, at Chatham House and beyond. An irrepressible nationalism of superpower belonging propels the profession of a certain internationalism, call it liberal international order ("LIO") and "LIO" rides, how else? in the wings of the bald eagle. This is the fundamental over-determination of the IR knowledge production that is interrogated in what follows since it is still dictating the historical, social and political boundaries not to be crossed by "outsiders." This is dramatically nationalized as Russia, China,

but there are many other entities. This official-Anglo IR framing, this *translatio imperii*, is what travels to the headlines and front pages of mainstream media, but also the main collections and blockbuster exhibitions of the museums, and I dare say the general university offerings, its mashed Area Studies, the compressed "global" modules in the social sciences, the profoundly damaged humanities, its brutally marginalized "languages" in the Anglo Zone ("hostile environment" indeed!). The angle of vision is intolerantly Anglo in Chatham House. Its monolingualism is hence not at all surprising.

Ikenberry's Western-universalist coverage of the entire world, and its claim to "put it in order," operates inside a specific Area-Studies frame of intelligibility that is being reconfigured as we speak in our post-Cold War state of play (the challenge is to push Pletsch's superb cognitive mapping (1981) forward). There is, again, communication between those universities who wish to provide such total coverage and the handful of think tanks in the vicinity of influential nation-states which are devoted to the fitful application of these international or foreign matters. The Area Studies covered by Chatham House, in English-only-filter are: Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle East and Nord-Africa, Russia and Eurasia. Continentally simple enough, primary colors. Its Anglo conventions underwrite the white-supremacist framing of meaningfulness still to this day. The dominant perspective is overwhelmingly emanating from the U.S., acting as the tenor voice and carrier of the main "melody" and the corresponding U.K. counter-tenor variation within and against the chorus of other voices, EU and NATO allies and now other nations around China. European voices have their own respective nation-state representatives to make themselves heard, but these are barely visible in the U.K. and U.S. media, even in English. The same holds true for the Europeanist Chatham House that lists its 250+ experts. The so-called "U.S. and the Americas Program," is accordingly the most "natural" area of key coverage.¹¹ It is run by a minority American manager of SouthWest-states provenance, Leslie Vinjamuri, trained in the U.S., who works her American connections and knows who (not) to talk to. There is clear predilection for the Democratic side of the aisle, although Republican realists are welcome too in some kind of "good cop, bad cop" routine, or a "second banana to a first banana." But there is no "tutti fruity," if I am allowed the light touch. The clumsy title says it all (US and the Americas): U.S. [typically called "America"] first and the plurality of the other American nations later, in a second distant position in the imaginary landscape. The coverage of Latin America and the Caribbean, is, no big surprise, sporadic and derivative, *tertium (non) datur* to the main entities (the U.S. and the U.K. over the EU). There is no proper representative of

¹¹ Chatham House, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/our-departments/us-and-americas-programme>.

this externalized excluded middle of the same rank as the said Director. Christopher Sabatini, American-born and trained, is the listed senior fellow in charge. In these internationalist pursuits, the "Latin" breaks open to the overwhelmingly dominant "Anglo" also in its institutional configuration that still feels the need to camouflage the proper title somewhat. Europe recedes because of Brexit. Russia is not what it was after the dissolution of the Soviet Union: its standard coverage is critical of the Putin regime. It is largely big-power authoritarian competitor with a nasty hand in diplomacy and spies. The Asia-Pacific will turn soon to the South-China Sea or as their Franco-German competitors call it, the Indo-Pacific. China coverage will grow in importance, but somehow I doubt there will be a strong Chinese director with independent powers who would challenge the mainstream coverage. Massive Africa remains under-represented, both in its North and Sub-Equatorial dimensions, despite the long legacy of the British Empire. The Middle East is summarily covered one crisis after another without digging too insistently on these intricacies. Mackinder's core-Eurasia formulations may return with a vengeance.

By contrast, the "core" of the internationalist vision of the Chatham House is unhidden Anglo-American hegemony of the "West" (Niblett, Vinjamuri documents in bibliography), although the civilizational concept is increasingly used less, without recourse to Arnold Toynbee and increasingly without warmth or curiosity (Kimmage). The colossal category of the West is typically used in relation to faraway lands and differentialist groups who resist such invasions (the Taliban in Afghanistan, for example). The structuring is typically binary ("the liberal is us and we are the West and the West is democratic, strictly according to our own handling, and we may agree to its faults and blunders but we do not dwell in them, and the Other, whoever this might be in the conjuncture is illiberal, non-West, assertive and even authoritarian...," so the logic). This U.S.-first IR vision of the totality or globality (i.e. "world"), by proxy if you wish, dominates the general coverage not only in the Royal Institute of International Affairs, but also in the official domains of British society. The official U.S. state vision enjoys what we might to call privileged or excessive visibility in detriment of other perspectives, not even the dominant European partners are typically invited. Official Britain wittingly plays echo chamber of the latest U.S. vision with some variation in tone, nuance, focus and emotional modulation, but in essence there is no genuine deviation from the main "U.S. First" narrative. Chatham-House Britain holds the distorting mirror of Ikenberry's America to see the world at large. Trump provided a few disorientations (although there were allies in the right-wing press, *The Daily Telegraph*, for example). Biden means fewer disorientations.

Ikenberry's interventions in Britain must be put inside this general frame and propitious climate. Wisely, he does not generally venture to talk in more open and less predictable fora.¹² The Chatham House session I joined, virtual because of covid (12 Nov. 2020), was about the insistence on the "liberal international order," which he coined (abbreviated as "LIO" from now on). It was an easy exercise in book promotion and the organizers behaved like delighted fans. These sessions are not meant for a genuine debate with foreigners inside a world-wide web of different voices. The debate is instead typically internal with other IR practitioners in the U.S. setting, particularly with the "realists" (John Mearsheimer is the alter ego, a "realist," who was one of the participants in the LES session three months later in February 2021, "The World on Edge: The Crisis of the Western Liberal Order"). I do not recall Ikenberry ever mentioning one possible contemporary colleague overseas with whom he would like to join efforts liberally or engage in disagreement politely. In the former session I managed to ask a couple of questions about whether *A World Safe for Democracy* was an encore of Woodrow Wilson, whether this was a reprise of the neo-Wilsonianism of a decade ago. Being a respectable free-thinking member of Chatham House, abracadabra. The connections opened! I reached out to our IR scholar who accepted the invitation to hold a conversation with me. He graciously sent me a digital copy of *A World Safe for Democracy* before it hit the public. I did what I promised, which was to read carefully the text and produce a nice document for the world to see. Our IR scholar probably thought it was all going to be all right after all since the proposal was coming from a trusted space, except that there was a catch: I wanted to follow up on my previous criticism of the neo-Wilsonians apropos the anthology *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century* (2008). Ten years later, these pages give depth to my critique whilst the "West" is leaving Afghanistan in haste.

II. *A World Safe for Democracy: What (miserable) "world" and "democracy" are "we" talking about?*

Nine chapters form *A World Safe for Democracy*: Cracks in the Liberal World Order, Liberal Democracy and International Relations, Nineteenth-Century Origins of Internationalism, Wilsonian Internationalism, Rooseveltian Internationalism, the Rise of Liberal Hegemony, Liberalism and Empire, Crisis of the Post-Cold War Liberal Order and Mastering Modernity. Let us not get mesmerized by the lingo. What matters is the "cracks," the general "crisis" in singular or plural, and also, fundamentally the

¹² Chris Nineham interviewed by Fernando Herrero, "Chris Nineham: Boris Johnson is a good example of the fragility of the ruling class today in Britain," <https://www.fernandogherrero.com/single-post/2020/09/25/chris-nineham-boris-johnson-is-a-good-example-of-the-fragility-of-the-ruling-class-today>.

"mastering" of this narrative of "modernity." There is no postmodernity and no neoliberalism, the former is too philosophical or "cultural," too ideographic and dispersed, and the latter is term of unacceptable opprobrium in these conventional IR circles. Hence, "liberal" is evergreen leaf in the political imagination of our subject of interest, even with the current turmoil and uncertainties. Crises are falling like unremitting, dirty rain and the greener the better... First chapter and the last two go together, like a fish biting its own tail in the pressing now: the signs of alarm may have already happened ten years ago, but there are now ringing louder (the book was written during the Trump Presidency in a sojourn in 2018-2019 at the University of Oxford). In this ideologically safe English spot, our "intrepid" IR scholar insists on the same story he has told many times. Why change when the career has been successful? Here, in this providential land, he revises the fundamental bibliography of American-provenance and dreams of a renaissance under duress. Here, he Americanizes himself further.

A World Safe for Democracy gives another turn to the screw to the nail that was already in place in the same wood at least ten years ago. It repeats the same message with or without the tweaking of Woodrow Wilson, now "defenestrated," so to speak, from his own Princeton School of International Affairs. The book does not open up new territory. There is no need to. This is thus revisionist work of an conservative bent that offers a few interpretive twists, as though there were of momentous importance. This work does not colonize new horizons. Ikenberry does not want to leave the surrealist room in Buñuel's masterpiece *Exterminating Angel*. There is no outside. There is no novelty. There is no "plan B." This is the "circling of the wagons," as my interview makes clear. There is some trepidation that the system set up by the "masters of modernity" (the U.S. mostly, with the help of the U.K. and the EU and NATO as faithful chorus) is on the retreat, and it will take time. In the meantime, it is about playing defense since the ideological edifice is shaking, the dear friend is ailing in the hospital and since when?, the empathetic image is also included in the interview with me.

The U.S.-led so-called Western-hegemonized world of late capitalism is mutating into something else, not yet known. There is a persistent logic of soundbite repetition (the "LIO" formula and lots of "liberal" and "world" and "order" as through the argument might better proceed through incantation). Ikenberry's "modernity" is mixture of simplified modernization theory minus its dependence tail, and some very distant and generic Enlightenment ideals of progress. Its contradictions are solved by the future. That is, we are — still — in the perfectible generalizable narrative of an expansive global system, capitalism, theoretically trickling down its riches, lifting all the boats as the common-enough analogies have it. For Ikenberry it is indisputably a good

narrative. It is fundamentally the right, the only thing available and it is "ours." Linear progress may be compromised, it may go under sometimes, it may even regress and jump backwards, even hide from sight, but the forward movement is not to be doubted. Who's the motor of this progress? Always put Uncle Sam as the locomotive. All the other wagons (or societies) follow the leadership of this one, according to one of his faithful sons. There is uneven development, different rhythms, and now the once 'core' may suffer some shocks, and some former peripheries are moving forward. In the time of now, this is a "coming home" of sorts, like the chicken in the famous Malcolm X's line. But *A World Safe for Democracy* signifies no introspection, no re-evaluation of the fundamental premises and postulates, no contrition, no change in the team of scholars and interlocutors, no need for new turns in the fork of the no new roads going nowhere different in no time soon.

The fundamental problem is that others are catching up and may soon even overtake Uncle Sam. So, who is going to be in charge, who will be manning globality, hegemony is the burning question for our IR scholar, although the word is not mentioned often. The preamble is Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The immediate past of the two decades of the 1980s and the 1990s: the stipulated pinnacle of U.S. influence, post-collapse of the Berlin Wall and of the Soviet Union (Wallerstein puts the U.S. pinnacle in the 1970s and it is gradual decline since). Sticking to the core and disregarding its peripheries, Ikenberry assumes the Francis-Fukuyamian "end of history" narrative, which is global modernization plans. The U.S. is top of the pile among other subordinated units, typically arranged in big-units or civilizations and hastily referred to in broad, superficial brush strokes (why bother unless they bring danger to the "order"?). We go from WWI to WWII and all roads lead to this "Rome" of American power, city on the hill of knowledge and progress, getting rid of the rival, the Soviet Union. Clever scholar, the problem is now one of success. We may find reasons to quarrel with both "liberal" Presidents, but the essential journey is not to be doubted by Ikenberry, not even today one century after Wilson. There are no fundamentally different readings of both American figures on the liberal Democratic spectrum, surely with blemishes in critical war situations. Soft-speaking American idiom, Ikenberry's, demonstrates an under-current push and pull of undiminished chauvinism ("my nation knows always best about the world that is out there and my strong state needs no input from outsiders or foreigners and my discipline needs no unaffiliated free-thinkers, we are self-sufficient in the complicated business of understanding the world," so says our Polyphemus). English-style politeness must be well understood: it often signals phlegmatic calculation and social-distancing from an assumed position of relative comfort and feigned superiority. Paradoxically in these

internationalist matters, provincialism holds tight. Keep the gates closed, the clubs checked out properly. Anglo-only: there is no need to set up shop in different locations and reach out to bigger groups of interpreters of global histories of where "we" may have been or not at all. Our Horatio's philosophy is not dreaming of other things in heaven and earth. Here, there is no past or future worth considering other than the U.S. on top.

Ikenberry's globalist narrative does not need to go into deep timespace. Historical sociologists (Quijano and Wallestein for example) are not invited to provide a world-system theory of gradual interconnectivity going back to the 1500s. Ikenberry's America may well come out of the expansive Americanity of these two scholars of different ideological persuasion, but the vistas provided by *A World Safe for Democracy* only selectively open up to the British era of Victoriana, industrial revolution and imperial expansionism. Here, I would say, Ikenberry feels comfortable, but only as long as Britain remains prostrate and obedient. All other foreign nationals need not bother to knock on the door. From East Coast U.S.A. and Princeton, university associated with Woodrow Wilson, our IR scholar looks exclusively at the old continent (Europe), yet strictly through the Anglo prism and holding tight to the English-only bibliography generated by his Ivy-League colleagues in identical IR endeavors and a handful of historians of European affairs (unsurprisingly English scholars working in the discipline of history if domiciled in the Ivies!). Yet, there is ambition even in this calculated opening to the old liberals of the XIX century, the men of state and the publicists of the British government and those in big business of the Victorian Era. No need to go back to the early liberals of the Enlightenment era. This is preamble to the real American deal, or foreplay to the real thing that begins, for Ikenberry, in the Reagan and Thatcher decade. This is the "victory" moment in the Cold War (in some kind of pathetic fallacy, Ikenberry's story identifies peak of US leadership with the most vigorous years of a typical adult life). This modern/modernizing narrative Ikenberry assumes as the most natural thing on earth is now in palpable decline, particularly in relation to the U.S. leadership that he considers almost a divine right. This post-Cold War is becoming, nasty surprise, an interregnum of a mutation an "illiberal post-American world" (the badness to my goodness so to speak). Invocations are to the Enlightenment values, but our IR scholar does not dwell here. These 'sirens' have aged and no longer seduce him to take him back to their rooms. The Victorian-Era preamble is better, the industrial-revolution modernity and British-imperial expansionism. It gives birth, in his reading, to the "internationalism" he is interested in. The *ius gentium* (law of nations) tradition is not addressed, not even in its American form. Panamericanism would take him away from the Eurocentrism that he needs like a fish needs water because otherwise the

international world is a cipher. We pass from one American sign post to another, from one old Democrat President to another, the recent ones are less prominent, how so?, and where are the Republican examples?, but we are not meant to linger long in the past since the intent is to reach the end of the tail, the messy follow-up to the Francis-Fukuyamian "end of history," once victory was proclaimed and see what comes next (there has been collaboration with him at least since 2006).¹³

It turns out that at least one of these "ends" (Iraq and Afghanistan wars) opens up to a very "bad" beginning that brings disorder to the LIO construct. Now, this kicks in the managerial reflex muscle but it turns out that the agents of disorder are precisely these "masters of modernity" (the U.S. and the U.K. inside the Western/European core of relative historical and social privilege). Yet, there is some combination game of core and periphery, but not using the language of the insides and the outsides, the nations like pinballs in the pinball machine hitting each other, the so-called "core liberal democracies" yet left strategically unnamed as though surrounded by a threatening mist that is surely majoritarian and peripheral, thicker and bigger agglomeration of foreign others, labeled illiberal, rules-breakers, authoritarian and even "assertive," you must love the euphemism as much as I do. So said the wolf to little red riding hood: only to trust him! Should we put our sole trust in our self-appointed IR manager of monopoly internationalism who puts the knowledge production of the Anglo world like it was a piece of a mummy inside some jar on the shelves of the library in some rarefied club for the happy few to talk about whilst the knowledge production of most societies in history is put out of sight and out of mind? But the specter of internal and external crises of supremacy and legitimacy is looking straight at us, and with it, racial and ethnic conflicts come along, the deterioration of the welfare state, the realignment of regions according to productive and most dynamic areas in the world – not the West – and the consequent tilting towards Asia. The juncture brings instability, turmoil, uncertainty, the rules-givers break their own set of rules, the U.S. blatantly so with Trump, Brexit Britain (now labeled "global Britain") seeking divergence from its European economic base, followed up by the misbehavior in the (post-)Brexit negotiations. Ikenberry's solution: to double-down on the mono-perspectival Anglo-American institutionalism and seek useful allies, but not in the IR-knowledge endeavors that remain close to others. The bibliography is thus like a monolingual English bunker. A *World Safe for Democracy* visually exercises the Godwin's law (the rapid use of Nazi analogies): and what does misty St. Paul's in the Nazi

¹³ John G. Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Forging a World Of Liberty under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century," The Princeton Project Papers, Published by the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, 2006.

blitz help us understand a debilitated U.S. and an ascendant China?

The English-monolingual bibliography is totalitarian universe pulling here exclusively inward in the American direction (England is, inside a shrunken head of a nation of four nations, diplomatic host, ancillary staff, shoehorn, comb, ornamental stuff, utensil, useful tool, cream tea or nothing at all worth mentioning). All the other options, languages and nations, may go elsewhere. Even in translation, there is a restricted circle of readers and interpreters inside these allegedly IR dialogues putting "order" and "meaning" to the world. There is absolutism to this liberalism, which comes out of a reduced locus of enunciation in the vicinity of the official American position represented by the same state and a small handful of handmaiden institutions, Princeton in this case. These institutions will come and go according to their specific situations, elections, administrations and their teams addressing the handling of "meaning" or the management of "order." All nationalities are the same but some are more than others: Anglo first. All disciplines are the same but some social sciences are more than others, International Relations ahead of history, for example, and feel free to put the foreign humanities at the end of the queue. All languages may be allowed to flourish, but this is English-filtered and exclusively in the American idiom. *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order*: whodunnit? The subject position is unnamed, but we know who it is, this is how "America" appropriates globally or totality for its own good first, and then for the good of others, like the gluttonous kid serves himself first the biggest piece of the cake, and then leaves the others to scramble for the leftovers. This totality or globality, all there is ("world, global order"): the big game, nothing else will satisfy our hubristic IR scholar, whose "travels" of the political imagination go predictably around the Wilsonian "safety." *A World Safe for Democracy* does not provide a detailed cartography of these inner and outer regions of the world (inner or meaningful and outer as less meaningful and there will be myriad, mixed and hybrid states in between). The slogans must be able to jump above all specific particularities. Ikenberry's mode is slogan-laced nomothetic. His mood, largely detached and controlled. No emotion, no affect. Suave manners of an experienced smooth operator who knows how to handle complicated notions well in controlled environments: "democracy" needs no serious philosophical effort. The implicit meaning is that it is the thing that is already in place, electoral politics for short, and we know there is money impact and the rest but it is in essence all right. If the civilizational language has also fallen out of favors, "global order" would do just that without major gloss and no loss (follow the signs of "women" and "education" in the relation to the recent departure of the West

from Afghanistan and the same and you will see the same civilizing mission). Syncedoque, the figure of speech, the part for the whole, helps tease out the logic of *A World Safe for Democracy*, "I speak of the whole, but I really take care of the part that I acknowledge mine; I am talking about the liberal West, but I only inhabit the Anglo portion of it, with some wiggle room, cushion, backyard of the European continent, which is the "safe" bit, when I put it against the whole lot of darkness of history and politics out there"). Ikenberry's latest iteration arrogates for itself the universalism of Western cultures simplified into Anglo officialdom. LIO wraps itself with the American flag, two Democratic Presidents, where are the other Democrats? Are the Republican Presidents less significant for world affairs? What about other institutions (Congress?, the Courts?). What about other forms of politics? Probing into this prose easily finds holes. The narrative thrust can easily catch fire and flames: why not consider race relations as a marker of progress? Why not class differentials? Why WWI and WWII and not Vietnam and interventions in Latin America? Why not Iraq and Afghanistan? The choices are never obvious, and our IR scholar is careful enough not to bring matters to the immediate years with living actors still in our midst.

The absolutism informing this profession of liberalism accepts no prefixes (no "post-", no "neo-", "i-" signals the non-American "others" testifying to a certain (ideological) rigidity in the American idiom). Explicitly, it is not bound by time or place, it is incontinent, but we all know we are talking about the latest superpower, evergreen, eternal present tense, "modern," detached from any significant connection to "colonial," also with no prefixes ("post-", "de-", "anti-", etc.). Western universalism would be a more encompassing terminology that puts the latest iteration, Ikenberry's LIO, in a long series of major events at least since the 1500s. This liberal absolutism thus logically generates nomothetic knowledge to cover the "world," that is the claim. But there are troubles now and this claim to the West is but a bastard version, IR version, of the West qua civilizational colossus. Ikenberry's West is liberal and portable, amenable to U.S. foreign policy. This "liberalism" is to be sure an ideological construct, an entelechy, that is generated by a series of bureaucracies or at least circulates through various institutions of diverse sizes (think tanks, universities, the state, the nation). Remove the U.S. from LIO and it disappears *ipso facto*, even among its converts and Ikenberry will admit to just that in the paragraphs I will read in detail soon. If the claim to "universalism" fares now worse than it used to, it could be the impact of post-structural and post-colonial sensibilities?, there is a change of nomenclature to the "liberal world order" or the "rules-based order." These slogans make no big difference no matter how often they are repeated, and they are repeated often,

and the realists have renewed their efforts of late in calling for the finish off and the unceremonial burial of their competitors.¹⁴

We appear to be moving towards a world of completion among a handful of great powers inside their respective areas or spheres of influence and two main areas are looming, the U.S. zone, gradually losing might, right and attractiveness and the growing Chinese zone (eloquent sign, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a kind of colossal "Marshall Plan" for the new times). The U.S. cannot match such initiatives, as it is undergoing its own internal infrastructure rebuilding that will detract from adventures overseas. Which way will other areas or regions gravitate towards? Would it be possible to cut a middle passage as some tendencies within the EU seem to suggest, the Germans for example? It is too early to tell.

Modernity and modernization do not appear to hold themselves together in the singular form. Monopoly (or ownership) claims of the one narrative of a singular modernity (the modernity of capitalism) appear futile. And we are facing instead with a plural variety of capitalist modernization processes with divergent or at least diverse "cultural" characteristics (American, European, Chinese, Russian, etc.). *A World Safe for Democracy* professes to own the narrative of the single modernity of victorious capitalism that now runs into problems of diverse nature and perhaps it is no more singular. Is this an external, omniscient narrator? Not at all! Does our speaking subject appear to owe anything to any other subjects outside the natality or "natural nationality" that happens to coincide with a very powerful one? What a coincidence! But it is the professional modulation of such affiliations that matter the most (i.e. the IR construct of LIO ideology of a certain America imposing its will, less so now). Sceptic readers may want to see who handles the strings of the puppet (power and knowledge), who claims to own the meaningful discourse which apparently owes nothing to the "RoW" (Rest of the World). "In it but not of it," where are we seen this? The part of the U.S., addressed as "liberal world order," is exceptional, self-sufficient part of the whole wide world, put a touch of Brit but not too much, a phantasmagorically separate entity, detached, once arrogant and dominant, now less so.

A World Safe for Democracy is unequivocally an arrested development, thought and sensibility caught *in medias res*, inside the precincts of the IR-discipline as it cuts its meaning in the recent history of the powerful with precious little input by those around and below the professional circle of immediate influence.

¹⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security* Vol. 43, No. 4 (Spring 2019); Walter Russell Mead, "The End of the Wilsonian Era: Why Liberal Internationalism Failed," *Foreign Affairs*, (Jan-Feb. 2021).

This is a small garden of academic creativity and very narrow intellectual input. It seeks no real debate that could furnish self-transformation of the parties. English historians of the Eurocentric "history of ideas" type, ensconced in Ivies, are summoned to help Ikenberry set up the IR table of operations, which is the Anglo timespace of the last four decades reaching us today. There is an enormous degree of generality in the "victorious" narrative provided, and whose "victory" is this one? But there is ethereality: there is no sustained follow-through of any concrete deed accomplished by any social group in any specific institution. *A World Safe for Democracy* is like a superficial rendition of institutional webs. This world is a world of surfaces. And we are exposed to the meanderings of a bunch of individuals with no apparent links to dominant social groups, but of course they are there pulling those strings, and to what purpose if not the upholding of some abstraction of power and knowledge for the general good of humanity. Those below, the dominated, let alone the wretched of the earth, are not welcome to the discussion table. So, this is but gossamer texture of "progress." Whose? According to whom? If there is superficiality, there is no "feeling" either, no emotion here except for one or two moments I will soon approach. The history that matters to Ikenberry is one captured by glossy surfaces — or slogans — and language simply has to reflect or echo some type of surface tension, but don't go deep there. This IR vision of the world is schematic history of ideas with no labor, blood, guts, pain, mess. These bad things are figuratively thrown out at the others. There is no civilizational discontent. All the (American) totems and taboos remain all in place in *A World Safe for Democracy*. "Clean up, fix it, give it splendor," that is the general disposition of our IR scholar, also in relation to the dramatic proclamation of Woodrow Wilson's "failure." But this is no the debunking of the IR realists, instead an attempt at a renaissance or rebirth that feels tired. It is yet another turn of the screw, but infinitely less significant than our IR scholar purports. Wilson's words still work but defensively so! There is no enthusiasm of a future project that could provide bigger, newer international vistas relativizing the ones already provided. There is here something retractable and inward-looking, paradoxical for any internationalism. Should we call it "isolationist" since Ikenberry does not look for a big ecumenism? He needs no foreign knowledge to satiate his hunger for knowledge. The emotional tonality is cool and collected, unattractive, almost muted, prim, proper, phlegmatic, clinical, managerial, dutiful, sticking to the business at hand, which is buttressing U.S. hegemony, activating ample social-distancing from an awful lot of world out there. Surprisingly, Ikenberry does not draw any inspiration whatsoever from the immense vitality of American popular culture.

Our one-eye Polyphemus sees the official history of the latest victor and there are big lacunae and thick blind spots here,

i.e. everything that has to do with the non-Anglo non-white (color) lines of internationalism. Cynical-institutionalist and bureaucratic besides hubristic, this American vision, what else to call it?, feels like state propaganda of great deeds compromised since the 1980s. Ikenberry is institutional man through and through who etherizes the institution on the discussion table (Princeton and the U.S. state apparatus) and sells professionally like a good salesman the benevolence of the status quo under the rubrics of "liberal international order" and the "liberal West." This must still be the future, even if there is misapprehension. And there is no need for big origins, archaeologies since the teleology cannot be horrific and different (the horror of "U.S. number two"!). Ikenberry rereads Wilson' speeches and provides a new interpretive twist. He digs his metaphorical heels deeper in the self-sufficient ground of "America," subtracting the name in the "whodunnit" that encompasses the "world," but it is a portable and manageable distortion of this "monster." This America is ahistorical sign detached from the history of the world (America with no Wallerstein-and-Quijano "Americanity, say). America is an "idea" or "a set of values," as the liberal mindset would like you to believe, and if the gap happens between word and deed, this is also constitutive of the idea of America, which is work in progress (i.e. the alcoholic always has tomorrow to sober up, the gangster will repent in his death bed if he has got a chance, why not return to the faith if we can come out of it in the meantime to pursue other interests?, thus the logic that underwrites *A World Safe for Democracy*).

Our liberal turns conservative and conservatism is here understood simply as institutionalism. The language of progress and reformism is as far as we will go. And this is the immediate territory he has to tread gently, silently. There is no problem with Princeton and there is no big problem, really, with the U.S. state department (in the concluding pages, I use the Pitts Rivers Museum in the city of Oxford to convey the generic possibility of a concrete institutional critique that our IR scholar evades). Ikenberry preserves this Huntingtoniana whilst, coyly, mitigating the pointed language of belligerence made famous by the older scholar, that of the clash of civilizations. We are now in the low tide of those 'excesses,' apparently retreating from such blasts. The language is now seemingly more neutral, still binary and Manichean, but more pale and decolored, less religious and explicitly "cultural," more compressed (liberal / illiberal, democratic / authoritarian, more euphemistic, the Chinese under Xi are more "assertive"). The perspective is still western, what else?, but it is the Anglo perspective of it, with the American tenor voice, and it includes much less content in the face of the competitors (China on top, Russia following, Turkey near, Iran also near, North Korea, add the Talibans and other extremists in their circumscribed localities). "West" is this corseted IR lingo, a

stalking horse. "Liberal" is shibboleth determining who's in and who's out. "West" is restricted club, not even the French and the Germans are invited to give us their thoughts. The use of "liberal" signifies membership in the club and we will see at least two examples in the concluding pages too. The Americans and the Brits use the terminology (LIO, rules-based order, liberal West, et.), perhaps some Germans too, even if it is considered outdated, or precisely because of it, and it is often done with a wink. Ditto with "the special relationship:" very special, as the cynical statement made by Trump made clear the sheer performativity of the discourse that said nothing in particular. In the meantime, Ikenberry and others stick to these identity markers, which function like smokescreen, game of mirrors, the proximity or affiliation to certain traditions with its fences. There is no mention of other belief systems, religions for instance, that might compete for political ideas. Like the Hebrews in the Old Testament who used certain sounds to detect insiders and outsiders in the way a certain sound was pronounced, LIO plays similar role in settings such as Chatham House. Go along silently if you wish, tinker with the brand, mess with the label, add the prefix to the stem ("neo-liberal"), and you are not with "us." *A World Safe for Democracy* is liberal in this precise sense of gathering kin and kith: "Anglo is us," as long as it is "Anglo on top." And it is so far victorious world history, but for how long. "Ordering" gives away the apple in the eye of our IR scholar. It is another euphemism for what the realists call "the grand strategy." Carl Schmitt called it "nomos of the earth." Who rules the world?: that's the naked desire of the speaking subject (Ikenberry) beside the liberal shibboleth and the Western stalking horse. This internationalism is in the antipodes of multi-disciplinarity and multi-perspectivism, also in the social sciences. Logically, it is strongly anti-humanities. It has the American-State monopoly of power and knowledge at its very core. But no monopoly is forever.

What do I mean by that? *A World Safe for Democracy* marks the provision of nomothetic knowledge inside the discipline of International Relations (IR) in the official vicinity of the U.S. state, call it Princeton and the sectors affiliated to the Democratic Party intellectual and academic East Coast. This scholarly work seeks to reassure, validate, safeguard and vindicate the symbolic field of big expanses (the "world") for "policy" pursuits, even though such provision is generic and is not directly involved in such avatars (by definition, Ivy Leagues have to internationalize endeavors marking their range of operations against say less influential, less rich, and hence more local institutions of higher learning). It is profoundly "idealist," and this is not necessarily a compliment, in the sense that this knowledge production handles a general collection of ideas seemingly detached or at least unaddressed from the thorny and sticky specificities of the bureaucracies and institutions involved. Ikenberry's core of being,

if I am allowed to use this type of language, is institutionalist (or bureaucratic) through and through but it is not "forensic" about it in its own analysis; that is, Ikenberry does not provide a clinical, thorough analysis of one single internationalist organization in particular to demonstrate its "force for good" promise. We are meant to take internationalism at face value in its benevolent interdependence. In *A World Safe for Democracy*, we are always in a world, and a reduced version of one, enmeshed in willful generality of good intentions. The analysis is therefore not "materialist" in the sense of not putting specific ideas inside the heads of influential actors following their interests inside concrete institutions involved in the tug-of-war of influence, power and knowledge in specific situations and its immediate or distant ramifications. This discursive generality does not go down to the ugly area of the institutions, the loud cobblestones of the street, the contaminated arena of the beach, the sewage, the gutter, the guts in the bucket of politics. There is no unconscious and no psychoanalysis here either, hence no "depth" to the ideas defended. But there is no way to go since the opposing ideas are merely negated or "negative" (illiberal, not modern, not order, authoritarian, not following the rules...) and suffer similar chronic neglect and underdevelopment. The 'others' are not granted "reasons."

A World Safe for Democracy is idealist and nominalist: we are mostly in the realm of ideas and names or nouns. Ideologies are not comparatively cross-examined, interests, like dirty secrets and dark passions, are not let out in the open. Ikenberry names a few ideas and insists on them, turns them into slogans and mottos, repeats them *urbi et orbi* in similar fashion to the old propagators of the faith in other timespaces. But there is similar proselytizing effort, not in vain the figure of Woodrow Wilson still holds center stage. But there is no "beyond." There is no transcendence in Ikenberry's secularist type of thinking that keeps 'deeper waters' at some distance. *A World Safe for Democracy* is accordingly immanentist. It could not do otherwise: there is no other world, no metamorphosis, no reformation, no severe mutation or revolution to the modern, the now, which lies in some kind of eternal present tense, with or without its tensions. There are no alternatives worth considering, certainly not at the "world-order" level of things. Our IR subject position is not willing to contemplate the theoretical option of 'cultural relativism,' or plural ways of linguistic signification. There is rigidity here. Even less is he willing to open up to the 'blowback' of the cultural-relativistic operation that would bring his absolutism down to one "cultural option" among many others. Ikenberry's liberalism is a disavowed form of imperialism that refuses to contemplate at any serious length the dark sides and the undersides of the imperial project, let alone the mere possibility of the betterment of the world-order proposed via the comparatives with others in the past or the future. His future

is American or isn't anything at all. The Francis-Fukuyamian "end of history" with the U.S. on top is still four decades later his essential vision. There is no *telos* that is not the American version he proposes and he will fight for it until the end. A world order that does not pass through American management is for him unacceptable, impossible, unimaginable.

In these profoundly conventional establishments, Ockham's razor will not cut the nominalism. The question as to whether this nominalism is metaphysical or merely branding of U.S. state department under global capitalism will not be addressed. No need for a comprehensive assemblage of the disciplines, no "Summa," either (how would IR fit within other schools of thought inside the social sciences, let alone the humanities?). No conceptualism will crack this "world" open. What is the substance of these ideas? The "ground" of intelligibility of these nouns? The legitimacy test of these propositions? We do not see a different arrangement to the proposed LIO. No counter-ideas circle around, no negations of these nouns form the core, no 'negative' ideas assemble in near formations (the negative 'illiberal' marks the 'other,' and some are more than others, from peripheral allies in Europe and elsewhere to the 'enemy' in the Asian plateaus). Ikenberry's constellation of ideas promises no reformations and no counter-reformations. There is no way out: this IR practice harbors (no apparent need for) metaphysics. If you scratch the surface, there will be something like a predilection for the Enlightenment "natural philosophy" after which the American constitution came about, but this conventional beginning of things feels, here, not heartfelt and genuine. There is no need to revisit. Better the jump to the Brits in the XIX century! The 'natural' Eurocentrism of our IR scholar needs a generality of ideas, but there is no dwelling in them, no excavation. As soon as this operation is moving in the direction of the complex continental philosophical tradition, it is better to keep it all at a safe distance (even less, of course, the temptations of the turning around of this Eurocentrism via the philosophical 'barbarians' in the Third World).¹⁵

Ikenberry is disciplined, parsimonious in matters of ontology, or the "grounds" that allows anyone to speak about "being human;" but there is, he can't help it, the occasional slippage into "human nature." This slippage proves, even to the absent-minded and the distracted, the universalism underpinning his liberalism, which he still wants to keep under wraps with no prefixes, unlike his avowed predecessors in the XIX century and perhaps even in the first half of last century who were more candid about the use of cunning and force (the George W. Bush

¹⁵ Fernando Herrero, "Ethics is the Original Philosophy; or the Barbarian Words Coming From the Third World. An Interview with Enrique Dussel," *Boundary 2* 28/1 (2001).

administration, soon after 9/11, had a moment of embracing the reality of "Empire" whilst others get caught in the perception and write books about it). I would still argue that Ikenberry's general liberal ideas – perhaps not meriting the word of universals – constitute his (ideological) "reality." Ikenberry does not want to "descend" from these immaterial entities to more mundane dimensions. He replaces "universe" for "world," use of force and violence for "order, and adding "liberal" he will probably provide a denial of metaphysical universals and a denial of abstract entities. His political unconscious would say something like "we do not need to go that high in our thoughts."

If this incongruity were to be presented to him, he would brush it off clinging to the new formulas that uphold U.S. hegemony. The secularism holds firm, the whole domain of religion – past, present and future – will be declared incomprehensible and frankly not that useful. This slimness is, I would defend, Ikenberry's universe and it has to be by force only one. The nouns that matter are all typically in the singular form as the book title confirms. Here, in these singular nouns, he invests all his "money." Outside, chimeras roam and wild beasts groan, and he shows extreme unwillingness to use his resources, even the exceptional ones at Oxford and Princeton, to pursue these 'distractions.' Hence, *A World Safe for Democracy* does not deviate from liberalism into its errors. It is safe to say, our quintessential American scholar pares down and cuts away the outer edges of the meaningful entities that might, just might, complicate his liberal proposals put forth *sub specie aeternitatis*. For ever and ever, this hundred-year-old "modernity" happens in the core of the West as he sees it and yet there is no specific geography, at least no one in which to linger long. We must travel with him and look at "man" as though from the top of a skyscraper, or with a bird's eye, or though the best drone or according to the latest satellite capability.

There is thus reduction and diminution of "world" to a number of small, successive stages. The parsing away of the concrete text reveals its incongruities and contradictions: Western universalism and selective-club Anglo particularism are presented as the avant-garde of global progress; internationalism is but only as far as Americanism, now hesitant; it is anti-philosophical, and anti-metaphysical, but with the naturalism of an Enlightenment tradition that, not conversant with post-structuralism, requires no elaboration. It is naturally Eurocentric but only in the narrow Anglo variety inside officialdom. This "world" is monolingual and intolerantly so: Ikenberry's language thus effects, unless the reader remains alert and critical, a kind of ontological reduction, from *pluribus* to *unum* (by contrast, "decolonial investigations" in the best formulations could be seen as something like this Ockham's Razor cutting through metaphysical universals and abstract entities, in the name

of radical difference, and plural 'cultural relativism,' one that is staged, more often than not, from the position of a minority-position continuum, call it "non-white" for short, traveling through bewildering trans-Atlantic timespaces in the last five centuries, other icons can be added to the English Franciscan born in Surrey in the southwest of London). Reconceptualization of "world" (universe, totality, globality, all that is) will have to bring plural perspectives and levels and layers, above and below, heaven and hell, even the infra world and the hereafter. Our author invokes the living and the dead, i.e. the tradition he considers his with filial piety. However, Ikenberry's discourse remains programmatic, slogan-like, a rigid form of branding. He does not "culturalize" if by that one means the opening up to plural ways of being in the world which may challenge what you call your "philosophy." *A World Safe for Democracy* allows no deviation from these slogans. This is LIO world alone. The world of difference is left unexplored "outside." These "strangers" are roaming the edges of the pages of the latest book. With no strangers to talk to, this is an impoverished vision of the international world, colossal dimension that is surely strange and foreign, excessive and impossible to know and master for anyone who dares. This article makes sure Ikenberry is not left alone to play the American-liberal game with the "West."

Ikenberry's world is secular through and through and does not attempt to comprehend the religion sphere, as though it played no role in "modernity." Wilsonian Presbyterianism is called generically Christian and there is admiration for his faith and belief system as though that was enough. What is there to learn from these strange belief systems or world religions, as they travel through the last two centuries? Our IR scholar is in the antipodes of the Emmanuel-Levinasian reciprocity with the Other, if only to keep some of the previous Hebrew and Jewish echoes alive apropos the shibboleth. Ikenberry learns nothing from the world at large, the world not encapsulated by his IR profession, Anglo-American-inflected, also in relation to how foreign affairs may be conducted. The Other is subaltern and does not speak loudly or softly in *A World Safe for Democracy*. Ikenberry's "world" is not foreign. Its foreignness and historicity are managed, filtered, neutralized, contained, eliminated. It must be lurking there somewhere like a famished ghost in the margins of the imagination but it is not to be let in. No Chinese and no Russian IR colleagues: thank you very much, in the brutal typification that identifies the scholar's mind with the mind of the nation-state, and also with that of the institution or the bureaucracy inside which the scholar makes a living. A damning thing to say: Ikenberry learns nothing substantial from the non-Anglo world.

Not even the Germans and the French are included. Expect no Hispanic or Latin. How many Blacks of any nationality? How many women? The paucity of the human-specimen represented in

this LIO world cannot be emphasized enough. Our IR scholar does not cross the English channel, not even from the vantage point of the Oxford sabbatical year, his imagination does not partake of the wisdom of the dominant cousins of the large European family. The small cousins always get their ears slapped. Bet your money safely: our American analyst of Anglicized German-origin name does not go anywhere else. The rest of the world outside this artificial Europe is without wisdom worth considering. Yet, there is pervasive mention of "West," "world" and "order" and less of "rest," non-totality and the "badness" of "disorder," i.e. out the reach of American hands, is left to do its connotations. Would our IR colleague admit to not knowing anything? No. Would he submit to any limits to his internationalism? Negative: he is blind and deaf to other, non-Anglo-American tradition. No need to tap into these vast repositories of time-honored wisdom, alliances, traditions, practices that may be call religious or not, which are older than two-centuries. Liberalism is thus brittle form of secularism passing through the self-styled benevolence of institutionality: the true core of this clever text is the aforementioned web of bureaucratic organizations in the abstract invocation of cooperation or interconnectedness. The ideal agents are, for Ikenberry, the publicists, the state officials, here he feels comfortable, but only if we stick to the Atlantic Charter. This is an exclusive club, fundamentally white, male, Anglo, upper middle class of the type of "history" that stays docile to nation-state dictum and the version of capitalism that puts "us" on top. If democracy is invoked, the concept is not interrogated with the trepidation it requires in the burning present of the post-Brexit and post-Trump Presidency in the Anglo Zone and beyond.

Big crisis in a dramatic big singular, or proliferation of crises in the irrepressible plural?: what Ikenberry worries about is the buttressing of American hegemony since WWII and the last forty years (the peak of the 1980s, in his assumed narrative a la Fukuyama, the calamities of the 1990s, and the tensions and upheavals in the aftermath). When looking ahead, things look shakier and more serious in relation to the assumed center of focus and attention, American hegemony. This pair is the "real thing" behind the liberal shibboleth and the Western stalking horse. Underline the adjective and the noun in the previous pair and bring them with their friends, three more adjectives and five more nouns, in the full book title. Now, we see how our Punch handles the Judy of the "world." IR needs crises. These are potentially fertile situations, great opportunities for academic life. And it is a reaction that typically, from the institutionalist standpoint, responds to a challenge from the "outside." In true xenophobic fashion, the "badness" is typically always external as in the Hollywood blockbusters (the jaws of the bad creature threatening the sexy swimmers in the coastal beach, so to speak).

There is no need to go for big Bang of the Universe prior to the 1800s, "we" know better ("we," the Enlightened, as simple as that, "we" must therefore rule, the Enlightened Europeans of centuries past called it "enlightened despotism"). A *World Safe for Democracy* puts modernity and modernization in the main exhibition platforms. But these figurations are now compromised. Should we change them? What do you think our IR scholar will say?

Ikenberry does not explore big ideas for the sake of exploring big ideas. This is reductive and restrictive and he will defend the need to follow this method. No extravagant metaphysics, no excessive teleology either, no eschatology, no scatology: we stay on this side of the living for the next two decades at the very most. No psychoanalysis either. No political unconscious. Ikenberry is "pure" and "clean" in the sense attributed by Mary Douglas (I am referring to the well-known *Purity and Danger* [1966]). Things are in order. Our scholar does not take risks in relation to the totem and taboo of officialist power/knowledge, which remain in place. The dangers are mostly around it and are not constitutive of it, in it. "Dirt" is the dislocation in Douglas' analysis, which could expand with sustained interrogation, cultural relativism, toppling, dismantling, replacing, "revolution"? No defiling here, no civilizational discontent either. Nothing further from the political imagination of this liberal type of IR truth: Ikenberry wants to "clean up, fix things and give them [new] splendor" (the motto of the Academy of the Spanish Language!). No big problem with the West either, but the monstrous category is approached mostly in an a-humanities nomothetic fashion. The brush strokes are broad and hasty, the prose is abbreviated and shortened, it does not amorously linger on the riches and achievements. The West means "shit," pardon my French, separate from U.S. hegemony. American is the perspective and American is the angle and our IR naturalizes this mono-perspectivism. But this West, it must be said, is idiotic figure, old stuff, docile manners, cowardly, burned-out pile of neglected things, desiccations, a carcass not to feast upon. If it is too foreign, it is better to leave it alone. If it speaks in foreign tongues, reach for the google translation and who cares. It does not amount to much except perhaps very occasional cultural ornamentation with no particular future dispensation. Ikenberry's is a self-assigned "civilizational" stance of the ordering of things in the proper places. Now, it turns out that impropriety abounds. Things are falling down. There is noise at the top and also in the streets, revolt of the masses and the sites of government have been assaulted with the instigation of some of the selected officials. The institutions: how are they coping? There is some restlessness and some venerable proper names are now removed from the names of schools of international affairs: will these changes suffice? will the law require more manicure? Keeping bad things out of sight, hearing, smell, touch? Should "we" go back to order this big, bad

world with its many foreign social sciences and humanities? The impulse of our IR scholar is institutionalist and conservative.

Ikenberry's all-American narrative is endogenous, self-sufficient, fundamentally illusory. Our Gulliver's travels take him to the self-sufficient truthfulness of his own enunciatory position. What is there to learn from the world? The narrative gathers some background with Wilson and Roosevelt summoning few interpretive voices. Interestingly, the second half of the last century is less presidentially defined. Clinton internationalism or George W. Bush's, or Obama's? What about Trump's, Biden's? The U.K. presents no significant Prime Ministers, not even the indefatigable ally in the "War on Terror." Global power moves from Britain to America, as it is proper, and "we" take the mantle naturally. There is distance between the founding ideals emerging from the Enlightenment tradition and the real-institutional practices ever since, the impact of slavery, race inequality and American interventions in foreign nations, including its recent disastrous wars (Iraq and Afghanistan). There is no desire for major upsets in the ideological construct. This is for gradual reformism and measured progress. The appeal is now to "safety" and to "pragmatism."

A World Safe for Democracy is narrow, miserable world, made worse by the claims to reach to or even capture the world (the intelligent conservative social commentator Walter Lippman, included in the initial quotes, spoke of the U.S. as the "island continent," surely echoing the "island nation" of Britain). Some of this insularity, the illusion of "going solo," or its "exceptionalism," is now compromised. But that does not mean the manners will fundamentally change, that the interpretive clubs will blast open their doors (I will summon two historical examples of closed clubs in the past still meaning today in the end). The vision of society that emerges here is one of a corporation with its management dynamics. The old ideal of democratic equality in the national space becomes now something like the membership in a private equity firm with its lists of stakeholders and shareholders.

Nationalism may be the vast space inside a more diffuse internationalism, but what matters is really the extension of the interests of the corporation (the logic being, "I want my ambitious "society" to go global, I want it to build international links as much as possible, to see partners, clients and customers wide and far in the pursuit of the best interests, opportunities, etc."). Locality would be a limitation, and who would want to do just that? The identity chain does not break: the state is the force for good, the safeguard, the backbone of the edifice, the institution is a benevolent force seeking its interests, contacts, connections, extensions. The ideal world envisaged by Ikenberry is one of a dense web of these interconnected equities seeking enlightened self-interest. "Democracy" is self-justification. Who leads?

The U.S. and the U.K. are introduced the "oldest and most venerated democracies." "Democracy" is the good name of the general society defended as long as we imagine the benefit of these shareholders and stakeholders in the different situations that may be thrown upon them. Scratch the mono-color of this "world machine" and there is the self-interest of the preservation of institutionality inside the increasing dimensions created by the interactions with other institutions or bureaucracies in the same and other nations. Is pan-relationality the terminal horizon of our IR scholar, even if the playing field is not levelled? But this does not seem to be a problem for him. There is no contradiction in this vision between abstract institutionalism and the space of nationalism, the individual self-interest and a more collective form of chauvinism, the delivery is always in a polite and calm manner in public. The "we" position is always already the superlative of the "good," the "most liberal," the most democratic, the mightiest, the wisest, the freest, self-sufficient, and there is gradation among the allies. The others are typically allocated by size starting from the foreign competitors, China and Russia leading the pack. These foreign units, typically nationalized, are somaticized as the negation or the diminution of the nominal good (less illiberal, illiberal, less freedom or democracy, or downright undemocratic, authoritarian, neglectful or unconcerned about minority welfare, they exhibit a blatant disregard for women and education, etc.). At face value, "culture" does not play a leading role in Ikenberry's schemata, but I would argue it is there always latent, implicit in the subtle manner of the repressed political unconscious sticking to the Anglo parameters until the end with no deviation. There are apparently no temptations to do otherwise in the last two hundred years! Be as it may, I would argue that Ikenberry's secularist frame (the "rules-based order," LIO, the "liberal West") is a softer, more modulated variation of the Huntingtonian cultural-difference focus of belligerence demarcation ("us v. them") built upon the grand religions (Huntington bacterizes and simplifies Arnold Toynbee's civilizational history of the world). From bad cop to good cop, from explicit hard lines to apparently softer lines, LIO boundaries are deliberately left less defined, more vague, "we" stick to the "us" and "we" distance ourselves, intellectually, emotionally, bibliographically, etc. from the "them." The subject of enunciation (Ikenberry) would like to keep these lines misty for us. What this analysis is trying to demonstrate is that there is still an overdetermined and supremely predictable "cultural substratum," operating in the vistas provided by our IR scholar. I call these vistas by the shorthand of "Anglo," I disclose the inversion operation: if the mainstream or majority position in the U.S. and the U.S. uses the generic "Hispanic" label to designate a motley true of "minority" position increasingly populating the national imaginary, I thus "return the favors" and call such

mainstream position "Anglo;" my solidarity position does not mean to be *in toto* uncritical, see the evaluation of the "Latino vote" in the latest Presidential elections.¹⁶

LIO is American-led international order, now the "victim of its own success," Ikenberry says and he relishes the paradox of combining a theoretical ideational opposition. Soon we will see ample evidence of this technique. "You win and then you lose because you have won," but not quite: the ideological lines remain firm and that is why the plural nationalities play the useful differentialist culturalism still needed ("I am more or less the same as the Brits, even the same with the Germans and the French, less so with the Italians and the Spaniards, less so with the Latin Americans, and even less so with the Russians, the Chinese, the Africans who are not invited to the conversation anyways," so the underlying logic).

Open admission of failure is something no one does whilst in public office if at all possible. The big narrative (modernity, modernization) remains not in doubt for these "cultural insiders," the "liberal democracies," and there will be exceptions that confirm the rule. Partial admissions of failure are all right, particularly when thrown at ancestors one hundred-years-old dead. The ones who are meant to fail are "the others," in the past and ideally the future. The decoding continues: the "rules-based order" as managed by the "liberal West" hides the subject position in the "whodunnit," but the parsing of the prose gives it away and the media helps (we only have to see who speaks and who does not, who is quoted and who isn't; anecdotally, the British newspaper *The Guardian* – of social-democratic leanings – has adopted what we may wish to call an Ikenberry trait, decapitalizing "the west," whilst sticking firm to the same narrative of modernity, including the need to invade poor countries in the Asian plains and focusing now on the humanitarian aid). We are unequivocally dealing with the Anglo-American global dominance, albeit the general presentation is one that is more oblique and more euphemistic than the one typically furnished by fellow IR realists (Mearsheimer is one realist grandee who relishes sharing the stage with our subject of interest whilst calling for the demise of LIO as the aforementioned LSE webinar proves). Ikenberry invokes Enlightenment values. But values alone never suffice: the argument is circular ("the world is safe for us, liberal democracies, because we are already inside the safety of being liberal democracies...and now due to pressures we may need to expand the radius of collaboration to guarantee our safety"). There are admixtures (liberal and illiberal, democratic and non-democratic elements), but there is no ideological

¹⁶ Fernando Herrero, "Latino, la categoría polivalente de las elecciones presidenciales de EE.UU," *La Vanguardia*, La <https://www.lavanguardia.com/participacion/lectores-correspondentes/20201114/49423802701/analisis-voto-comunidad-latino-elecciones-eeuu-joe-biden-democratas-donald-trump-republicanos-minorias.html>.

confusion whatsoever as to where our IR scholar stands in relation to the messy contingencies and fast-moving avatars of world politics of the last four decades. His habitat is this "old Western-led liberal order," this is his private garden. And there is no venturing outside. Ikenberry remains naturally Eurocentric as though this was still unproblematic mode of being, particularly for any internationalism worth its salt, so late in history of the world. His is narrow vision of Europe, Britain-framed, England-only, Oxford-circumscribed, Chatham-House-publicized. This "garden" is "owned" by the official American position. There is also the EU and NATO, but these are here silent partners. There are no worlds of meaning outside, no post-Occidentalism either. Let us parse away the sentences to catch the cunning-like-a-fox and the slippery-as-an-eel reasoning.

This is a first example of casuistry:

[L]iberal internationalism can be seen as a form of international order that can be manifest in various ways. Non-liberal international orders – those that are closed and not rules-based – might take various forms, including geopolitical blocs, spheres of influence, mercantilist zones, or imperial orders.

Liberal international order has successfully coexisted with other systems, and there is a lively debate about whether liberal internationalism, organised within the liberal democratic world, leads to and depends on imperialism and empire elsewhere. Does liberal order have illiberal foundations?

The idea of a "liberal" international order carries two meanings. In the first, the international order is liberal in that it has liberal characteristics – openness, the rule of law, and principles of reciprocity and nondiscrimination. But the order may also be liberal in the sense that it is built around cooperation among liberal democracies, and the specific aspects of that cooperation may or may not be "liberal." The American-led postwar international order has been built on a system of bilateral and multilateral alliances, and this cooperative security does not itself have liberal properties. It is liberal only in the sense that it is an alliance of liberal democracies. Liberal international order may also be based on hierarchical relationships that cut against liberal norms of sovereign equality and rules-based relations. And liberal democracies may act in decidedly "illiberal" ways outside the boundaries of the liberal order, intervening in and dominating societies on their periphery. In all these ways, the entanglements between liberal and

illiberal forms of order are inescapable, complex, and shifting.¹⁷

The language is deliberately soft-edged, vague, seemingly "neutral" and noncommittal at first glance. We have a bunch of common nouns and the insistence is on the favorite slogans. There are no specific timespaces, no concrete works, no writers and readers. The narratorial voice makes sense of things as though these were seemingly ethereal, purely ideational. The language clarifies nothing, delimits nothing, turns and twists around itself. Plural manifestations of the "same"? "Success"? "Lively" debate: it must be the euphemism of the century (Giorgio Agamben is thus "lively" about the enormity of the fracture of democratic legitimacy of the West according to its own self-declared principles?). There are no proper names. The pasture is this nominalization of ideas. The paragraphs are pliable and "open" ("closed" is euphemism for "the others"). The final sentence resolves nothing since the resolution is future-oriented conjunctural, situational.

The favorite word (liberal) sometimes includes quotes, sometimes does not. There are twenty-three instances of the favorite word, four instances in the negative, one "illiberal" in quotation marks. There is humming and even hammering, as though repetition was a virtue in persuasion (the more I say the taboo word, liberal, the more the water drip-drop erodes the stubborn stone?). There are no "post-" and no "neo-." Etherealized language: nominalism and idealism battle each other with no grounding in sight. Prosper (the 'exterior' narrator) controls the narrative in this tempest with no Calibans. We are in some kind of eternal present tense. No island continent but amorphous incontinence. The narratorial voice seemingly comes from nowhere and goes nowhere, perhaps the realm of the paradoxical? This prose commits to nothing and breaks into its multiple liberals and illiberals. But the binary is mashed and then recomposed since the narrator will be the adjudicator of things with or without the quotation marks. Sameness and difference are one complex whole. Protean aspects of the positive-and-negative term undergoing mutability. The reader may wish to substitute the favorite term (liberal) for any other (communist, fascist, anarchist) and see what happens. The liberal features included read like an abbreviated catechism of good ideals, a taxidermy of values. Liberal is ultimately tautological and syllogistic, it is so because it is already so according to the unnamed disembodied and placeless narrator assuming clarividence, perhaps omniscience (the whole wide world of the last two hundred years is surveyed!). But these four features of this "liberal" ideal (openness, rule of law, reciprocity and nondiscrimination)

¹⁷ G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 18-19.

combine with the opposites inside the "American-led" system. Sugar and coffee, flour and vinegar, sand and stone, any problem? No, according to our IR scholar. Agamben calls this problem "state of exception." Ikenberry sees none. These "hierarchies" may take place "cut[ting] against" norms of "sovereign equality and rules-based relations." The violation of principles is no problem. Ikenberry pedals away in the liberal bicycle above this groundlessness. The cynical manipulation lies in the 'natural' inside-outside division: "liberal democracies may act in decidedly "illiberal" ways outside the boundaries of the liberal order. So, the false logic is one of: "I" am always already the "good," and "you" [the competitor, the enemy] are not. I call it as I see it fit." The cynical manipulation is amplified in the proposed LIO. The mapping is expansive: from Europe, the Atlantic Alliance, the West, the free world and the world.¹⁸ "Whodunit"? U.S. hegemony since 1945.

This is a second example of casuistry:

For both realists and revisionist critics, liberal internationalism fails because it rests on deeper and precarious foundations—anarchy among states, market capitalism, hegemonic power, empire and imperialism—that ultimately undermine and distort it. In the chapters that follow, I both concede and dispute this claim. We confront a paradox. On the one hand, liberal internationalism offers a remarkably capacious vision of order and change in the modern world. Its intellectual horizons are vast. It makes sweeping claims about the developmental logic of modern society and international order. But on the other hand, as a political project it is remarkably thin and limited. It is not a self-contained political movement. The world will never march only to liberal internationalism's beat. It is a flag without an army. For better or worse, the liberal project needs partners. It needs to tie itself to great powers, capitalist systems, and hegemonic projects. This is both its strength and weakness.¹⁹

Ikenberry goes for the happy middle between realists and what he calls revisionists. The former play hardball, bad cop, rough power politics and grand strategy without the dalliance of the "ideals" (as the line has it, "he is a son of a bitch, but he is *our* son of a bitch," originally used by FDR about the Nicaraguan dictator, Somoza). This realist position defends the U.S. strategic position and period. No nation building and no responsibility to protect and it may advancing as I write these pages. The latter are the critics of the main narrative of modernity and modernization, its

¹⁸ Ikenberry, 19.

¹⁹ Ikenberry, 24.

systemic violence, the cynical play with the principles to keep going, the 'manufacturing consent' of propaganda efforts, those who call it "Empire." This "revisionist left" is represented by Samuel Moyn and Mark Mazower both in the Ivies. Let us go where Ikenberry will not go: Michael Moore inside American popular culture could be added among others.²⁰ Tariq Ali and Perry Anderson make more sustained and academic contributions (Ali, 2021; Anderson, 2020).

Ikenberry remains in the IR house. He turns E. H. Carr around. Carr's charge of Wilsonian utopianism or inefficiency now turns pragmatic, but mostly for the core nation-states always already incorporated. Liberalism is apparently without strong foundations, not quite philosophically anti-foundationalist in the style of a Richard Rorty's post-structuralism, but there is no "philosophy" in Ikenberry and he would not know how to answer this charge. He concedes and disputes, he shows the strengths and the weaknesses, the vision is capacious and vast but the political project is thin and limited, not 'self-contained.' Liberalism helps with order or status quo and also change in the "modern world." Birds of a feather, "for better or worse," LIO needs partners. I am reminded of Elisabeth, the object of desire of John Flory in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*, which we will see later. What would we say of the liberal girl who loves you and loves you not, holds no philosophical interest, enjoys hunting big game and dreams of a good marriage in the faraway parts of the Empire? What would we say of Al Capone who walks his mother to church on Sundays, admits to his strengths and weaknesses, and understands, he says, human nature, has seen a lot of it, and goes around with his partners, who lead him astray, but for the better part, he remains, dutiful to his good mother?

This liberal vision changes shapes. It is chameleonic and changes "colors." It contains a disorienting multiplicity of options but our narrator is not disoriented. It is capacious, he says. Its horizons are vast, but there are no circumscribing opposing visions offered by another narrator. This is cold and hot, thin and fat, foundationalism and not quite post-foundationalism. No need to go for post-structuralism and post-colonialisms are probably placed, it is a guess, below this "modern world." Ikenberry equivocates the binary mechanism (liberal-illiberal). "The world does not march only to the beat"? "LIO" has no army? Not even the U.S. army? Good and bad, the idea needs institutions, armies, conflicts, big and small wars. Supreme non-specificity and eerie generality: our narrator does not want to let his coat tail catch fire by the fireplace or his fingers get caught in the mouse trap. LIO combines with 'funny companions,' listed as big powers, capitalism and hegemony. Americanity is missing in action: too

²⁰ Michael Moore, "Peeling the American Onion," Reader Supported News, <https://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/71137-peeling-the-american-onion>.

close for comfort? Too obvious? Idem as before: substitute liberal and put Soviet or Nazi, German or Chinese or Russian or Guatemala or Ecuador, or something nonsensical a la Lewis Carroll, carrot, aubergine, automobile, or any Borgesian sequence of incongruity that provokes laughter, Foucault dixit, and see what happens.

You will catch thus the intentions of the writer. The paragraph hides "U.S." "Liberal" is camouflage of "American." Neo-Wilsonian language of utopianism now turns pragmatic and still "progressive," gradually so. Quintessential American pragmatism comes to the rescue to "achieve the country" in turmoil. Ikenberry takes the both options in the "either-or." He talks and walks in different permutations. He takes the fork on the road, affirms positives and negatives, concedes and disputes. It is weak strength and strong weakness. In a word associated with Boris Johnson, "cakeism." He wants agility and pliability under the circumstances. He brings the consideration the "higher" plane of supreme generality must combine with the pressures of the circumstances (the vested interests, the alliances with several groups, the dog in the fight, the "son of a bitch," who is now "ours," etc.), but there are no examples that will clear the fog and mist.

Ikenberry does not dwell on the latter specificities and the company he keeps is not clarified with adequate proper names, unless you go to the bibliography. This capacious history of the modern world is a ghost town except for American agency in the most general sense of the term. He calls this vision "capacious." In conversation with me, he wants to give "gravitas" to the liberal tradition, just like Louis Hartz did with his famous *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955). This is my working hypothesis: just like Hartz gets lost in his later works in a certain comparativism with societies other than his own, so does Ikenberry, who is more professional and self-disciplined, and will not invest in these foreign dimensions emotionally, intellectually. He is less of a comparativist. Sixty-five years later, Ikenberry wants to repair the damage affecting the liberal tradition and calm its afflictions, strictly inside the discipline of International Relations. He does so, yet again, taking the Huntingtonian turn. How so? By assuming the lessons in the famous article "Conservatism as an Ideology" (1957). Conservatism is essentially institutionalism battling the revolt of the masses and the uncertainty of its credibility status in the eyes of others. In my reading, Ikenberry repeats the Huntingtonian operation except that liberalism is now the conservatism to be defended against the revolts, internal and external. A sizeable sector of the GOP is now "contrarian" and refuses to follow the conventions, particularly after Trump. A *World Safe for Democracy* plays defense on the institutionalist side, as Ikenberry puts it in the interview with me. He doubles down on the narrative of "modern society," which is rigidified,

mummified and becomes almost impossible to dislodge from its desirability that is not questioned. The very adjective 'modern' is prototypical, qualitatively superior over the others, intrinsic, 'natural,' resists historicization or mutation. Speakers of other languages, Spanish for instance, are not naturally to be mesmerized by such 'modernity,' from a purely comparative linguistic standpoint (a point worth taking about adjectives in English and the Romance languages for example, where the adjective may naturally precede or follow the noun, with a significant semantic difference: the preceding adjective marks close-to-zero novelty, it is "extra," poetic, prototypical, marks a certain quality, it is more 'substantialist' or intrinsic or even 'natural' if you wish, the information is already known, the meaning is one of repetition or insistence; whereas the adjective following the noun plays differently a restrictive function, it is contingent, accidental and circumstantial, more 'historicist,' it adds new meaning, which is not to be taken for granted as natural, static or absolute. "Modern" in Spanish *moderno*, exists since the XV century!). Ikenberry's modernity is less historically rich than the diachronic options available in other languages, Spanish for example. *A World Safe for Democracy* is thus historically poor. The poverty of this historicism appears to be no obstacle for our IR scholar fixated on "modernity."

This construct, with or without the liberal qualification (idem for the adjectival difference suggested before), remains his non-negotiable telos (of capitalism) which he will not break down and analyze thoroughly, let alone pluralize or diversify into the possible cultural modalities competing with each other out there (capitalism with American, Western, Russian, Chinese, Iranian, etc. characteristics). "Modernity" is "his" perennial possession, a kind of ontological Being of sameness that only the "illiberal others" almost in a horror-nightmare scenario appear to want to damage. But these others do not speak in the "world" and the "democracy" laid out in *A World Safe for Democracy*. Around the narrative of this "liberal international order," absolutist and intolerant the narrative and the order, the silence is therefore deafening. Here there is only the American dictum, if you wish modulations of its official varieties along the decades. The "rest of the world" (rubric "RoW" separate from the U.S., as it is used in IR circles) produces no meaning worth paying attention to emotionally and intellectually. Postmodernism makes no sense in this IR domain. There is no order of meaning that is not the American hegemony. No no-number-one?: this is the utter horror that Ikenberry will not contemplate. Impossible.

III. Woodrow Wilson Encore: Soft in the Middle.

Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) is perhaps the stellar path dependence for Ikenberry and others (IR realists also use the

historical figure mostly to attack the progeny, see Mearsheimer and Russell Mead). The American President remains point of reference near the peak of European celebration given to him in between World Wars, but it subsided fast. There is an influential Wilson Centre in Washington celebrating its fifty-year history, and there are noted schools of international affairs, in Princeton for example, linked to its former leader, name-removal notwithstanding, once the racist legacy of the former Democrat internationalist becomes unavoidable. Wilson remains household name in the U.S. inside these IR circles, particularly for, using their terminology, the idealists against the realists. Outside these circles, the name has been largely washed away by the tides of history and little of him remains of burning interest as far as I can see, certainly in Europe, including Britain (Chatham House is no exception). I have not heard anyone else vindicating Wilsonian vision or policies for our times, except neo-Wilsonians like Ikenberry. The word "liberal" is not usual parlance outside these Anglo circles; the English version, more muted and oblique.

A World Safe for Democracy insists on Wilson. How many American Presidents would you say would be honored a hundred years from now? Wilson's words preside the book title. Wilson is the indigenous or native foundational point of reference for American international affairs that is externalized, still, one hundred years later. So, this is a certain Americanization of world affairs that nuances the declaration of his failure. But the charge is individualized, it is his alone. The institutional edifice remains in place. Wilson is old-enough memory to be useful-enough "history" that could be used for tradition, depth or "gravitas" to the young society typically not suited to introspections and always obsessed with the immediate future. But Wilson represents the irresistible emergence of the U.S. to the world stage a hundred years ago (frightful symmetry with the venerable age of the Royal Institute of International Affairs). Our 'savant' remains fetish, totem and taboo for those who call themselves liberal internationalists who seek something of the taste, flavor, texture of this legacy. Ikenberry admits to Wilson's shortcomings, as it could not be otherwise, coming so late to the critical scholarship already written about the figure. But there is a twist and it is to admit to the failings but only in so far as to try to bring a renaissance of sorts. He may be our failed leader, but he is ours nonetheless, and after we wash our mouth, we may well say the good old formulas again and convey a 'new' meaning that may serve as the new inspiration needed for the uneasy times approaching. What was called bad idealism or utopianism, Quixotism, pie in the sky (Carr) is now instead defensive pragmatism and survivalist ethos still fitting the "liberal West." *A World Safe for Democracy* is no statue toppling, but the opposite, just another brick in the walls of the institutions that deserve the good mission. Ikenberry's is a conservative-institutionalist

disposition. The proclamation of the "failure" of Wilsonian internationalism should not mislead the careless readers: this one-hundred-year-old ancestor is one stepping stone in the right direction, modernity or progress. We ride the two nouns and we leave him behind! Ikenberry's euphemisms give him away. The racist did not push hard for equality, the white supremacist did not believe in the equality of the races, the internationalist only saw a few strong nations in Europe, the old imperialist and colonialist powers and the rest of the world was foggy, he never understood the right of national self-determination, getting groups and societies mixed up, his Christianize was not 'catholic,' his messianism jarred his colleagues in the U.S. and Europe, his jingoism may have felt all right to some of his compatriots.

Ikenberry preserves the mummy with quasi-religious piety in the bell jar of the historical imagination. But this historicism is a kind of antiquarianism that quickly wants to move on to the real thing, the struggles of American hegemony since the 1980s. Still, our IR scholar remains respectful of the faith of the elders. The origin?: "[1919] is the first stirring of the LIO imagination." Yet, Wilson is not celebrated for his intellectual powers. It turns out that most of his ideas are not his, that there were around him at that time. So, if it is not cognition, what else? His political persona. Yet, there are abundant "issues." Is our good Virginian a savant? Or does he suffer from the savant syndrome? Was he worthy of the European adulation, a vain man, a sober man? Was he a catalyst, an inspirational force of nature, or a weathervane? Wasn't he overwhelmed by event? Didn't he suffer from hubris? Isn't he today more of an embarrassment who knew little of the big world out there? Why do "we" silence his name in reference to the influential school of international affairs at the University he presided for about eight years (1902-1910)? Given the intellectual limitations, is our man close to the character of Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) in Levinson's *Rain Man* (1988)? Given the political limitations, isn't he perhaps close to the character of Chancey, the gardener (Peter Sellers) in Hal Hasby's *Being There* (1979)? Reputedly, our Democrat president of impeccable Southern polite-society extraction enjoyed *The Birth of the Nation* [original name, "The Clansman," 1915] in the White House. Ikenberry of course does not include such incriminating piece of information in the historical record. Ikenberry does not prod too deeply, too much, too hard. We read that Wilson is progressive and conservative at the same time and our good friend, the paradox, grows thick legs and walks undisturbed in the chapter four right in the middle of the book. Wilson is the soft in the middle of Ikenberry's "modernity," as the Paul Simon song.

Ikenberry's identity formula, modernity (speakeasy formula for capitalism) is "the" international order. The latter concept "allow[s] modernity to envelop most of the world."²¹

²¹ Ikenberry, 102.

Whodunit: ideas do things. Ideas and things spread. Things are ambitious and cover the world, always from the U.S. base. Ikenberry's account of Wilson fits perfectly J.M. Blaut's *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (1993). It takes one to know the other. It takes two to tango. This is genuinely an imperialist / colonialist diffusionism with Wilson by proxy. This global process is led by the "Western liberal democracies." The fingers in our hand will suffice. Capitalism and participatory democracy grow, expand, take over the world and the core is "civilization," the second identity of the West and technological advancement. This is XIX century ideology of progress that dwells well in Wilson's body and soul, and now retrospective ghost, together with white-supremacist racism and the alliance with the stronger nations in their privileged hierarchical place, namely the former colonizing powers (Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Spain is very weak by now, etc.). Wilson remains in the middle of the chorus line like the prettiest "girl" taking the limelight during the singing and dancing. He is surrounded by invisible (wo-)men, thick silences. His "failure" ("he simply blew it," he showed no compromise, mettle, etc.) is promise of a rebirth a hundred years later. Ikenberry's project of reformist progression needs him.

"The nature of modernity" demands the resolution of problems, tensions, grievances, shortcomings and prejudices in the future (isn't the phrase in quotation marks perchance incongruous substantialist residue underpinning the anti-philosophical language of this idealist-turned-realist IR discipline?). Never mind, the future here absolves — Wilson and by extension also Ikenberry — and who in his sane mind is going to tinker with this type of belief in the hope of better things coming? West and Europe are always the platform, also the levers, force multipliers, voice amplifiers of American dictum, Wilson's, exclusively in this chapter four. Wilson is the closest our IR scholar gets to the invention of a tradition, the making of a foundational myth of origin of a native tradition. But why the isolated individual and not for example James Brown Scott's Francisco de Vitoria initiatives with his English counterparts in the realm of international law (law of nations, the natural-law tradition, the *ius gentium*) right during the same years? These initiatives are not even mentioned and they are happening whilst Wilson was enjoying the adulation of Europeans, but not for long. The American treatment of the Virginian Presbyterian would be harsher. The cognitive mapping is nonetheless patchy, sketchy, poor. Chapter four gives no new information. Pan-Americanism is not explored either. Such direction of travel would have questioned the fundamental Eurocentrism underlining our IR scholar, but it is a handicapped Anglo variety of no continental depth. An internationalist figure such as Alejandro Alvarez is not present. Too foreign? Surprisingly, neither is Carl Schmitt who

saw American ascendancy so much of Ikenberry's liking with a feeling of the end of an era. That West was not his! (Schmitt and Agamben are missing in the bibliography).

Wilson shows up in sepia and no global color lines. Ikenberry cites W. E. B. Du Bois's disenchantment with Wilson, but does not pursue his scholarship about Wilson or the scholarship about both. How different would have been a reading of the Princeton President from a Black perspective skeptical of the old internationalism? How fitting to the recent University removal of the name off the school of foreign affairs in response to the 'revolt of the masses' in the American streets in recent years? There is still a silencing of the Black critique of Wilson that is not pursued genuinely. Du Bois is kept outside the League of Nations then and still today in LIO. Du Bois is only one token name whose words are not cited. Wilson's words are of course cited, reverentially. Readers will see again excerpts of his speeches and clipped statements of belief. This belief is, we are told, in (the deity of) modernity, which holds inside, almost in the fashion of an Aristotelian substantialism, an essential core of liberal democratic future. The careful reader blows the whistle at the tautological trap. One future or the future, still the "death of history:" the assertion of Wilson's belief emerges as valid, if insufficient, but these are muddy waters, or rather conservative and progressive and readers are meant to linger in this mixture waiting for godot of a decisive evaluation or resolution (the reader may substitute Wilson for any contemporaneous figure to see that what really matters is the eulogy of this 'modernity'). The closer one gets to Wilson, the less 'desirable' the historical lesson appears. Good and bad things go together and, given the absence of other voices, not to mention languages, Wilson remains the only proper name amid the repeated desiccated slogans and the rigidified mottos. Democracy appears to necessitate no excavation. Readers are exposed once again to the 'wisdom' of Wilson who identified the modern world with "civilization," the West with the best in mankind since the dawn of man, its hierarchies included. This "civilization" is engine of the world and this world at large delivers no transformational value to our "prophet," or today to the interpreter of the oracle of the prophet (Ikenberry), because, it turns out, "we" ([neo-]Wilsonians) already know what's best. No one else shows up and shares the pages of the middle chapter to tell us they know about other, better things. Ikenberry Americanizes himself in this "liberal West." Such language disintegrates as soon as you start parsing the component parts and syntactic roles with some care and worry about the general syntax of history being proposed by our monolingual IR scholar. This "liberal West" is an all-American creation, insulated American through and through with some Britain near IR circles and little else. Wilson's messianism was already mocked by the French, the English and others in his time. Whilst Ikenberry keeps

a straight face, he is not one for defilements, we might as well learn from the continentals.

The central belief system of Wilson still informs the central tenets of LIO with or without 'clarifications' that the future will solve. The belief is in cooperative exchange and trade, and "progressive change."²² This in turn facilitates "liberal democratic societies" that would behave like "disciplined and cooperative global partners."²³ The subject and agent of history dreamed by both Wilson and Ikenberry remains thus phantasmatic. It is as though aggressive merchants seeking their own riches would not exist, as though the aristocracies and the proletarians would lose the fight of history to the merchants who would traffic amiably in goods and people and efficiently according to good market rules. These good rules would propitiate a democratic society of continuous, gradual expansion without commotions into the better future. Is this secularization of Christian salvation the political unconscious of our IR scholar? The latest iteration of universalism of Western cultures? Is capitalism, not a noun Ikenberry uses often, the singular modernizing telos? This telos is here rooted in the historical-cultural West in Wilson, and in shortened and abbreviated, paltry and portable version, also in Ikenberry, to be sure. What else to do then but this "doubling down?"²⁴ The general frame is one of the incompleteness of modernity, also euphemized as "development" (i.e. late-stage capitalism). What would completeness be? If this is so, we appear to be dealing with more vocal civilizational and cultural varieties of capitalism typically arranged by big national labels or affiliations of nations (U.S., EU, U.K., Russia, China, Asean...). But this plurality of 'cultures' is taboo topic for Ikenberry. *A World Safe for Democracy* does not approach this plurality with a ten-foot pole. Such 'openness' will not and cannot be explored. If it were, it would have to suspend the absolutism of the American liberal position Ikenberry embodies. Cracks in this absolutism bring the 'horror' of 'cultural relativism' to this narrow vision. The current uncertainty has to do with these uneasy fractures in Anglo hegemony bringing true challenges to the once naturalized Western-exclusive supremacy of interpretation of global matters.

The repeated call is for the "rules-based order." The invocation is for the combination of international cooperation and multilateral institutions. A world of benevolent bureaucracies combines with democracies, largely as we already know them, with or without their imperfections. But the 'ground' is restrictive and the substratum is exclusive: Wilson's civilization is identified with the "great nations of the world" in his lifetime (ascending U.S., Britain, France, Germany... Russia, Japan and China are marginal). How different is Ikenberry's world vision? Both are

²² Ikenberry, 123.

²³ Ikenberry, 123.

²⁴ Ikenberry, 123.

looking from the outside in and our IR scholar is in essence asking for the repurposing of timely strategies and more efficient alliances keeping the Wilsonian edifice of the West as intact as possible. The future solves modern contradictions (i.e. hierarchies, racisms, etc.), probably after we have all departed. Openness and collaboration and one may almost imagine efficient warehouses, the Amazons of the world, processing goods fast and silently in and out to multiple locations! Is this Ikenberry's vision of what a desirable society would look like given his paucity of imaginary musings? Karl-Popperism, the binary of "open-closed societies," has become in the meantime the rhetorical recourse in the liberal-internationalist catechism. No soaring poetry in *A World Safe for Democracy!*: the call is for a refocus on safety and survival. The gesture is studied, surely preemptive, excessive, exaggerated, ominous and 'false,' contrived, reminiscent of the boy who cried wolf. Irony of ironies: the proud member of the strongest nation in the world — the one that just left Afghanistan in haste without coordinating with its allies — alerts to an uncertain future in which "others" (non-Western nations) may "become like them," and do likewise. We circle the limits to Ikenberry's imagination, what if America is not beginning and the end, and what if "they" do not have to become Americans, America assuming one more destination of travel among others? But cooperation and rules-based order are wanted as long as the speaking subject (or by fallacy extension, his strong nation) is the regulator and the cooperation turns out to be a profitable deal. If it does not, then the rules are broken and the cooperation is called into question, still in the name of openness and free trade. There is indeed a rat in the rotten state of this "Denmark." In the new spin, the push is not for the spread of democracy, but for "creating the conditions in which it could survive."²⁵

Limits thus circle both authors, Wilson and Ikenberry, for example in relation to the language of international law and of human rights, which does not flow naturally. If it was not about upward transference of sovereignty to supra-national entities in Wilson, it is not about that either in Ikenberry. Nation-states keep their levels of legal decision-making and the U.S. has been "forcing its hand" so to speak already for decades. The bad press of the United Nations in American society is eloquent testimony of this exceptionalism. The exception turns out to be the norm: strong nations use the Security Council for their purposes and American Presidents go to war without majority vote in Congress and without U.S. resolutions in their favors. No self-recriminations, no self-lacerations. Ikenberry echoes Wilson's voice in some Princeton lectures. Readers are invited to pry into the belief system. His was a modernizing world civilization of expansive world-system capitalism with centers and peripheries. Ikenberry cites Wilson's convictions, good-will expressions and

²⁵ Ikenberry, 127.

his many good intentions. Great. I am sure Al Capone or Mother Theresa of Calcutta, my neighbor and me, also the reader, had many of those good intentions too. Providentialism remains. Secularize it and it remains basic flotation line, also for Ikenberry: the U.S. is, God bless, the vanguard of this global movement of civilizational modernity or modern "civilization." Toynbee's plural civilizations have jumped out the window like bats with baby faces! The modernizing paradigm is Procrustean bed: has Ikenberry read Pletsch's great article on the "Three Worlds" (1981)? an awful lot of items get cut out and thrown out of this liberal history of the last two hundred years. Wilson's prophetic voice is rendered reverentially by Ikenberry. The faith holds, albeit in secular clothes.²⁶ Unbearable lightness of being artificially alone: the readers are neither exposed to Wilson's contemporaries' comments on the American president nor to sustained critiques of this old-liberal variety of Americanism. Ikenberry's tactful pointing at Wilson's limitations are his. Wilson's record is "mixed," he says, so late in the history of scholarship. Wilson did not dream of upsetting imperial and racial hierarchies, his notion of the self-determination of nations was also limited, the colonial world would have to become a series of protectorates, he supported the racial order.²⁷ How are those badges of honor? How is this collection of (modern) virtues? Turn these limitations around: white-supremacist racist who in messianic fashion saw the U.S. as first among nations inside a Eurocentric frame of vision that mostly considered a narrow core and unceremoniously condemned the vast majority of the (non-white, non-Anglo) world to a subordinated status.

Will the future fix these issues and absolve Wilson and those who handle him with kid gloves?

Ikenberry refuses to use more categorical language with these defects and failings of Wilson. Who would defend these today? One must historicize them in the original society inside which he lived and died. Its legacies are alive today in the institutions and the streets. In the soft middle of this chapter four, Wilson is not explicitly called "white supremacist" and "racist" — perfectly logical conclusions from a strictly historical standpoint that builds on the supremacist, segregationist and racist Southern Democrats fighting against the Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln. But he is one, one may wish to shout it from the rooftops or discreetly sweep it under the carpet floors. Ikenberry sees these shortcoming like everyone else and probably has misgivings about them, but does not call them out as though doing so might just peel the gild and chip away at the tradition he is inventing for his academic pursuits. Many others have found these handicaps a long time ago in the various cultures of scholarship, not only of American provenance. These limitations, vices or sins the

²⁶ Ikenberry, 133.

²⁷ Ikenberry, 133-4.

religious sensibility will call them, are here handled without fuss, carefully, and placed in the strategic box. That is to say, Wilson was moving in the right direction (modernity) but he made 'mistakes' along the way. It is as though the chosen individuality could not punch his way out of the original circumstances, failed to transcend them. Did he ever want to? I would go as far as saying that Ikenberry would almost let him off the hook, let the door open and get him out of prison. Would you quote from a disreputable individual in the past? Would you use his language to give a fair title to one of your books? Would you keep going at it for one or two decades? What does that say about our IR scholar in relation to his fallen foundational father? By focusing on the big picture (modernity, 'civilization'): Wilson's faulty beliefs still take all of us to a better global place in the near or distant future. This apparent metempsychosis does not mean a serious metamorphosis in the (scholarly) ways, the 'West' remains exclusive club of restrictive provenance, the bibliography is very white, the rest of the West does not amount to much, the Chinese, Japanese, Russians, etc. are not conversationalists invited to join these IR themes at the proper discussion tables.

I am of course recreating Ikenberry's good-faith ways which, like Wilson's, fail to move and persuade. Ikenberry gives the Princeton President the limelight, putting others' "disappointment," surely a mellifluous euphemism, W. E. B. Du Bois' for example, still today in the corners of vision (p. 134). Many things are surely wonderful in the general declaration of faith, the 'ego' looks ideal in the official mirror image of this restricted West, the 'id' moaning and kicking from underneath the chair. Keeping the analysis of the American President at the intentional level of his belief system, Ikenberry does not look deeper into those good intentions and further away into the road leading to hell in the refrain. If Ikenberry treads, ever so gently, on the Wilsonian "expedient universalism," it is because he is still not that far away from the same universe. Wilson was not "resolute on racial equality" (Japanese proposal was not followed through at Versailles). China was ostracized and given no voice either, the Germans were given priority in their occupation of Chinese territories. Britain was old European world for our Scottish-Irish descent in Staunton, Virginia, and Europe is ancestral platform also for the Anglicized German-stock Kansas-born (originally, Eichenberg), but no one is suggesting any type of determinism in the racial or ethnic background.

But some influence it must have, even if your mainstream Americanism tends to mitigate the meaningfulness of your heritage in informing who you are, what you believe in and what you aspire to be. We read that Wilson was not "committed to racial equality as a universal principle."²⁸ Erez Manela's scholarship is cited but put in the background. This would have

²⁸ Ikenberry, 135.

been a more biting 'attack,' I mean it in the musical sense of the term, on the Wilsonian figure, which remains in the latest iteration the solo icon in a white lineage of an enlightened despotism that arrogates for itself the monopoly of what the West stands for, at least for the purposes of the discipline of International Relations. Our IR scholar knows what's best and how to keep knowledge within boundaries, no matter the revisionist claims. The Brits are all right among the foreign nationalities, but there is also contrivance (what about quoting from the devastating thoughts of John Maynard Keynes about Wilson?). Ikenberry's prose attempts rare poetic flourishes around Wilson. But these sublimation attempts fail miserably. Will religion (Wilson's Presbyterianism) come to the rescue to explain such execrable behavior from our contemporary vantage point?:

This logic [of great-power collaboration seeking future resolution] followed from his view of the league as an embryonic political community. Wilson's thinking about international relations was infused with his Christian beliefs. The League of Nations could be thought of as a church in a town. Wilson, as a leader in the church, would naturally think that the most important way to make the town stable, peaceful, and civilized is to get people to go to church. He knows that potential churchgoers do not necessarily yet behave in a Christian way. The town had gangs and brothels, gambling houses and drug dealers, and some of the church's leaders have their fingers in these dark activities. But Wilson has faith that the church will do its work. Even if the churchgoers of this generation do not reform, their children will, and the town will slowly be transformed. This, in essence, seems to be Wilson's view of the league. It would be a living thing, and its principles of rectitude and right would slowly enlighten those who inhabited its conference halls.²⁹

The cuteness of the vignette should instantly gather dark clouds and fierce storms in our global-climate epoch. The League of Nations is like a generic church in a generic town and Christianity stands for moral rectitude. The leader knows things are far from perfect, but salvation is transcendental and hides in the future. Ikenberry's secularism is an moralistic exercise in false piety. He affects to treat Wilson's Christian religion (Presbyterianism) seriously. But the account is mechanistic, catechistic, silly, moralistic, ideological through and through, cynical in the true sense of cynical (to feign virtue, to affect to abhor vices). It is a capsule, a small piece of a morality tale for our postmodern, postcolonial times that do not believe in single moralities. He [Wilson] believed in a certain type of collectivity. Once we clear

²⁹ Ikenberry, 136-7.

the 'forest' of the Chinese, the Japanese, the very assertions of the French and the Germans, pinch one Brit or two, and hide the 'blacks' and the 'colonials' in the basement, what remains? Du Bois, out of sight. No one single whiff of a Hispanic scholar. The 'languages' silenced by the haughty *lingua franca*. Do we enjoy the parable? Do we appreciate the syllogism that mashes virtues and vices and solves the paradox in the perfectibility of the following generations? Church or town, which one for this gown representative, the narrator who is not in the picture? The son of the Southern Presbyterians who supported the Confederacy held firm to his "Christian beliefs." And keep on holding tight and good for you could the irreverent free-thinking spirit howled! The generality of this "church" and "town" speaks social-distancing. Presbyterianism probably means nothing to Ikenberry. Would most 'catholics' make sense of this Protestant Church of Anglo provenance? The narratorial voice assumes private access to Wilson's inner thought process. He does so to exculpate him or at least to attempt to mitigate the imputation of faults and the imputation of blemishes. You may be a racist, but your sons and daughters may not be so, so retrospectively, such change makes you look good, a hundred years from your death. The false syllogism continues: the church has good intentions, also limitations, and the town, supposedly larger social dimension, has "gangs, brothels, gambling houses and drug dealers and some of the church's leaders have their fingers in *these dark activities* [my italics]." Perhaps the town also includes good intentions in such list of activities. Ghostlike church and churlish town indeed. Generic religion (re-ligio), theoretical binding, what communities are these? No content, no concrete practices. What do these gangs do? Provide breakfast for the hungry children in the neighborhood? Do they gambling houses pay their bills to town hall? Do the drug dealers kill the bad guys? Do the brothels help in making (church) people enjoy sex? No races, no faces, no names... In good humor, the priest may need a little fix of whore, whisky and cocaine once in a while to get animated again for his congregation. Run your own inventive combinations (what makes you think that church is any better or worse than other institution, why would the children do differently once they have acquired the dark arts, what are the colors of both church, town and gown, who is this bird-eye perspective in the first place...). Is church polite society? Is town the whole wide world of many different peoples? Would you bring Islam to town? Liberalism may indeed combine with Western imperialism, but this betrayal of the democratic principles of theoretical egalitarianism, no Agamben here, will be assessed as a necessary correction, from a point in the future, call it the future perfect tense that completes the stated ideal (say, by 2050, American society, largely a non-white society, will have finally solved the problem of the equality of the races). Ikenberry's *A World Safe for Democracy* constitutes, in mind at

least, an extension to the identical false 'solution' illustrated by this silly vignette: 'we, the self-appointed good (liberal) people, do have to do bad things from time to time, hopefully not all the time. But 'we' do it for the betterment of mankind.' The vignette must not distract the careful readers: this is Carl-Schmittianism minus the Agambesque denunciation. The analogy is false: the League of Nations failed, there is no utopian horizon of non-conflict. The U.S. never joined the league. If WWI was the 'cruel lady,' WWII was the cruel lady in waiting. I am referring to Carl-Schmitt dictatorship moment of solving the Weimar-democracy malfunction, and Agamben's denunciatory state-of-exception formulations apropos the self-legitimizing powerful democracies in the West who go on violating their own principles internally and externally (we should remember the horrors of Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, the invasions of Iraq and of poor nations like Afghanistan after 9/11, etc.). Ikenberry does not denounce these 'church' proceedings. He instead explains the existence of the 'dark arts' in the generic 'church in town' via the proxy of Wilson, who still speaks for our times.

Wilson is a "history of failure" as Ikenberry admits.³⁰ The Senate did not endorse his work. The U.S. did not join the League of Nations. Who remembers him? Who builds international visions making connections to his legacy inside and outside the U.S.? He was too arrogant, we are told. He overshot his mark. He was "limited" by his upbringing, he did not pursue equality goals, etc. Why not drop him instead, finally and once for all, and look around for someone, something better? Why not pursuing the laborious reconstruction of collective forces at play inside specific institutions inside and outside the U.S. around him? Wilson is "absolved" because of his individuality and his own incompleteness reaching us today. It is up to us to push forward. But do we want to work with Wilsonian tools, given his mainstream white-Southern sensibility straddling the racism of the Nineteenth Century and the first half of the Twentieth Century? Do we want a piece of his 'civilization' in our historical moment? Ikenberry's "solution" to these problems is comparable to the Habermasian incompleteness of modernity. We just need to get on with it and stick to it with more determination and the future will be better than today. *A World Safe for Democracy* constitutes a pallid liturgy of liberal salvation in the Wilsonian article of liberal faith released into no specific timespace other than American options appropriating Western universalism now on its way out. But you bet your hat that America will remain, at least in our IR scholar, first and foremost among the allies. There is stealth in Ikenberry's invisible gown narrator, remember that he did not position himself in church and town, but it is really church and state, and state and university in the aforementioned child-like vignette of rotten catechism about matters of the utmost

³⁰ Ikenberry, 138.

seriousness. Intellectually, the prose sinks. Emotionally, what follows is supposed to be a lyrical moment full of classicism and literary embellishment:

Wilson emerges in this portrait as almost a Periclean figure: flawed, burdened by hubris and moral blindness in equal measure, but full of verve and inspiration. His observation that "only one thing can bind people together, and that is a common devotion to right" is almost a direct invocation of the great Athenian leader's funeral oration. The Wilsonian vision of liberal internationalism sought to transform the old global system – based on the balance of power, spheres of influence, military rivalry, and alliances – into a unified liberal international order based on nation-states and the rule of law. Power and security competition would be replaced by a community of sovereign and equal nations. But Wilsonian internationalism did not involve deeply transformative political institutions.³¹

This is the ending of chapter four, a light touch of foreign humanities in the domesticated variety. This is bad 'poetry' from the social sciences for the social sciences in its IR options. Second-hand lyricism of a certain classicism delivers a hokey emotional tonality, a failed attempt at sublimation of grand themes. The repeated adverb "almost" suggests an approximation to genuine emotion that somehow falls short in the use of the right words. Simply add "full of verve and inspiration" to other historical and political figures and see how they animate themselves (Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Franco, Tito, Castro, etc.). Is this an evocation of an 'oceanic feeling' (Freud) of a 'grand illusion,' a unified international order? This colossal unification "almost" resembles Parmenides' Being. Is this a celebration of the 'prophet' in so far as he 'saw' a world of nation-states and the rule of law? Is it also an exculpation of his gross mistakes and grotesque failures? Self-righteousness and togetherness can go many ways, in Wilsonian times or in ours. Colossal sameness, world unification and its subaltern 'cultural differences.' Nomothetic knowledge wins and idiographic knowledge (the humanities) lose out, except for this type of silly ornamentalism in accessible English translation. Big creatures no longer roam the earth, only medium-size and small creatures in some type of "peaceable kingdom" as in Edward Hicks's painting of 1834. There are here no Empires to be seen and nation-states are naturalized and made non-problematic. "Rule of law" – no justice – is good, I suppose, as long as "you" are the regulator or the rule-giver and not the taker. Theoretical equality of sovereign nations is supposed to replace power and security competition and the talk of the International Criminal Court and the various missions of the United Nations is missing in action in

³¹ Ikenberry, 139-140.

A World Safe for Democracy. But we are in the midst of nouns and ideas, as we hold on tight to our two proper names (Wilson, Pericles). This surreal dreamscape scenario is meant to be moving. If no institutions were pushing this 'vision' forward, which ones would move this forward now if not this reconstructed neo-Wilsonianism in the vicinity of the U.S.? Ah, that's the rub! But the very name of the main actor is hidden in the credits of this modernity. Is "he" shy? The true agency is unnamed, camouflaged, smuggled, time and time again by our coy American narrator who sometimes puts instead "the liberal West." Wilson remains the single proper name in the silly classical mirror image of a clichéd figure of Greek wisdom commemorated in some funeral oration in some fleeting exposure to a university course in the classics. This bit of old-fashioned Donald-Kaganesque arrives very late in the game of geopolitics, bringing a bit of 'classical Europe,' always distant and very venerable, supremely docile and very dead, to IR policy strategies and stratagems. It is a small world: Ikenberry thanks his own postdoctoral collaborator for the tip. There is proper credit in the end notes, one-off. The student is involved in the initiative called *Imagining World Orders*.³² The horizon is not Athenian, it is Princetonian, Canadian and – surprise – Oxonian!

This is one more telling ornament worth mentioning among Tennyson, W. Lippman and FDR:

I will begin by speaking about our ancestors, since it is only right and proper on such an occasion to pay them the honour of recalling what they did. In this land of ours there have always been the same people living from generation to generation until now, and they, by their courage and their virtues, have handed it on to us, a free country. They certainly deserve our praise. (Pericles' Funeral Oration, as recorded by Thucydides)

Let us not be blinded by this externalized "classicism" in the English tongue. This is the initial quote in *A World Safe for Democracy*. Readers are invited to join in the imagined intergenerational continuum of the "same," also gather praise for the ancestors. This is a prefabricated patriotism of generic achieving our country (will the morality tale extend to others for example those radiating from Kabul or Teheran, Moscu or Beijing?). Portable moral exercise in filial piety as Nietzsche told us. It is "tribal." And it is meant to be uttered in the utmost seriousness of intent. *A World Safe for Democracy* is the extension of this apparent contradiction that reconciles the profession of internationalism with the celebration of this one community, unnamed, without explicit gods. No cosmopolitanism. Ancestry suffices: this is community not of blood but of belief and faith in

³² Tolya Levshin, *Reimagining World Order*, <https://rwo.princeton.edu/>.

the good things. There are no chronologies, no geographies. As such it is forgettable piece of non-specificity, a kind of wishful thinking, a feeble type of wish-fulfilment in community gathering. It is as though the narrator wished he had a collectivity, courageous, virtuous, ancestral, he does not have.

This is utopia without flesh and bones and Thucydides is excuse and pretext for something else that is alluded to indirectly. Pericles is the old name for "our" Wilson and his progeny. The old Virginian turns out not to be the perfect role model, but still will do for "our" immediate future.

The jump from this unnamed community to a global community is natural and effortless. It is also immensely problematic and *A World Safe for Community* does not resolve this monumental problem of jumping from one particularity (one individual, one nation, one civilization) to its excessive totality (call it "world" not in the conventional IR sense of its appropriation, control, "nomos"). Basic scrutiny soon discovers the fallacy of the typical synecdoche at work here where the "part" (the U.S.) is said to represent the "whole" (globality, totality, the world). *A World Safe for Democracy* appropriates the "world" under the cloak of the "West," and arrogates for itself, claims cognitive monopoly, of such international world. Its majorities do not speak here, not even through its official representatives, let alone its dissidents and iconoclasts. This normality is a truly appalling state of cognitive affairs, not to mention affects and sensibilities missing in action: thick silence encircles Ikenberry's mono-perspectival Anglo-exclusive LIO proposals.

This is faux devotion to a rather harmless and venerable classical Greece, origin of a certain West, that is also detached from its contemporary manifestations. This trick of a generic civilized humanism will not catch incautious readers. There should be no doubt about the parochialism embedded in this placeless and atemporal community of courage, freedom and achievement that deserves, it cannot be otherwise, honor and praise. Reading poorly like a children's story, almost a fairy tale of Tolkien quality: this community is virtuous. And this a community of the "same." Freedom in the misty beginning – all the way back to Pericles' times, or 1919, or 1945 or better yet the 1980s? – this is freedom everlasting for the progeny to treasure and defend. No explicit naming of the main agent in the 'whodunit' of this history. In this 'puppet show,' the 'puppeteer' is obviously hiding. Thucydides ventriloquizes the narratorial voice, or vice versa, but not in the original philological mode, instead in predictable, accessible English translation. *A World Safe for Democracy* does not do these antiquities. It is all about "modernity" in the radical singular form that is also intolerant, imperial and colonizing, and perhaps less so. Who is this "I"? Pericles? Wilson? Ikenberry? This is anamorphic mirror stage of identity chain of these three good gentlemen exhibiting superb

'public virtue.' I put it to you that this is a proper Machiavellian political virtue.

We are witnessing the invention of a specific tradition, call it American, inside the liberal tradition, in the disavowed "neoliberal" modality of the second half of the Twentieth Century and early Twenty-First Century. Precisely, we are in the narrow terrains of International Relations in the vicinity of the sole standing superpower and not elsewhere in the wild inquisitions into plural political ideological and its many disparate practices in bewildering array of timespaces. The vision of "politics" is here reduced to "foreign policy" as the ladies in waiting service the pretty princess in Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. This "rules-based order" does not mess with the messy tradition of international law and its courts and tribunals, let alone the various notions of "justice," a loaded word missing here. Ikenberry's political unconscious would wish to add "white" to this, his tradition and its intergenerational sequence and he would surely try to disavow such identification publicly. But the narrative sequence and the bibliography say otherwise and do not lie. A *World Safe for Democracy* constructs the liberal subject of zero explicit content, a phantasmic construction to be sure, walking down the only path taken. This path is called modernity and it is really the technological advancements of modernization under expansive capitalism, yet another silenced word of enormous significance, the "face" behind the mask, the interests behind the U.S., liberal West and LIO manifestations. The strongest nation is the purveyor of the most virtuous and 'noblesse oblige, must bring the symbolic goods to the rest of the world, i.e. LIO.

This virtuous community is a free country, a perfectly meaningless sentence in its own right unless we figure out what freedom stands for in relation to what subjects under what circumstances, pressures, etc. This tribal community cannot do wrong, or can do wrong to do right, but only from time to time, due to the circumstances, and when these change with the weathervane, then "we" revert to shape and form after, say, one, two or twenty years as in the 'forever wars' that have been brought to a close by the time I write these pages. You easily catch the cool cat in this poverty of historicism and the "trick" of his false syllogisms. The partitions of meaningful history are all dependent upon American sign posts. This is like using McDonalds stores to navigate the foreign cartography of foreign cities in the world that means nothing to you except the burger, the soda and the french-fries. Readers are invited to identify themselves with this all-inclusive first person plural: "we" are also supposed to "honor" our ancestors and what they did for "our country." I would urge extreme caution and a modicum of skepticism. This vignette is 'literary embellishment' of a transcendental trans-generation, but it betrays an immense poverty of a sorry historicism, exclusively American, that is still in

conventional use for IR pursuits self-styled as liberal. This Americanized Eurocentric embellishment of global affairs via Wilson qua Pericles flops.

Will you pick the invitation to be moral and faithful to these generic ancestors, even if flawed, or particularly if flawed? Is it our turn to be great after these great generations? The future absolves them since they handed freedom to us. The vignette means America. Americanism is the substance of this internationalism which is essentially force multiplier and "res extensa" to the "res cogitans" of the big foreign world out there that exceeded all the Greeks, Wilson, Ikenberry and all of us in equal measure. But our IR scholar will have none of it, his *lebensraum* coincides with that of his official superpower nation, with a useful British touch. There is coyness. There is obliqueness. There is complicity between these figures and this cynical narrator who does not tell us who has done the "virtuous" deeds since time immemorial. Our IR scholar, admittedly a good "son," also has the promise of courage and virtues. The mirror image identifies the scholar and the narrator of the narrator bonding over institutional piety. The conservative disposition invents and preserves, fixes the record somewhat and gives gravitas and splendor to the LIO brand, or tries to. This is current mainstream *modus operandi* advising the Biden administration.

IV. Big Changes are Taking Place: Britain, One Possible Anamorphic Mirror of the U.S.

Ikenberry's LIO is one example of the disentangling of this "Western Cognitive Empire," but such disentangling does not mean that such "monstrosity" will go away tomorrow. This is one name of the crisis of legitimacy and credibility of the U.S.-led West that is now unraveling in the hasty departure from Afghanistan. The mainstream coverage in the West, and I include European countries, Britain too, maintains the civilizing ethos and the modernizing mission unaccomplished, particularly shameless in relation to the poor nations, simply follow the standard articulation of the signs "women" and "education" and "our soldiers." It is as though nothing big had ever happened since the infamous photo of the Azor yacht in the Atlantic holding three Presidents of diverse name recognition, George W. Bush, Tony Blair and – shockingly – the Spain Prime Minister of the Conservative Party, José María Aznar. The caution is to handle the terminology of West and the rest with care. Are we talking in the vein of the old historians who dwelt in the painstaking reconstruction of old civilizations? Or are we talking in the vein of the IR experts who would rather have a hasty hearing and help formulate foreign policy for the next few years? Arnold Toynbee did both things, but this the exception that confirms the contemporary norm, also in centenarian think tanks in the old

continent giving warm welcome to the main American scholar of interest.

I submit to you that *A World Safe for Democracy* collapses in front of your eyes as soon as you activate a careful reading that is not blind to the Anglo mono-perspectivism. The previous instances illustrate what I would describe as the cynical logic of poor historicism resolved in American supremacy that is pervasive in the book as a whole. LIO disintegrates on its own terms as soon as you parse the sentences, follow the rationale of the syllogisms, unstitch the paragraphs and assemble the overall picture proposed by the chapter sequence. Approaching LIO not on its own terms does even more damage. This critique follows a previous one of mine ten years ago. Ten years later, Ikenberry's song remains the same: it is about American hegemony and LIO is one particular manifestation of such hegemony. Soon enough, the inquisitive reader gets an overwhelming feeling: these slogans and formulas that repeat "liberal" ad nauseam seek the reinvention of the U.S.-led Western-framed "world order." *A World Safe for Democracy* is about the "fixing" of these "crises" in a "world" that must remain subaltern. This is a hermeneutic project of "American First," admittedly not in the Trumpian tones, but in the "softer," and more insidious "liberal" tones of the Democrats in the Obama and Biden administrations that call Empire leadership.

The horse has bolted. No need to close the doors. We have seen it before. Ikenberry "sticks to his guns." LIO is IR branding of a school difference with the realists and the "progressives" trying to carve a middle "centrist" passage. This is presentation card inside narrow circles of power and privilege (one, two or three Ivy League institutions in the East Coast of the U.S., a handful of think tanks across the Atlantic in the old continent and elsewhere). The "world" alluded to is immensely intellectually provincial and thus miserable precisely in the theoretical embrace of the surely excessive profession of internationalism. *A World Safe for Democracy*: the toothless takes a bite at the big stake. The "part" colonizes the "whole" ("America" for the Americas, the Anglo world, the liberal West, the totality or globality). There are no foreign humanities revolting in *A World Safe for Democracy*. The knowledge that is being produced here is usable nomothetic social science of strict American provenance, with a British touch of salt and that's that. This is a perfect antithesis of multi-perspectival cosmopolitanism in the true sense of the word. Ikenberry learns nothing from the world at large. You simply have to check out the ghost dance of the invisible 'languages' in the bibliography and the interpellated collection of scholars and colleagues summoned to the knowledge proceedings (not even the French and Germans make the cut!). There is an inexcusable chauvinism that comes naturally to some social sectors in the U.S., whose (illusions of) self-sufficiency seeks mirrors of self-importance in their "private

clubs" (two examples are coming up soon). Failing to understand the notion of perspectivism delivers the mirage of your absolutism. This is brutally clear with our IR scholar: the slumber of his (historical) reason is one that continues producing 'monsters,' and I am reconstructing a certain Francisco-deGoya 'enlightened' dictum. A more convincing historical reason would have been more expansively curious, more vigorously agile, more multi-perspectival, and emotionally modulated. It would have followed through the different national traditions and would not have kicked down the one single LIO can down the single modern road in exclusive IR circles of more of the same. This is no "world" one wishes to inhabit.

There is substratum of Americanism, an unacknowledged "cultural determinism," that combines with a form of "identity politics" through and through, call it "Anglo-white" for short, that goes to Oxford and not to Monterrey, Colorado, Buenos Aires, Moscow or Kabul, Teheran, Beijing or Wuhan. If it goes to South Korea is with eyes on the 'assertive China.' And it goes to Turkey is with an eye towards the Asian plains in the outer boundaries of the West of Mackinder infatuation. It appears that the main geopolitical 'games' will be played there, even after the U.S. defeat in Afghanistan. There is an unmistakable "whiteness" in the main agents engaged in the reconstruction of the favorite notions informing *A World Safe for Democracy*. The main bulk of the bibliography and its trust is "white." And I say this descriptively and restrictively in relation to the effortless naturalness of a Western universalism that is now increasingly interrogated, challenged or even thwarted, yet still defended by Ikenberry, even it is 'defensive' and 'humble' ways. Our IR scholar is interested in the interrogation of the plural political ideologies in world history, let alone the foreignness of the world at large. No order, no word about the world: Ikenberry is about furthering the liberal orthodoxies on the catwalk of the latest superpower. *A World Safe for Democracy* is truly about the history of the winners in the last two hundred years with the hot-button pressed on the 1980s. It is all about 'winning' and the button remains hard-pressed in the early decades in the new century. What happens when these winners are winning less handsomely or not winning at all? "Lessons have to be learned" as we are hearing on the mainstream media, and you bet your hat the lessons will not change the *modus operandi* in the short term unless something calamitous happens. There is something profoundly constraining about the "world" IR-trapped here surrounded by the restitutive choice of interpreters. There are worlds, present, past and future, that are not been invited to the discussion table. *A World Safe for Democracy* would lose the majority, if it were submitted to the internationalist exam at the General Assembly of the United Nations. He would also lose the vote in most university classrooms if the doors were

blasted open and readers and interpreters of different walks of life, nation, color, ideology, etc. were to say a thing or two.

Big changes and transformations are taking place, not only in the U.S. Perhaps we can use the example of Britain as one dysmorphic mirror that may give some images. We take into account the three levels of geopolitics, the institutions and what one might wish to call popular culture or 'the street.' The connections among the big entities such as Europe and the West are now less obvious. Brexit accentuates a stereotypical "island feeling" of distance from the "continent." At these three levels, we can now sense a gradual, perhaps inexorable distancing from the West and even Europe. There is facetious shape-shifting too. In conventional politics, this "plasticity" is called Boris-Johnson "cakeism." The current Prime Minister has declared that "[Britain is] the quintessential European civilization."³³ Such cynical statement happens precisely during the signing of the Brexit deal in December 2020, running the clock of the year and parliamentary scrutiny with a twist. The tone is light and casual. It speaks of an unbearable lightness of being precisely in moments of seriousness over the possibility of the failure to comply with its own protocols and agreements. The defenders of Brexit become the advocates of internationalism as they break the ties with the EU and the stipulated deadlines of their own signed agreements. Meanwhile, Johnson's own father declares himself to be French,³⁴ surely to continue having an easy access to the continental riches. It is all very "funny" and these are jokes of a political substance. But no alternatives appear credible to the American supremacy inside the British establishment, sunshine, rain or thunder. I do not yet see the British and their European presenting intellectual alternatives to the Americans, let alone acting on them. Chatham House certainly has no English equivalent to Ikenberry, who is given the center stage. There is no denying that there are tensions as the hasty departure from Kabul made evident. Undiplomatic language has been used by British state officials.³⁵

The 'special relationship' will be tested more and more to the point that the 'joke' becomes insipid. Brexiteers were warned that a detached Britain is less relevant to American interests. They still went ahead and pushed for it. Perhaps they thought that it would make no big difference in the context of NATO. More ad hoc arrangements will take place and perhaps some macro-notions (West, etc.) will be used less by the mainstream press. This

³³ Reuters Staff, "Britain is the 'quintessential European civilization', PM Johnson says," Reuters.com, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-eu-johnson-europe/britain-is-the-quintessential-european-civilization-pm-johnson-says-idUKKBN2941PB?edition-redirect=uk>.

³⁴ "'I am French': Boris Johnson's father applies to France for citizenship," Irishtimes.com, <https://wwwirishtimes.com/news/world/uk/i-am-french-boris-johnson-s-father-applies-to-france-for-citizenship-1.4448010>

³⁵ Ben Wallace interviewed by Katy Balls, "Britain is not superpower," *The Spectator*, September 4, 2021.

diminution will not translate into greater coverage of 'the rest' (one example is the recent elimination of The Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of London). I think a shrinking of the 'world' may take place and a more 'isolationist' ethos may again conquer the temperaments. Pletsch's mapping ('Three World' and 'Social-Science Labor' divisions) is being reconfigured as we speak: shrinkage and compression of Area Studies (the working template of the Area Studies at Chatham House was mentioned). Is Britain going to 'tilt to the East' and what would this mean for the three levels of analysis? It will fall for the U.S. over the China side. And what would this mean for example for the influx of international students whose fees have been earmarked for the upkeep of the whole university system? Will the Chinese continue coming now that the Europeans have largely left?

With there be a perceptible shift in the disciplines? Will the 'languages' continue with the free fall, and the humanities come out of the final throes? Are we witnessing the instrumentalization of the sciences towards more immediate situations, results, 'solutions'? Quantifiable and predictive models of the social sciences are mentioned in relation to covid predictions. Some ministers are explicit about the need to study less politics, the social sciences, the humanities are not even mentioned.

The sciences feel the latest pull of the STEM arrangement (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). In the meantime, the "arts" are running to the hills (of Europe) for their life! Who is listening to Donne's "no man is an island"? You can already see it in the cultural offerings, an increased localism. Buy British, put the British product in the bag with the "Union Jack," hire British is already here. Anti-immigrant ethos will continue and we will see images of desperate peoples arriving via France. One can foresee a greater minority control and there is already a war on "woke," unsubtle in the tabloid press and more hidden in the respectable right-wing press. More 'liberal' (or social-democratic) papers such as *The Guardian* overcompensate with what one might call an Obamanesque tone of increased 'cultural' visibility of BAME subjects, less so ideologically (). There is less number of foreign correspondents and even Europe thins out into some distant mist, the global pandemic barely covered there, the Olympic Games had the focus on GB team success and the report on the disjointed evacuation efforts in Afghanistan focuses on the grateful migrants arriving here. The IR framing of these civilizational-and-cultural entities is clear, inside Chatham House and outside. The Labor Party political opposition means no fundamentally different narrative (they are now proposal a "moral foreign policy"). It is still a tense moment, and fractures are visible even in polite-society think-tank circles, but these are largely as far as I can see at the level of strategy and tactics, not about the big frame of US-led UK-near Western frame of the narrative of modernity of the liking

of Ikenberry. There will be ad hoc arrangements with extra-European nations and also some flying solo, but even if thinning the bulk of the economy will remain very much with the EU for decades and years to come. What was once a smooth trip of mutual interests – Reagan and Thatcher, Blair and Bush, say – is now a more 'bumpy road.'³⁶ Some sectors of the British establishments feel left behind by the Biden Administration. But some links, in Oxford and elsewhere, remain as strong as ever.

The IR-understanding of the U.S., Europe and the "West" is no longer automatic in Britain. If this 'mental travel' is less easy, Brexit also goes against the immediate free movement of goods and peoples to-and-fro Britain and Europe. With the retreating civilizational horizon and also the marginal presence in panoramic courses in the social sciences and the maligned humanities, one would expect at the institutional level a certain de-Westernizing and de-Europeanizing to take place in Britain. It may or not go all the way down to the level of popular culture and 'the street.' Young sectors will suffer this particular blow the most in the immediate restrictions of travel, study, work and leisure options. The odd cousin (Britain) is now even more estranged from his 'natural' European family. This may mean a weakening of the Eurocentric matrix among all groups, including dominant groups, as the progressive economic outlook points more and more towards Asia because of China. As the bulk of population continues consuming more and more Chinese products, will this translate into a greater awareness and sensitivity towards things Chinese? Or will the anti-China message in the mainstream media and the current government win?

One possible international connection to explore is via the former units of the British Empire in which India figures prominently. There is some migration into Britain and the Indian component is now well represented in the 'most ethnically diverse Cabinet ever.'³⁷ It is holding a few good hard-Brexit cards. Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, is the current face of the general anti-immigrant 'hostile environment.' What do we make of the social configuration of Britain? In relation to the peculiar nation of the four nations (England, 56 million, Scotland 5.5, Wales 3.2, Northern Ireland, almost 2 million), there are no numbers, and perhaps no 'critical mass,' for a breakup. Scotland may prove the exception.³⁸ The same numerical assessment may perhaps travel

³⁶ Tim Shipman, "Blair attacks Biden's 'imbecilic' retreat as Kabul chaos deepens," *The Sunday Times*, August 22, 2021

³⁷ "Britain's most ethnically diverse Cabinet ever," [Diversityuk.org](https://diversityuk.org/britains-most-ethnically-diverse-cabinet-ever/), <https://diversityuk.org/britains-most-ethnically-diverse-cabinet-ever/>.

³⁸ Victor Bulmer-Thomas interviewed by Fernando Herrero, "Caribbean and Latin American Vistas Between Two Empires in Retreat, the United States and Great Britain," [Fernandogherrero.com](https://www.fernandogherrero.com/single-post/2020/08/30/caribbean-latin-american-vistas-between-two-empires-in-retreat-the-united-states-and-grea), <https://www.fernandogherrero.com/single-post/2020/08/30/caribbean-latin-american-vistas-between-two-empires-in-retreat-the-united-states-and-grea>.

to majority-minority considerations. Minorities are about 10%.³⁹ The nomenclature is "minority ethnic," and also the clumsy "BAME" [Black, Asian Minority Ethnic]. The official data speak of White majority (86%) with Asian (7.5%) and Black (3.3%) mostly of Caribbean descent. Ethnic groups typified as "other" including subdivisions (other [non-Anglo] white 4.4%, Indian (2.5%). There is a decrease of White British from 87.4% to 80.5% in the 2001-2011. The percentage of the population from Black-African background increased from 0.9% to 1.8% in 2001-2011. Minority-visibility acquires a new sense of urgency inside the institutions and workplaces, universities included, the BBC and other media, and even inside the Royal Palace, where minority presence is in the small single digits. Minorities are less visible, generally more fragile social sectors, poorer (Pakistani and Bangladeshi combined groups is the lowest employment rate) and less visible. The labels in the U.K. do not correspond to the American labels, and the numbers are considerably less significant as the American numbers. There is nothing remotely comparable to the Latinization in the U.S. and its challenges to self-perception. In my perception, the language of race-and-ethnicity, even inside the small academic sectors devoted to these matters, lags behind the American counterparts.

What I am trying to say is that, unlike the U.S., the situation is much more contained in the U.K., with fewer challenges to the national cultural identity of predominantly Anglo white configuration. The U.K. will remain a "white" society, if less white, even in the messy context of a global society of digital interdependence and virtual connectivity. The self-perception remains less changeable than its American mirror image, even with the traumatic Brexit shock, and possible further implosions and involutions. Britain does not style itself as a nation of immigrants, English remains the language of the nation (Welsh and Irish and Gaelic have very small percentages of speakers), and the global scene puts the American idiom above the native variety, but not internally. The assimilation model is not questioned. There are no sizeable communities that I can see that push the agenda of multiculturalism (the word acquired negative connotations at least since the government of David Cameron and it is not used much in public). The recent Sewell Report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, commissioned by the Johnson government, goes as far as stating the denial of institutional racism in British society. By contrast, "diversity" is used as often as possible by all sorts of institutions, rain or shine. It has no particular cultural bite.

I now focus on the universities, where we are witnessing a clear deterioration at all levels of student servicing, faculty and

³⁹ "Population of England and Wales," GOV.UK, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest>.

staff provision, employment options and conditions, international rankings. The model is declared unsustainable from a general economic standpoint after the students started paying full tuition in 2010 (nothing comparable to American rates). The breach with the EU does damage to the many links, funding and grant collaborations and otherwise. There is a corresponding worsening of working conditions with a lax hand of the state in regard to these institutions caught in between the worst public and private practices. This alone would require lengthier elaboration and some 'bottle.' David Graeber, recently deceased, who experienced life in the island from up close, has spoken of the bureaucratization of work (his formula of the "shit jobs"). Stefan Collini (2012, 2017) is a good courageous voice. We must imagine the exacerbation of the bureaucratization of knowledge production following the business-model of university life in general (should we call it the Americanization of the university?). We can speak of the plebeianization of the knowledge fields that are not useful, practical or amenable to policy uses. There is a profound debilitation of the humanities, even the discipline of English, but also the social sciences, certainly political theory and IR remains specialist niche in rarefied environments. We may use the term of "managed decline," even "palliative care" in relation to 'the languages,' thus is the standard label of a brutish indifference and devalued conglomeration. Teaching provision is largely underpaid and placed on the shoulders of a subordinate quasi "lumpenproletariat" not far up or down the living wage, typically foreigners for the foreign languages.

Single courses taught by single specialists who are responsible for the appropriate content provision are now the exception, at least in these 'languages.' We are now in the model of modules. There is an increasing plural fragmentation of modules taught by faculty and staff, largely under-paid, in increasing onion-layer categorization distinctions. Sausage factory: content is unified. Marking is anonymized. "Grade inflation" is called "marking moderation" and the faculty or staff in question must do more paperwork if there is a complaint about the appropriate final mark. Failing a course is the kind of phenomenon that the dodo-bird which underwent extinction sometime in the past history of the world can relate to. Contracts are typically short-term ("shit contracts," after Graeber's anthropology, are the norm). Pensions are reduced. Course loads increase. Modular model virtualizes and digitizes, also anonymizes interactions. Now, covid is the perfect excuse for hybrid models moving away from face-to-face. Tiers diversify among the tenured and the untenured 'lower classes.' PhD programs are on the brink of collapse and knows what will happen to the future of the profession (the deluge after me!). The shrinking of foreigners servicing basic levels of instruction, divorced from research and professional development, is already

taking place: the sourcing will be more British and more local, but the range of these 'chicken' will not be, in this wonderful marketplace of ideas, 'free.'

These 'languages' speak eloquently of the provincialization of the British university inside British life in general. It is not far-fetched to speak of mutations and in some cases of the de-institutionalization of knowledge practices that currently do not convey a strong echo in the immediate society (the 'languages' for example). Brexit and covid are talked about as "the perfect storm" in the following months, if not years. Increasing job precariousness and mutations of working options, physical and virtual, and no-work at all. Many will have to learn to make do. It is not far-fetched to speak here too of the 'hostile environment' that now often uses "Europe" typically disparagingly. Life in the streets will do in different ways, particularly in the cities, London, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, which certainly offer more "color" to what is otherwise a more controlled environment, and still quiet, by comparison to the U.S., symbolically and otherwise. But one should not sound too defeatist and remember that this is the country that organized the multitudinous demonstrations against the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. So, not everything is quiet on the "Western front," and Chris Nineham gives some panoramas of the last few decades, including a few musical suggestions following Vera Lynn, The Clash and Johnny Rotten.⁴⁰ Some of these images reflect, distort, refract and break up the changes and mutations taking place in the U.S. too.

V. In the Manner of a Conclusion (or "Have you Come to see the 'shrunken heads'? Yes, Please!").

Ikenberry is not going to sustain serious conversations about the great topic of the "disintegration of the Western Cognitive Empire" with Walter Mignolo, Catherine Walsh and Tink Tinker, to name the colleagues who joined the proceedings of the conference inside which these comments of mine are to be inserted. Somehow, Fernando Gómez Herrero managed to do just it, thanks to the proximity to Chatham House, which will not touch the challenging topic in its public program with genuine public virtue. This writing builds upon such conversation and it gives depth, ten years later, to a previous writing about the anthology *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century* (2008). This is the dystopian sandwich which must be together with *A World Safe for Democracy*. The U.S.-U.K. relationship remains, less special, still instrumental, tense, taut, perhaps it is thinning. It may even break.

There are still a few connections in good place and order: Ikenberry is welcome in some Anglo settings on this side of the Atlantic to tell Britain and also the world at large what he thinks

⁴⁰ Nineham.

about matters of international relations. The establishment English response is largely amiable and polite, supportive, complicit. They are in the same bed of this LIO affair together, it seems, for the most part. One institutional example: Chatham House. Another: largely, the London School of Economics. Yet, another a few colleges at Oxford University. Of course there are dissenting voices and even iconoclastic tendencies out there. But these are minority voices, if my binoculars work. In the last decade, the crises multiply, not only at the strategic and tactical level, but also at the more expansive, more threatening levels of structure, institution, nation and even system. The inside-outside partition does not 'solve' these crises: they are not only 'out there,' they are also 'in here,' inside your areas of study, university courses, favorite television programs, also inside your wallet, mind, heart, guts, pants and underpants, when you jump into bed with your LIO allies, or not.

A World Safe for Democracy rings some alarm bells. Yet, the "solution" remains identical to what was already in place a decade ago. Ikenberry has moved three-sixty-degrees to go back to where he started: "liberal." Meanwhile the big and strange world may go around, but the North point of his compass is fixed. Does his technology work? This latest book reads like an extension of a position white paper written for an amiable think tank or two, and I bet my hat that it must have been sent, fed-ex, to the office of the U.S. State Department Secretary of State, Blinken, of the same age and general style as our IR scholar of interest. *A World Safe for Democracy* insists on previous arguments, problems and "solutions," apropos strategic and systemic levels threatening U.S. leadership, which is really the center of main bother. This liberalism is a shibboleth. This West is a stalking horse. What matters is American hegemony and how to keep it in place for at least a few good more decades, if not for ever and ever. I fail to see warmth or intelligence in Ikenberry's portrayal of the West. For all his protestations, the apple in his eye is American run of the "big game," with the necessary, if ancillary English support. For all the talk about "world," the shoe is American, the shoehorn is English, the sock may be European, the ground and floor is the rest of the world.

This (neo-) liberalism is no genuine interrogation of the democratic troubles in times past and future. This is certainly not an ecumenism of world visions. This is instead a very small tent that speaks the language of an expansive "god," without capital letters (let us recall that *The Guardian* and its Sunday version, *The Observer*, have recently started decapitalizing "the west," but this is their unequivocal perspective). Something similar is at work in *A World Safe for Democracy*: this "liberal West" is abbreviated history of the immediate present as it constitutes an Anglo-framed Eurocentric collection of items holding some useful content and little else. The poetry is little as we saw in previous pages.

Ikenberry's is narrow vision about the mastering of the world according to the latest interests of the recent masters of the world, the U.K in the Nineteenth Century, but exclusively as a butler, equerry or generous preamble to the lord of the castle, the horseman, the 'good deal,' the 'big game,' the United States since 1919, and one name, Woodrow Wilson, but also the series of good dates, 1945, the 1980s and the last two decades. Years may change, the proper names too, but this officialdom is all-American, America-First, America-mostly, America – only, American is the monopoly game, the possession game of the "world," thanks to the social sciences in the disciplinary modality of the International Relations (or IR). Some deconstruction of it must continue.

Leadership is standard common language, supremacy less so, hegemony is more academic and rare, Empire is belligerent and brings the whiff of denunciation, and it is thus avoided in polite establishment society, for example Chatham House. One thing is to admit to blunders, even big blunders (Iraq and Afghanistan for starters), another is to push for the vision of another narrative of history away from statism, nationalism, institutionalism. The internationalism that we have been concerned with is built upon these three legs. I hope some uncovering has taken place in the pages that have preceded and the ones that follow. Ikenberry's internationalist scholarship forces us to confront geopolitics and this exercise would like to foster a ruthless interrogation of scholarly power / knowledge enrolled in the service of the most powerful nation on this earth, at least for now. How many would engage in the dismantling of these privileges and monopolies? Not our IR scholar, who must enjoy them. Ikenberry –make no mistake here – wants to preserve these until the end of time. His language, LIO, is brand of U.S. Empire and the differences with the "realists," and there are some, hold relative interest for those not in the tight knot of IR practitioners in the U.S. and elsewhere. It is post-Trump-Presidency times in America and it is Brexit Britain (now called "Global Britain") on this side of the Atlantic and things are awkward at the core of Anglo hegemony. It is by no means the end of the Trump phenomenon and covid throws a fast ball towards the trembling knees of these two influential nations with their similarities and differences.

I am finishing these pages in the 20th anniversary of 9/11, after the Taliban has seized control of Afghanistan and "the West" – still a certain convention in foreign affairs in the British press, right and social-democratic center – has left in great haste. Let us mark this perhaps dominant IR-frame of Western civilization and its declining course offerings in the university curriculum.

Chatham House was the abracadabra that opened the conversation about these important matters. What I have called casuistry has to do with the logic proposed by the speaking subject who represents the goodness of self-sufficient knowledge.

This cynical subject claims that "complexities" and "paradoxes" are needed in order to maintain a position of relative privilege and then in unenviable megalomania mounts a two-hundred-year internationalism on the legs of *Pax Britannica* and *Pax Americana*. Ikenberry cannot be left alone to speak for and about liberalism, internationalism, the West and the rest, not to mention Wilson and Pericles, the poetry of achieving our country and all the rest of it. Things are also more complex than the current 'disavowals' of the West as in some German European think tanks. Some extrication is needed from the tentacles of IR capture, and it will not be easy (you say Europe, I see the E.U; you say West, I include Latin America, and you mean NATO, you speak of Europe, and who appointed you, you speak of education and women in contexts of war in poor countries and I see the graveyard of empires, you speak in English of civilization, and you are not thinking of the schism of the West after the fall of Rome, the postcolonial migrants in the coastal towns of the Mediterranean, the three religion legacy in the Iberian peninsula, etc.). Who is sitting comfortably at these discussion tables according to the various cultures of scholarship? Who is invited to join these conversations? In looking at these Anglo sociabilities of internationalist interpretation, this is one eloquent example of an exclusive club, courtesy of the old historian Arnold Toynbee who did both history and international relations. I keep the examples polite and English not to scare too much some of these Anglo sensibilities.

Toynbee delivered a series of public lectures at the University of Pennsylvania in the Spring of 1661, later gathered in a book titled *America and the World Revolution*. Our liberal English scholar reminiscences about the "American acquisition of an empire"⁴¹ and the impact it had when he was a small boy and saw and issue of *Illustrated London News* in which there were pictures of Panama as it detached itself from Colombia, determined to set itself up as a sovereign independent republic. One of the sequels of this Latin American "Revolution," Toynbee calls it, was the perpetual lease of the Canal Zone by the New Republic of Panama to the U.S.⁴² This new American Empire (sic) comes into existence against America's own will, [America] gives and takes.⁴³ No shrinking violent, Toynbee registers the unpopularity of the U.S. "among the majority of mankind today, except for the rich countries that rally around it. That is the paradox – surely different from Ikenberry's – that needs explaining.⁴⁴ It is, he calls it, a "handicap of affluence." It brings a high degree of insulation of the rich minority from the poor majority of the human race.

⁴¹ Arnold Toynbee, *America and the World Revolution: and Other Lectures*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 33.

⁴² Toynbee, 30-1.

⁴³ Toynbee, 36.

⁴⁴ Toynbee, 37.

Toynbee indulges in some Anglo comparativism. He is determined to bring solace to none:

The British lion and the American eagle are, no doubt, as different from each other as any mammal is from any bird. But if we are to believe our own natural historians, all forms of life have evolved out of the same original stock, so even creatures that look very different from each other do have a common heritage. The American eagle's and the British lion's common heritage is what Lewis Carroll calls "Anglo Saxon attitudes."⁴⁵

What is he up to? What do these "Anglo Saxon attitudes" mean? Toynbee takes his audience on a tour. We travel to a Club in Lahore, the capital of the Punjab province in Pakistan, the country's 2nd largest city after Karachi, and the 26th largest city in the world. Be as it may, no Pakistanis set foot in this club, except servants. Toynbee's chronology is 1961. I do not know what the situation is today. How come? Why so? Membership was confined to the local British business community, and a member might not even bring a Pakistani with him as a guest. Toynbee *dixit* not in celebration of the exclusivity of the club. He uncovers the scandal of segregation even after independence. We may infer he had a chance to see the club for himself.

Our English historian makes the connection with the American Revolution for the benefit of his American audience. He asks, "would the (revolutionary) Philadelphians have done the same with the sole membership of United Empire loyalists?" Rhetorical question. No. He is initially flattering his American audience. He appears to imply that they do it better, show more flexibility, they are not so narrow-minded and exclusivists, even as they break up from the British Empire. What is left unsaid is that perhaps there is no discrimination going in the transatlantic direction towards Europe, but it certainly was firmly in place internally towards other communities (non-white, non-Christian, etc.).

Toynbee gives us another example to prove the poignant point of the "Anglo Saxon Ways." He reminisces about a bus trip in Bombay on Malabar Hill, thirty-two years earlier, in 1929. He tells his American audience how a certain English hostess reproached him for such 'daring.' Our historian of comparative civilizations (who was 40 when riding that bus in India and 72 when telling the tale in Philadelphia) adds the logical conclusion coming out of the hostess' politics, "I had been a traitor to the Anglo Saxon caste and I had been reproved."⁴⁶ We must underline the biting irony that Toynbee distances himself from such treason and such English ways of his own 'caste' wanting other things, i.e.

⁴⁵ Toynbee, 117.

⁴⁶ Toynbee, 42.

not a revolution of 'shrunken heads,' as we will soon see, taking over the church and town, but simply more mixing of all kinds. Let us remember that India becomes independent nation from Britain in 1947. Our 40-year-old Toynbee was riding the bus 18 years before Indian independence and telling the story 14 years after Indian independence. He is telling a U.S. pre-Civil-Rights East-Coast audience about border-crossings in relation to "race" putting his own ethnic affiliation and the imperial past of his own nation first on the plate. Others may follow.

There is a marvelous anecdote told by our old-style IR scholar of suave English manners. He tells his American audience about an English acquaintance of his, perhaps a witness in the train car that is soon to come to the imagination?, and a certain encounter between an English lady and his daughter and a monsignor of the Roman Church riding happily in a certain train. We are not in India anymore. The anecdote happened in a sojourn somewhere in Latin Europe, Italy to be precise. The lady mistakes the passenger companion for a nasty dirty Italian priest and says so loudly to her daughter. No whisper or a loud whisper. We can only imagine the daughter's reaction. The case is, the man of the church heard it and replied, "Madam – raising his hat – I am a priest and I may honestly say that I am not Italian and I am not dirty." Did the women changed car?

Toynbee's lectures continues emphasizing the persistent wish among the English not to make friends with living Italians whist living in Italy. He remarks that the well-to-do English people who can afford to live abroad bring with them their own English cooks, housemaids, doctors, clergyman and artists. This would add a new variation to the vignette of Ikenberry's "church and town." In superb finesse style, Toynbee remarks that the "old masters might be unhygienic." Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* fits here about 'primitive' and also 'modern' superstitions about mixing and pollution, placement and order, prejudice and racism, also touching on academic and intellectual racism. Toynbee is carefully underlining a generalized attitude of careful separation and racial or ethnic segregation among his own compatriots (and soon the American will be summoned too). The social distancing involves words, thoughts, gestures, clothes, smells, germs, etc. In our age of covid, who knows for certain who's the carrier and who is the spreader? In this Anglo-Latin comparison, Toynbee adds that "to bring foreign artists to Italy might seem like bringing coals to Newcastle." The joke still works in Brexit Britain with perpetual distancing from the foreign notion of the Baroque. Toynbee is touching, anecdotally if you wish, on the racism embedded in his nation abroad in relation to tourism in Latin Europe and the larger experience of British imperialism.

Old habits die hard and no one is spared. Our English gentleman brings some contemporary American parallels to the audience in Philadelphia. Toynbee recalls the conspicuous

homesickness of Americans outside America, who suffered from a distinctive handicap. No doubt transplantation is hard, "a severe ordeal for human nature," he quips, also in "fortress Britain" during WWII. He adds that "Americans were more maladjusted than continental European soldiers with their homelands under occupation."⁴⁷ He continues: "those non-English-speaking soldiers from continental Europe managed to make themselves more or less at home in Britain. The American soldiers, by contrast, looked forlorn." Our historian of good comparative cultural perceptions is noticing something like the notion of "transculturation" of the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz that he found was sorely missing in big quantities among these foreign soldiers of American extraction stranded in the island of the old continent undergoing a brutal war (Ikenberry's book cover of *A World Safe for Democracy* is visual culture of the 'good war,' but it is St. Paul's and not the American G.I.s looking forlorn). Our Toynbee is not perfect, he admits to "have never learnt to speak any foreign language properly."⁴⁸ Ikenberry's long bibliography is not perfect either.

The P.X. [the largest military government retailer store] in Germany is a nice American counterpart to the British-only Club at Lahore. This is the paradise of one acquaintance of Toynbee's, an American girl, whose lifeline psychological resistance to have foreign surroundings depended on such store.⁴⁹ Another great example along these lines of food purchase, ingestion and digestion. At the University of Peshawar, also in Pakistan, this time in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of the largest Pashtun-majority city in the country, Toynbee was entertained to a lunch by an American professor and his wife. Our English historian remarks that the meal was "an excellent one in the American style." There are no specifics. He adds that there was a "good fortune," the P.X. was "within 110 miles away!" One comment by the hosts as to the drastic measure: "everything on the table comes from there, not the bread, but also the flour in it."

Surely London will be different from Italy, Peshawar, Lahore, Bombay or Germany! Our amused English historian mentions that an acquaintance of his and her husband behaved in the same manner, and bought everything they had eaten and drunk during his long stay in London at the P.X. They did so disregarding the list of local shops (butcher, baker, grocer, fishmonger, fruitier, dairy and the rest) Toynbee had provided. Was it a matter of saving money or time? Was the food simply bad in 1950s London? Something else is happening and this is not simply about gastronomy. These "Anglo Saxon ways," the not mixing, not digesting, not touching, not seeing, not hearing, are not exclusive British or American attitudes. Toynbee lists

⁴⁷ Toynbee, 46.

⁴⁸ Toynbee, 47.

⁴⁹ Toynbee, 47-8.

Afrikaners, Germans, high-caste Hindus. "Self-insulators are only a small cranky minority of the human race," he generalizes, and these matters of IR relations, "a representative abroad who cannot do without a P.X. is not a political asset, he is a political liability. He is bringing unpopularity upon his country instead of winning for it the good will that was his government's objective in posting him abroad."⁵⁰

I simply want to play the contrast Toynbee himself plays:

The Muslim and the Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking Roman Catholic Christians are more typical. Those spiritual pioneers will not only eat and drink with their native converts. They will inter-marry with them. God bless them. If the human race does now [1960-1] at last successfully coalescing into one single family, the credit will be theirs, not ours.⁵¹

I am now neither defending nor attacking his final position of one big ecumenical family in the early sixties. I am simply underlining Toynbee's "theirs-ours" binary and how he is giving theoretical credit to "them." Who is this 'them'? I am simply underlining the xenophilic disposition towards a 'catholicity' of eat-and-drink together, inter-marriage and yes, "conversion," that catches my eye.

Toynbee toured the world in a seventeen month's journey in the years 1956-7. There is more in these lectures than a series of amusing anecdotes dished out for your historical and political imagination. In another series of lectures in Puerto Rico and Pennsylvania, Toynbee speaks of the Western hemisphere in a changing world, the present revolution in Latin America, and the problem of the United States. This vocabulary is not Ikenberry's, which includes no Latin in the Americas, no revolution, and no real problem with the U.S. that knocks Uncle Sam down from the number-one pedestal. These are the four chapters comprising the slim volume *America and the World Revolution: and Other Lectures* (1962.). Toynbee still defends the formidable task of the study of mankind's history. I am less interested now in the "solutions," as in the cultural-relativity that comes to every single position on the map once the map continues expanding (U.S., Latin America, Western hemisphere, latinity, revolution, problematicity of the U.S. too....). The "problem" in the early 1960s is that of the U.S. blocking "revolutionary" transformations in its immediate "Latin" neighborhood and also in the rest of the world. This admonition is by an old English liberal.

The following anecdote of openness is also coming from our seventy-three-year old historian:

⁵⁰ Toynbee, 63.

⁵¹ Toynbee, 53.

I have sat in one of those profusely decorated baroque village churches in Puebla, district of Mexican plateau and I have watched the villagers tending it. I say 'tending' because it was evident that, for them, their church was not an inanimate construction of stone and wood and plaster, but was a beloved living creature, a member of their family, like the children and the domestic animals. One villager was touching up the gilding on a plaster cherub's head; another was polishing the brass-work; others were practising peals on the bells. Their church was the centre of their community life and was a satisfying focus for their affections. Manifestly this was a life that made for happiness.⁵²

Still today, it is not easy or automatic for the conventional English sensibility to approach thus respectfully the foreign Baroque tradition in faraway modest parts that do not come up in the mainstream media. Puebla will not register as meaningful point of reference for contemporary British – or American – sensibilities today in the classrooms or the 'street.' But there is something about this 'naive art,' that triggers an appreciate response in our historian (there is a direct connection with the Mexican historian Leopoldo Zea that merits further explorations for another time and place). This approximation is again to be seen against the official history of anti-Baroque iconoclasm which permeates to this day British society and remains alive and well particularly in religious contexts of English Protestantism, but also the academic and literary spheres of historical culture in Britain to this day. I simply want to mark his receptivity and openness to, for him, foreignness. There is no conversation with these surely peasant, modest or perhaps indigenous parishioners. It is for now sufficient to imagine Toynbee's imagining a foreign happiness that was also fleetingly his.

Later on, there is a tremendous jump:

For about 350 years, running from the early decades after the Spanish conquest to the closing decades of the 19th century, Spanish America was an almost unique example of the reappearance of this Hellenistic phenomenon in the modern world. But today the exotic modernity has become ubiquitous. Mexico City and Guayaquil and Lima have Asian counterparts in Ankara, Tehran, Kabul, Karachi, Bombay [today's Mumbai], Djakarta.⁵³

Again, I am not saying Toynbee is right or wrong. I simply want to register his receptivity of foreign ways of doing things that are not his own immediate or received English ways. I am interested

⁵² Toynbee, 42.

⁵³ Toynbee, 46.

in this intellectual and emotional welcoming of the historical diachronicities of foreign cultures. Toynbee marks the imperial and colonial period of "Spanish America," as he calls it. As I mentioned earlier, this three-hundred-year dimension is not an immediate timespace of typical interest in Britain today inside think tanks or conventional university classrooms in the social sciences or the humanities. This is nonetheless declared to be an 'exotic modernity' that is also 'ubiquitous' in the 1960s. There is spatialization of cultural difference and there is the insinuation of equality of forms as well. Toynbee's peculiar Hellenism, for an old-style classicist like him, has to be understood as the admixture of disparate elements, West and the rest, crashed, mashed and compressed, inseparable, crudely put, not in ways that are discernible and celebrated separately. This the Fernando Ortiz's anthropological formula of transculturation yet again, but the paragraph points out at the challenge of the 'Third World' cultures, the compression of worlds (first-second-third), that also inevitably activates the compression of the disciplines, the social sciences and the humanities, in their best comprehension efforts. Perhaps there is even a "Third-Worldism," at least of an incipient kind which he may not have been able to follow through. Interestingly, there is no explicit geopolitics but these localities would challenge the imagination of any Phileas Fogg going round the world in eighty days or less. These are "Latin" and Asian names of capitals and provincial capitals, nine in total, imperfectly in the uneven number in the end. The countries are Mexico and Perú in the Western hemisphere, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Indonesia in Asia — two Catholic and seven Muslim countries. There is a certain promise of self-sustaining alternate modernities, the unleash of potential otherness, gilded cherubs, jeepneys, etc.⁵⁴ Our classicist resists the temptation of purity, order and 'classicism.' Global modernity is promiscuous.

There are two more stops to go, one European club and one antiquarian museum, before this writing ends. Let us go first where Ikenberry would not go: to a self-critique of one's own limitations. *Burmese Days* is the first novel of George Orwell (Burma is contemporary Myanmar of flickering presence in the news, currently under military government). British Burma ends in 1948. The novel recreates two decades prior. The current name of Myanmar is of uncertain origin. Turmoil continues and the genocide of the Rohingya people hits the international press occasionally. The recreation of this foreign society allows our fictional writer to say a few things about his own.

It is the so-called European club in the novel that becomes symbolic of the Englishness that the writer is denouncing. It is European when you look at it from the general Asian outside perspective but it is really English. The novel recreates a collection

⁵⁴ Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, (London: Indiana University Press, 1995).

of misdeeds by English types abroad. Its largest theme is the prevalent imperial ethos of self-importance among these English types in a so called "backwater of civilization," in the former province of India when it was part of the British Empire. The ostensible theme of this non-modernist character-driven first novel is that of imperialism and colonialism reaching us today. Eric Arthur Blair (George Orwell) was in Burma in 1922 doing the work of Empire as a low-level colonial policeman. Six-years later he starts writing the novel whilst living in Paris. It is a strong moralistic indictment of the racism of the English. There are no other Europeans near. *Burmese Days* is about these 'English ways,' Toynbee's 'Anglo-Saxon ways,' shallow, callous and brutal according to the faith and the belief conveyed in this fiction.

The native populations are seen from the outside looking in, are distant and remain in the general background of the main plot that goes from English character to English character in various ways. Some of the native types are also unappealing and immature, as venal and manipulative, getting by under the general circumstances of inferiority and subordination. No one seems to punch out of the generalized abjection, the masters and the servants. There are some mistrusted minor characters in between. The protagonist John Flory (composite alter ego of the novelist) knows the local language, mixes more than his compatriots, keeps some distance from them, but cannot break free from some of their abuses and prejudices. Flory always feels uncomfortable in the European club, which is, hasn't it been already said? only for Englishmen (English women are welcome, but cannot vote in the elections). Flory fails to protect his friend Dr. Veraswami from the crass racism of his compatriots, particularly P.W. Ellis. The "n-word" flies fast and furious, freely throughout the novel. It is written down on the notice board, signed and makes it clear that no non-whites are to be admitted to the club. Flory looks the other way, demurs, goes along, ends up signing the note, regrets it later. *Burmese Days* is about his mixed feelings of regret and entrapment that will find cruel lack of resolution. Flory courts Elisabeth, the new pretty English girl. He will not get her. Obsessed with status, she is not inclined to go for the 'Bolshie' who shows keen interest in things "Oriental," something that exceeds her understanding. She hates his big words, his intellectualism.

This all-English European club of restricted membership is located in the fictionalized town of Kyauktada, contemporary Katha, a town north of the big city of Mandalay in Myanmar. The weather is, for these colonials, oppressive. Hot, humid. The lack of interest in their surroundings is thick and strong and always wins. There is not much to do except joining in the activities of the club, reading the English papers, playing tennis, socializing, gossip and above all drinking. English-only conversations laced with expletives and swear words, there is the one or two marriage

prospects, a constantly reinforced sense of self-importance and increasing anger ensue about the gradual decline of the futile enterprise of the British Empire. "Booze is the glue that binds colonial society together," David Eimer says in the introduction to the novella. No glory or heroism here.

It is a delusion to entertain that the men who signed up for these outposts of Empire were hard-working. *Burmese Days* is fictionalized hangover of these days in hell that will end badly for Flory. The character-driven plot adds natural flourishes Orwell later regretted, and also touches of melodrama and sentimentality. But it is the anti-imperial moralism that wins at the end of the day and is defeated, in the novel, by the overpowering racism. This is "a stifling, stultifying world. Every word and every thought is censored. We [English] 'sell our souls in public and buy them in private, among our friends... in our Kipling-haunted little Clubs.'" The narrator is Flory's inner voice, but it is also a free-floating omniscient voice sharing in the general malaise of a civilizing mission gone awry. No character is admirable. Some are more brutal than others but the English win and stick to their own kind in times of boring uneventfulness and occasional threats of possible revolt.

Other characters circle our core of Englishmen: U Po Kyim, obese, devious and malicious bureaucrat with many tentacles, who antagonizes the obsequious Indian Dr Veraswami. The bureaucrat will eventually join the club as the sole native quote over the doctor. Flory's mistress, Ma Hla May almost goes mad when he kicks her out of the house in the pursuit of Elisabeth. The mistress will be the excuse for Elisabeth's rejection of Flory and his final suicide. The courting never worked. Elisabeth is not fond of the natives, her religions and festivities (the "pwe" is demonic). She is genuinely horrified and does not want to come near Flory's curiosity about the native things. These Orientals are for her, as for many in the club, horrid, beastly, grotesque show of the underworld of civilization. For her, there is the "lovely" and the "beastly," the "Good" is synonymous with the expensive, the elegant, the aristocratic, and the "Bad" is the cheap, the low, the shabby, the laborious, the lowly. "Bolshie" Floyd has forgotten, not entirely, his "English ways," she thinks, he simply mixes too much with the natives. She starts entertaining hopes with a new suitor, Verrall, a military officer of curt manners, as soon as he shows up in town. They both share horse-riding and profound lack of intellectual curiosity about the native ways. She disappears with him in the forests and will have to find other suitors ready when he takes off from this 'small station.'

There is nothing but "tripe" in the Club library. The big excitement is always the arrival of the ice that is quickly consumed with the booze. All mixtures are abhorred, "Bolshie" is Anglo-Indian, at least in the mind. "Cadge" Eurasians, 'yellow bellies,' cowards beyond redemption, lie between the natives and

the Europeans. These constitute the apex of depravation, living in poverty among the natives instead of aspiring to emulate and assimilate to 'civilisation.' The drop of "white blood" is the sole asset they have got: these mixed impoverished mestizos culminate the utter horror for Elisabeth. These are like "those Mexicans and Italians and other ago people who play the mauvais role in so many a film." Degenerate types, these half-castes inherit the worst in both races. Religion plays no part in the novel. Democracy is not a word these English types use.

Floyd who does not appear to be handsome nor unhandsome happens to have a face birthmark in one side of the face. It flashes occasionally as some kind of existential embarrassment and keen sense of shame. He turns the other cheek so that Elisabeth cannot notice it. One hunting expedition goes well enough. One time he falls off a horse in front of Elisabeth and Verrell. One episode of abuse of a few natives by one brutal Englishman almost causes a fatal riot that may have destroyed not only the Club but the English outpost. But the natives have no backbone, we are told. The local administrators are implicated in the suffocation of the discontent they themselves instigated to prop themselves up in the eyes of the Europeans and the rain season begins and things go back to normal. There are no more threats to civilization. Once news of Floyd's concubine is in the open, due to the manipulation of a local magistrate, Elisabeth decides to defenestrate the young man once and for all. The birth mark shines brightly. Once Vermell, the brash horseman of solo interest in polo leaves, she will have to settle down for a predictable Club member, Mr. Macgregor, which is good enough for her in the end. In melodramatic fashion, Flory cannot take it any longer. He cannot escape. He shots his dog and then himself in his room alone. With his death, the birthmark fainted immediately, the omniscient narrator must have been a witness. No mark, no sign of shame, no life. The corrupt local leader U Po Kyin is elected to the Club to show "diversity."

Let us turn to one example of insufficient decolonial strategies in a small town of Ikenberry liking. I visited Oxford recently since I live nearby in Warwick in the English midlands. I checked out the usual spots, one among them, the Pitt Rivers Museum.⁵⁵ This interesting museum is named after Augustus Henry Lane Fox (1827-1900), who later changed his name to Pitt Rivers. Estate landowning, army career, fought in the Crimean War (1853-6), retires in 1882. Pitts Rivers appears to be the perfect Renaissance-man of impeccable Victorian feeling. He embodies industriousness, zeal and great curiosity. Our man is known for his research in muskets, rifles and other firearms his military career complemented with archeology and a keen interest in typology. He became president of the Anthropological Institute in the last decades of the XIX century. He joined the Ethnological

⁵⁵ Pitt Rivers Museum, www.prm.ox.ac.uk/.

Society of London as early as 1861. "Arms and letters," as the motto has it, go fittingly together, knowledge and power, empire and the social sciences. He had the means and the ends, the intelligence and the study. His inheritance of the Cranborne Chase estate in the Dorset area allows him to pursue excavation of archeological sites. He cultivates a passion for collecting. There is a four-volume work on this site (1887-1896) which must be good read. Pitt Rivers became the country's first inspector of ancient monuments. His ethnographical collections form the basis of the Pitt Rivers Museum in the town of Oxford. The quirky Museum also contains numerous objects of an international provenance. It is a well-known touristic attraction.

The museum has embarked in a process of decolonization.⁵⁶ It is, according to its own words, on the face of it, unobjectionable. The idea is to sensitize visitors about the space of cultural representation, how it may go right or wrong or elsewhere fast too. The museum is not, we are reminded, a neutral space, and it can also be a "space of resistance." Perfectly commendable the reminder in its universal abstraction. It turns out that these are contentious collections. The occasional object in focus could turn out to be a footprint of colonialism and there are, we are told, certain "uses of labels that oppress." The subjects and the agents are missing in the sentence. Who whom? Whodunit: I found myself persistently looking for agents. The direct personal object of the sentence is also missing. We are on their side, obviously, whilst we are invited to consider the balloons of culture, knowledge, hierarchy and place names. Nominalization reigns and triumphs in the end. "Culture" takes center stage and civilization, sorry Mr. Toynbee, is largely out, also in the theoretical plural. This is preeminent culturalism in the vicinity of historical anthropology and archaeology and its many artifacts. Although we are in the social sciences, there is no explicit IR here. Perhaps the specter of the "civilizing mission" hovers over the museum as imaginary bats with baby faces. The "bad" objective correlatives of imperialism and colonialism of times past and present are thus if not removed at least certainly neutralized and well-kept and contained in relation to a few egregious examples.

The curatorial hand displays one main card: an eminent, omnivorous culturalism under the working assumption of a theoretical or formal egalitarian multiculturalism. Visitors are invited to hold dear the theoretical notion of the plurality of ways of being human. We read in the brochure that:

Culture can be defined as the distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviors, products or way of life of particular society or people. Colonialism seeks to overwrite existing cultural systems in the belief that colonial cultures are

⁵⁶ "Changing Perspectives," Pitt Rivers Museum, <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/changing-perspectives>.

superior. The cultural system that often get imposed as capitalism, communism, religion, scientific logic, racism, patriarchy and gender binary. Cultural imperialism leads to the destruction of other ways of living and the misinterpretation of many objects.

Culture is apparent synonym of a society or a people. Once plural "cultural systems" turn into one "cultural system," this is the bad lesson that the museum wants the visitors to take to heart. The moment the many turn into one, we are supposed to blow the inner whistle of impropriety. No monotheism but polytheism of theoretically plural cultural systems without those bad "one-seed" tendencies in them. Idiographic cultural difference now reigns over the nomothetic impulse of sameness. But isn't this difference also indifference of a generic predilection over any one society or people? Or are we simply avoiding to use the old language of primitive societies or non-Western or perhaps non-white peoples anymore? This stated badness (the imperious mono-culture taking over, say) is conveyed by those awful singular nouns. The list is "capitalism, communism, religion, scientific logic, racism, patriarchy and gender binary." Colonialism is restricted or qualified, imperialism receives a perhaps softening Edward-Saidian touch, "cultural." Would "cultural colonialism" make it any less? Would the ghosts of Pitts Rivers' contemporaries — all those wonderful statues of gentlemen in the adjacent Natural History Museum — remonstrate at the blame of "scientific logic? Would some cultural systems not be racist, patriarchal or gender-binary for a reason? There is something too automatic about this identity series that assembles a theoretical equality of particularities as long as they remain particular, static and not interactive. Once dynamism kicks in socially and historically, a development, process or mechanism may start activating those bad imperializing and colonizing singularities, which are now kept at some imaginary distance. But is capitalism at the same level as communism. Is religion per se also uniformly "bad," etc. There is more.

Visitors, big and small, native English, Europeans and former 'colonials,' are invited to consider old labels (lady premier, women having no identity separate from men, reinforcing gender stereotypes and missing rank and ancestral lineages in those original cultures). In relation to opium, included in the "knowledge section," we are reassured about the negativity of the "illegal narcotic," and the global impact of it, not only in China some 1300 years ago; "thriving" added to trade implies prosperity and positive development. We have to consider the links with colonial powers, the economic interests, a sense of loss, impoverishment, physical and mental devastation, besides such "thrive." There is gentle but firm guidance as to how to read the labels. It is as though the human element per se had been wiped

out, the betting chips swept clean and out of the betting tables so to speak. Who is using opium? How was it used? Whose reactions, intellectual and emotional, are we talking about? There is a curatorial desire for a certain neutralization of emotional and intellectual reactions. It is almost a neo-Victorian exercise in public virtue by the name of the decolonializing strategy. This strategy is aiming at the channeling of the 'proper' responses of the visitors, as though the readers and interpreters' reactions could not go in many directions (right, wrong, moral, immoral, civilizing-mission, cultural-relativist, imperialist, postcolonial, capitalist, communist, gender-traditionalist, polymorphically perverse, etc.). The institutionalist ethos is one of removal and cover up, of subtraction, rather than one of complication and addition of 'exotic' excess. The exhibition floor of Pitts Rivers is one of incredible richness of objects impossibly crowding the imagination of the visitor who will feel cognitive overload sooner rather than later. There is something of a collectionism run amok. Neatness is impossible and this not necessarily bad. But we are almost expected to lean more towards 'order' and 'purity' than 'danger,' a la Mary Douglas. Like children prodded by the firm hand of the headteacher, we should not behave like the adults in the crazy room and not be amused by the shock and the horror. There is a certain infantilization in the curatorial hand that guides visitors in the Pitts Rivers Museum in a certain direction, that of a family cultural activity towards the proper multiculturalist destination of equal and mutual respect on a theoretical plane of moral desirability but without the invocation of any one deity in particular. A secularist ethos of egalitarian multiculturalism minus its precise name presides the Pitts Rivers Museum. The gesture is quasi-maternal, an institutionally guided neo-Victorian, *faux* neo-Puritan, surely any reference to sexuality in any form, shape has been wiped out too. Appropriately there is a corner honoring women's pioneers in anthropological inquiries. The story is one of a magnificent plurality of ways of being in the world. The desire of this decolonizing handling is a preventive one, away from hierarchical constructions. Pitts Rivers' typology gets a 'decolonial' update.

With or without the curatorial signs, the charm of the Pitts Rivers Museum comes out the sheer disparate, bewildering abundance of objects thickly packed in the many display cases. These collections overwhelm the imagination of the most intrepid and studious investigator of the plastic human form. It is impossible to put world order to this exhibition floor, but also there is no clear narrative that could connect these cultural system, not even one of modernity and modernization. Precisely, the curators want you to suspend any and all hegemonic singularities. Yet, things turn complicated when we turn to the human remains at the Museum and the recent cover-up and removal of the "shrunken heads." Almost teasing, the signs read

"Have you come to see the 'shrunken heads'? It feels like a tease without the stripping. I said "yes" only to get the "no" of their show. (I had seen before years ago!). It turns out that there are many human remains in this big collection of exotica and "endotica." Who would have thought, Harry Potter? The general tabulation includes India (252 objects), United Kingdom (702), France (175), Nigeria (151), USA (139), Papua New Guinea (137) and other countries. In the name of humanity, we are assuming 'respect' and singling 'other (indigenous) cultures,' and the eye-catching, relatively small display of the so-called 'shrunken heads,' once attracting plenty of attention, is now gone.

How come? What is going on? These 'shrunken heads' have a diverse provenance, under the former label of trophies of war. Some of them are connected to the Shuar community in Ecuador. But there is an agglomeration under the category of indigeneity, which is perhaps an unconscious form of indignity. This may be inevitable, perhaps, in relation to the implicit substratum, the category by default that needs no explicit naming, that of a hitherto dominant white-Western framing of intelligibility, here with English characteristics in the original Victorian institution of the Pitts Rivers Museum. How is this for one big binary opposition typically instrumentalist by anthropologists? If there are mixtures, these are not forthcoming explicitly, forcefully. We thus read that "indigenous peoples have long argued against the public display of their ancestors' remains." This is one supremely unassailable generality, something like "a crime has been committed, or the famous Freudian line, "a child is being beaten." Who is to argue against the proper burial of anyone's ancestors' remains? Isn't Ikenberry in a sense doing so with Wilson in *A World Safe for Democracy*?

The Museum brochure of suggested 2 GBP donation includes two demonstrative quotes: "we, too, have the human right to be buried and stay buried" (identified as Suzan Shown Harjo, Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muskogee Indigenous rights activist from USA),⁵⁷ and "You're a race of scientific criminals. I know I'll never get my father's bones out of the... Museum... I am glad enough to get away before they [sic] grab my brains and stuff them into a jar" (identified as Minik Wallace, Inughuaq from Greenland).⁵⁸ The latter is a historical figure long dead. There is emotionalism in the quotes coming from a generic indigenous locus of enunciation supposedly addressing an also generic locus of reception, "us," the visitors. Should we assumed a largely non-indigenous and "white" audience, as the surveillance of my surrounding the day of my visit confirmed? There is no direct link that I can see between those strong assertions and any specific

⁵⁷ "Ms. Suzan Shown Harjo," American Academy of Arts and Sciences, <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/changing-perspectives>.

⁵⁸ "Caught in the Middle: the Tragic Life of Minik Wallace," Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum, <https://www.bowdoin.edu/arctic-museum/exhibits/2020/caught-in-the-middle-the-tragic-life-of-minik-wallace.html>

artefact at Pitts Rivers Museum. So, we must infer a generic indigenous denunciation of malpractice of a generic "white" curatorial hand, coupled by a childish or child-like response of a generic visitor who fails to comprehend the foreign complexities. These two speakers play representational role of their respective ethnicities irrespective of any specific object connected to the Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muskogee and the Greenland communities. By default they also play a general representational role of generic indigeneity apportioning blame to whom if not some generality of curators and visitors. This blame allocation is done in the name of human rights in the vicinity of disrespected funeral situations. The curators admit to the problematic past research practices of their colleagues and how these practices have contributed to other cultures being called "savage," "primitive," or "gruesome." The brochure "The Pitt Rivers Museum is..." assumes the old blame, corrects it pointing in in the ideal direction, one that is enabling our visitors to reach a deeper understanding of each other's ways of being. The old displays with their old labels reinforced racist and stereotypical thinking that goes against the Museum's values today. Hence, the metacognitive neo-Victorianism of the invisible curatorial hand is justified in summoning a strong and misguided emotionalism among generic visitors, infantilized, faceless and nameless, presumably non-indigenous. Once corrected, the 'new' visitors may look again at the objects present and consider the act of public virtue accomplished according to the premises of human-rights and the pursuit of deeper understanding bypassing all racist simplifications.

The cases where the shrunken heads were exhibited are now covered with mono-color panel with accessible text that is meant to interpellate those visitors who, like me, I am sure, also wanted to see the 'shrunken heads' inside the larger context of the impressive collection. These heads are not visible anymore, not even in photographic, let alone audiovisual complement of the contemporary Shuar community and others. No more "trophies of war," the typology in the case probably of the liking of the old anthropologists and curators. The institutional declaration of good faith is clear: we will not tolerate such displays offensive to human dignity and we will correct such offensive use of language on behalf of those generic indigenous communities in order to prevent the misunderstandings on the part of generic visitors, childlike or childish. In this Museum at least, we are publicly anti-imperialists and anti-colonialists in the labels and the displays of our collections.

This is thus the inquisition of and into the old practices, but also of the correction of the generic bad manners of some of the visitors. "We" (the curators) arrogate for ourselves the professional declaration of human rights of decency and dignity and "we" assume the responsibility to protect the visitors from the

misinterpretation (of their own prejudices, feelings, etc.) by the act of removal of some of these objects (of perdition). This intervention is done according to the universalism of human dignity in relation to the proper burial of human remains according to the theoretical plurality of ways of doing so (each community will take care of its remains, no community will interfere with others', and one can quickly see how things can get complicated very quickly, who the adjudicators be, etc.). This is still a humanist "cover-up" of former "indignities" among our old generations – probably going all the way back to Burma 1922 and beyond as made evident by Orwell's Flory and the European club. This is a self-assigned humanitarian impulse that claims to remove 'dirty' emotions of cultural disrespect by the visitors. There are no foreign humanities reaching these visitors in their respective foreign languages except for the occasional use of one or two words. Pitts Rivers is no Babel of human experience: it is English-mostly, and I would argue the sensibility is "Anglo" precisely in this neo-Victorian puritanism embedded in the act of removal of a few 'human remains,' as long as it is in the exotica provenance of certified indigeneity.

A more daring curatorial gesture could have pushed the figure of speech of synecdoche figure, and try to put the part (Pitts Rivers, Oxford, England) into the "whole" (impossible, excessive world dimension, totality, globality). Placing historicity and contemporaneity side by side would have complicated the perhaps unconscious geographical diffusionism and Eurocentric history that is quintessential colonizer's model. This curatorial intervention does something in relation to this modernity and modernization, makes it less explicit, but it does not touch the fundamental substratum of its narrative still underwriting the very core of this one specific institutionality, Pitts Rivers. The latest curatorial intervention hides the dominant narrative better. It covers its singularity in a theoretical plural landscape of plural ways of being, of myriad cultural systems, going about their business in the world at large. With labels cleaned up, and the manageable meta-cognitive bits and pieces provided by the dutiful and moral curatorial hand, visitors are now free to go from culture to culture, society to society with no clash, war, contact, strong emotion, etc. giving one and all equal bond of love in equal measure. Indifferent "love" but no indifferent "hate" across the big binary of white and indigenous: the raceless and invisible hand of prestidigitation is *fait accompli*. You will not see the 'shrunken heads' inside the still quirky and peculiar, very Victorian-origin, Museum institution.

We can still ride the bicycle up and down the peaks and valleys of speculation: the moral lesson is clear. Visitors are meant to follow this exercise in public virtue and uphold the filial piety traveling all the way from the generic indigenous position and the virtuous curators against the old practices which lack proper

understanding, and less virtuous, and more emotional in the wrong type of way. Thus virtually equipped with such museum virtues, the new visitors are meant to take home the historical lesson that their ancestors were wrong and that progress has been achieved, at least in these English midlands. That is to say, there are no savage or primitive modalities of being. The whole semantic field of savagery and primitivism is erased. Is it the naturalization of global modernity or 'cultural modernization' accordingly? Modernity is not capitalistic but simply moving forward in time according to your own best cultural systems or particularistic ways? All singularities are oppressive perspectives and all pluralities are therefore salvational, or is this also an impossible binary? Should we simply get rid of all the "either-ors" in this exhibit? Should we do the same once we step outside the museum door? Nothing is gruesome or freak show: should we assume a phlegmatic, beatific air of all-acceptance? All flowers are beautiful under the same sun? Theoretical egalitarianism of all forms of being is right and proper, at least curatorially so, in relation to labels and case-study displays. What is not human or inhuman is covered, or not shown and put away. Humanity wins and we must respect all humans. We are all equal and we deserve equal respect and dignity in equal measure. Such article of faith is clear correcting somewhat the record of the institution built upon Nineteenth-Century British imperialism and colonialism.

"Ways forward:" the museum commits to return any remains, whenever possible, after consultation, accounting and following through take place. It is a complex process, visitors read. Repatriation is expensive, even prohibitive for "many communities," thus in the generic form. Such repatriation may also be a "low priority" given the complexities of the political, social, and cultural challenges. There is no list of the specific objects in question, no concrete list of claims, no cognitive mapping of these communities (all indigenous?), on planet earth involved in this repatriation situation. How big is this load? The Museum promises to meet these challenges exploring models of "virtual and physical repatriation and co-curatorship." Would this 'virtual' dimension change substantially the state of play? Could we have a virtual encounter instead of a face-to-face or physical encounter with these spine-tingling heads? The curators reach out to the messy world of emotions: "Healing wounds" and the ethical code article 4.3 are cited in the brochure always inviting meta-reflection. There are references to two case studies: the Shuars and the Australian Aboriginal Human Remains. I mention the first case. The shrunken heads are also called "tsantsa." The legend says that their "exoticising nature" often led to the *misinterpretation* (sic) of the visitors who referred to them as "freak show," "gory" and "gruesome." Since 2017, there are already links with the Universidad de San Francisco in Quito, Ecuador about how "the Shuar community would like their heritage cared for in

Museums in Ecuador and internationally." Complex hyperlinks between England and the Andes are put on display. There is a complex web of institutions and at least two nations, one indigenous group, one foreign University, one native University, one quirky Museum attached to a handful of now hidden 'shrunken heads.' We may imagine many agents and many visitors in the course of many days, months, years.

Doesn't the whole 'decolonising' operation presuppose an impossible rigidity of visitor response? There will be 1,001 reactions, emotional and intellectual. Some might even be distracted or bored. We can remember Auden's poem, "Musee des Beaux Arts." There will always be different cultural responses covered or not by the assumption of humanistic moralism, but also the reverse, vast differences of feeling and opinion, also indifference, unguided by its opposite, amoralism. The children continue skating on the pond, the torturer's horse scratches its innocent behind on a tree, the ploughman does not notice the disaster in Breughel's Icarus's fall. Our curators want to "tidy up" the spot where the "dreadful martyrdom run its historic course." And what is wrong with those strong emotions? And what is right? A certain element of "cultural indeterminacy," let us call it that, is repressed by the curators who act like the new inquisitors of what the visitors are allowed to see and not see, think, feel, make meaning in accordance or not with the well-meaning guidance, follow or not the ethical boundary lines about histories past and present. Should "we" clean up the prejudices of our ancestors? Our own prejudices? Perhaps hide them better? There is of course an invitation to submit comments and "continue the dialogue." But this dialogue is as far as I can see not in the open and I wonder what would accomplish. We are thus facing with what we could describe as the sanitization of history in the name of decolonizing gesture of theoretical equality among all humans involved in different roles in the history of the world.

The 'misinterpretation' of freak show, gore and horror have no place in this museum space. Will it have it in popular culture instead in the horror section of Netflix or the local cinema with lots of American imports? There is prim and proper "de-emotionalisation" suggested, or at least the unhidden suggestion of the mitigation of the strong and wrong type of emotional response that could mock the ghosts of those 'shrunken heads' and upset the peace and quiet of other visitors. There is a consistent euphemization of old language and the "Anglo" neo-Puritan gesture of removal of the elements that may cause "discomfort" in the historical relations between the various societies of the world, particularly in the context of imperialism and colonialism. So, in the peculiar way we are invited to consider these mega-concepts in un-painful and non-distressing ways.

But is it a matter of not seeing these distressing or upsetting displays or about seeing a lot more of these displays and take

them to consider systemic or structural frames of expansive intelligibility? Was Orwell about not displaying the European club in *Burmese Days* or the exact opposite? Was Toynbee about politely looking the other way in regards to the "Anglo-Saxon ways" or exactly the opposite, bringing it "home" in those public lectures in Puerto Rico, Philadelphia and elsewhere? Wasn't the whole point about the exposure of how racism grows out of separations and invisibilities? The Museum could add a new caption, "pain in history and politics is very welcome, fasten our seat belts. All of us are going for a ride." The cognitive endeavor cannot be about silencing the "others." It cannot be either about the wholesale imposition of respect and dignity, according to some humanist and humanitarian impulse. The curatorial hand cuts the "umbilical cord" between these others and "us," the links between historicity and contemporaneity.

We are meant to care about those "human remains" there in equal measure to the "human remains" that we do not get to see in the mass media about the latest war catastrophes in some of the near and distant geographies in the world? This curatorial vision is built upon the self-imposed censorship and prohibition to display unpleasant links about the generic political binary (us v. them, white and indigenous in this anthropological and archeological setting of the social sciences). Typology is curtailed and impoverished, historicized, instead of being put on displayed and compared in relation to the possible narratives that may be put in play by all the actors, curators, visitors, old ancestors, Victorian forefathers of the times of Pitts Rivers, American ancestors celebrated by Ikenberry, etc. There are levels and layers of interpretation: the object comes with the label and legend, the display case is among other cases, there is a whole bunch of agents, institutions and nations in contention. Do we freeze all these interpretive situations in the name of human dignity and respect? Do we hide the unpleasant elements at the basic or more elementary level of the labels and the few curious and yes, gory and shocking 'shrunken heads'?

The history of any object should be rich and multidimensional and provenance brings the history of acquisition, sale, purchase, theft and robbery and imperial possession and colonial riches and how it landed in the specific display case in such impossibly cluttered Museum floor that will prick the imagination of the most dormant of the students of world history, exotica and "endotica." Not every object must be "explained" in this way. Such impossible task would make Borges laugh and it would cause cosmic headache and cognitive overload, given the multitude of objects included in the Pitts Rivers Museum collections. But one or two or three examples would suffice. Give provocation to those good visitors and have three or four highlights of diverse history of object acquisition and rotate the options two or three times a year. Include explanatory

texts of old and new practices. Add audiovisual samples of historicity and contemporaneity, and some of this foreignness does not have to be cleaned up and made quiet, suave and docile, polished and 'modern.'

What cannot happen, I would like to defend, is this blanket gesture of moralism, or removal operation, and according to some 'deity'?, in which a few objects are covered and their corresponding labels put away under the name of 'decolonisation.' Such gesture leaves the onion of institutions, Museum, University, also nation, conveniently unchallenged. This filial, false piety of proper moral and emotional interpretation of the indigenous cultural other must be repudiated, almost with a Nietzschean gesture if you wish. This institutionalist and conservative tradition of "clean up, fix, give new splendour," must be thrown out. These binaries (indigenous groups in faraway places and 'us' non-indigenous in near places) must be made much more complicated. There is a whole host of binaries set up in place here that are unintelligent and emotionally crippling. 'Empire blowback' must be reactivated, which is probably the ghost of the trepidation that lies at the core of this curatorial intervention. What is not wanted is the reminder of the imperial, colonial foundation of this immediate modernity or modernization that virtuously constitutes who we are. We are just not supposed to attribute those freak shows and primitivism and barbarisms to others. Which means that if we keep quiet, we would be fine as long as we leave the curatorial hand with the clean-up task at hand.

What is feared, cognitively and emotionally speaking, is, I imagine, the 'reversal operation.' This operation would invoke the ghost of Walter Benjamin and call civilization barbarism and vice versa. It would stretch the combination as though it was chewing-gum and make sure it reaches today. Those human remains in Papua New Guinea, Myanmar (Burma), China, Tibet, Spain, Brazil or Afghanistan and also those in the United Kingdom, France, USA and Japan or Australia, just to play with the idea of the West that Ikenberry may have in his head. Strong ideas and strong emotions are welcome, even the childish ones in their elementary modes. So let us make sure the Museum provides higher levels of exposure and cognition and more information too, no less. Distant and foreign cultures are as freakish and gruesome, weird and horrific, beautiful and cruel and violent as the ones we call our own and we owe it to them and to ourselves to pay attention to detail as we place them and us in imperialist and colonialist situations, surely demanding for all of us. Who gets to sit at these discussion tables? Who talks and who does not about these topics? If pluralism is the factotum, what singularities get to subjugate it historically and socially speaking? Surely we want to take a close look into these 'world orders' that do not begin, pace Ikenberry, in the Nineteenth Century. Who decides to remove or not remove

what, to honor whom, to disrespect whom, how and why? How do we tackle historicism and futurism in the think tanks, the museums and the classrooms, also in the streets? The challenging point is, I would argue, exactly the opposite of this 'clean-up operation' of the museum in the pursuit of the good ideal of healthy cultural relativism among its theoretical equal parts. It is the means to reach that 'good end' that matters mostly. This omniculturalism is flat. Its world is a flat collection of cultural systems automatically endowed with distant and equal value, measure, right, condition, almost in a Thomas-Friedmanesque mode of vision in which a great globalization invites the cultural expressions of those wonderful *qua* unthreatening plural systems of cultural indifference. This culturalism has to be by definition less strident, more palatable, less judgmental, explicitly value-free, implicitly "we-in-the-west" not in capital letters, are now "stooping to conquer" all others, "killing them with kindness," so to speak, at least in relation to the exhibits in question, which are not to be violent, gory, grotesque and upsetting. Fear not Elisabeth, Flory will not upset you anymore: no more *Burmese Days*. No more "Anglo-Saxon" ways either. No expletives, no swear words, no "no sex, please, we are British" farce. Yet another "postmodernist decolonialist" turn to the good manners, the interdependence and collaboration among the different positions never fully fleshed out.

Next time you visit Oxford, covid permitting, make sure you also visit St. Mary, the Virgin, the oldest church in town. Interesting links arise with some of the previous things mentioned in relation to Orwell and also Toynbee —and indirectly of course with our IR scholar, Ikenberry, who remains the main subject of interest until the end. I suggest your curiosity should not miss the gilded plaque in the far back of this great and austere church, to the left side as you face the altar. It reads:

This tablet erected by the officers non-commissioned officers and men of the 1st battalion and Oxfordshire Light Infantry to the memory of their comrades who died in Beloochistan [sic, current spelling is Belochistan] between 1st May 1885 and 1st March 1886. Under the first name of Lieutenant Alfred Hubert Spencer, there are about 100 men. Black-letter carving, the initials in red.

Belochistan takes our imagination to the Asian plains in between Afghanistan and Pakistan, a massive region to the south-eastern part of the Iranian plateau. Its vast area borders the geopolitical regions of the Middle East and Southwest Asia, Central Asia and South Asia. Balochistan lies at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz and provides the shortest route from seaports to Central Asia. This region has been in the eyes of competing global interests for all of its recorded history. British and other historic empires have

crossed the region to invade Afghanistan by this route. The gilded plaque is 'objective correlative' (T.S. Elliot *dixit*) of the hyperlinks between Oxford and England with its far-flung Empire and its current foreign affairs since Tony Blair. I am sure a careful reading of the history of the region will discover its rich resources, complex ethnic configuration, complicated national borders, hegemonic Muslim-civilisation present legacy and the tragic fate of those Oxford men, surely part of an occupation army. The Afghanistan portion of the area is now under Taliban control after the retreat of the U.S. and its allies. The imperial and colonial legacies reach our contemporaneity and permeate a city full of them inside churches and museums, public statues and squares, college facades, thick university history and old and new political connections.

How far have we gone? The said gilded plaque is contemporaneous with the poems by Rudyard Kipling, for example "The Young British Soldier." It is set in India, but it is largely the legacy of the British Empire that brings about the previous Orwell and Toynbee sections. Ikenberry's narrative of modernity is never far. A colorful reference to Kipling was made by Vladimir Putin at the expense of its allies, and perhaps most pointedly Britain.⁵⁹ The bombastic poem contains the final rousing lines of emotional encomium of military self-sacrifice: "When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains, / And the women come out to cut up what remains, / Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains / An' go to your Gawd like a soldier./ Go, go, go like a soldier, / Go, go, go like a soldier, / Go, go, go like a soldier, / So-oldier of the Queen!" It is one example among many by Kipling, whose "style" Orwell pins down to the general ethos of the European club. Kipling's over-the-top Victorian poetic style may be out of fashion for our more postmodern sensibilities, but I would submit to you that the generally respectful appreciation of the soldiers' service and sacrifice in our own times of the "forever wars" in those Muslim parts is still the overwhelming narrative in the mainstream media in the U.S. and the U.K. and Europe.

The final spot has to do with the vision from the tower of St. Mary's the Virgin. Across the street, you can see the Cecil Rhodes statue still presiding in the central position at the facade of Oriel College looking down at the traffic on High Street. It stands above the Latin motto "*e larga munificentia Cecili Rhodes.*" The Latin is eloquent "thank you" for the largesse of the racist and imperialist Nineteenth Century figure. This transition from Empire to an international commonwealth includes other figures, Lionel Curtis, for example, directly connected to the so-called 'Round Table' Movement and the 'Second' British Empire experience (1909-

⁵⁹ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Putin vows a 'quick and tough' Russian response for its foes," ABC News, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/putin-annual-address-lauds-russias-vaccine-work-77209937>

1919), the immediate precedent of Chatham House (Andrea Bosco is the specialist in these matters that deserve greater attention for another time and place). Influential fellowships for the purpose of promoting unity among English-speaking nations bear Rhodes name to this day. Former American Presidents have benefitted from it. The links between British universities and Oxford in particular with the U.S. remain strong, as Ikenberry's sojourn to write *A World Safe for Democracy* attests. There links are many.⁶⁰ The cognitive operation is really about hyperlinking.

A World Safe for Democracy must be inserted in these contexts and situations initially in England, which is where my foreignness is responding to his, and this type of critical response must be repeated elsewhere. Ikenberry's "liberal international order" (LIO in the shorthand that will sound humorous to Spanish speakers) is American brand of an unmistakable political ideology (*propaganda fide*), call it "market democracy." It is also one attempt at an appropriation of the legacy of Western universalism, albeit in the reduced two-century timeframe, the Anglo moment of hegemony, the U.K. passing the command and rule to the U.S. (*translate imperii*). The Latin is no simple affectation: it conveys vaster timespaces than the one proposed here by our ambitious IR scholar who wants to put good "order," order of his liking, to no more and no less than the "world." His vision of the world is miserable and the readers will judge how persuasive this account of mine is.

Ikenberry does not attempt to convey potent myths for the making of any collective construction. Wilson is the closest he gets to the mythic enterprise and I have left no doubt about what I think about that in previous pages. "Liberal" is thin, brittle. It draws inspiration, not from myth, religion, history of American constitutionalism, or even the history of international law (law of nations, natural law tradition, *ius gentium*, idem as before), who had some noteworthy American representatives (James Brown Scott for example). Ikenberry is not going to go 'down' to the inspiration provided by the 'lower levels' of American popular culture. His garden and club is strictly International Relations (IR) of the officialist kind, near or tied up to the latest U.S. state department. The imagined world is one of some kind of efficient and noiseless warehouse dispatching goods to an orderly world out there. You do not see happy workers in unions well-paid and appreciated by the bosses. Ikenberry's is feeble utopia that draws life from faceless bureaucratese, those settings old American sociologists have addressed in various forms ("organisation man," "lonely crowd," etc.). We can put one or two universities in the mix and the nation-state, only one. *A World Safe for Democracy* is 'reductive,' it is not about the theorizing of politics. Only one variety matters: the proverbial donkey is with the big blinkers in

⁶⁰ Global Economic Governance Programme,
<https://www.geg.ox.ac.uk/person/john-ikenberry>.

its natural field of happy pasture. Its own side of the fence is always the greenest. Why bother to venture 'outside,' his cultural predilections ascertained, foreordained, Oxford will do for a little change. There is unmistakable 'cultural overdetermination' here at play. I suggest the generic "Anglo" for short. There will be other names. Yet, it is clear that *A World Safe for Democracy* constitutes an American arrogation of Western universalism. Such operation only 'works' in rarefied and exclusive clubs with few witness. Add the aforementioned reconstruction of the European club in Orwell's *Burmese Days* and the several biting anecdotes of the Anglo-Saxon ways of our old historian Arnold Toynbee. Ikenberry does not "mix." His is therefore an unwarranted arrogation, also an absolutism of an ideological position of insufficient historical, political, culture persuasion. There is a brutal lack of experience of the "cultural systems," think the Pitts Rivers ways, of a "world" he does not (want to) know and does not want his readers and audience to know either. I suggest we should not obey: *A World Safe for Democracy* is speakeasy of American hegemony ("speakeasy" in the sense of wink-wink, access code to exclusive settings helping out with foreign policy). Previous generations of imperialists and colonialists called these endeavours *propaganda fide* and *translate imperii*. *A World Safe for Democracy* reads like an extended position-paper, sticking as long as you can to the American interests in foreign affairs according to the administration of your liking, Biden and Blinken's now.

Without poetry and also without strong myths, Ikenberry's IR discourse falls flat of its own solipsism and nominalism. We are exclusively in the realm of ideas. But this idealism hides its explicit interests. It also bites its own tail: it calls the former idealism pragmatism and survivalism now. Sensing bad times, this liberal talk talks to itself, play contrast with the 'realists,' reaches out a bit to the 'progressives,' and quickly returns to its métier. This idealism-turned-pragmatism works on its strategies and stratagems using advertising and marketing techniques: public display of virtue and filial piety for your ancestors and good consideration for the old 'publicists,' some of them English, foreign factotum in the Anglo family and little else. If your unceremonious society fails to treasure history, because of its immense complexity and accelerated timespaces, you will then have to turn to other modes of persuasion to get your meanings out there. Ditto: thick nomothetic brush strokes over more nuanced, detailed, idiographic 'painting' of a world order, with little or no cartography. *A World Safe for Democracy* is abbreviated syntax of history, asphyxiating history of the winners, "we win" and "we" will continue doing so...

There is something 'flat' in Ikenberry's prose that cannot or does not want to 'go up' to 'higher' or lower levels (i.e. metaphysical transcendentalism of immanence, scatology of "worlds," intergenerational myth-making points of collective

convergence, "religiosity," mass popular culture myths, etc.). There is no mixing of disciplines in this IR-liberal narrative of modernity qua modernization. Walter Lippman triumphs over Carl Schmitt or Giorgio Agamben, only to name two immense absences. Liberal is therefore 'weasel word' and LIO is accordingly a persistent 'weasel phrase.' Previous close-readings of some of his paragraphs have made the point of casuistry or false logic in this IR liberal-and-no-neo-liberal prose. What does this 'weasel' mean? It means that there is a deliberate 'veil' over the construction of an anonymous authority hiding its own 'ground' or 'sources' of legitimacy. Who decides in this world order if not the U.S.? Yet, the American name is insistently put behind the liberal shibboleth and the West, acting as a convenient stalking horse. This Western 'horse' is not civilizational 'real,' it is always already trapped in IR strictures of U.S. liberalism. Logically, this social-science language is not luxurious, it is retractile. It does not expand and consequently undergoes reification. This "world-order" seeking type of thought must logically recoil from the vast domains of 'foreignness.' *A World Safe for Democracy* refuses to go to 'foreign cultures' of challenging ideologies that will have to interrogate such absolutist claims. As in advertising, also political advertising, these weasel words are misleading. They fashion big statements in typical nominal singularity. But they do not say anything at all. They are vague qualifiers. They equivocate, mislead. They avoid making direct statements about complicated matters either because there are impossible taboos or incredible totems around things that cannot be thought or said, do so and you will get into trouble with the latest administration. The liberal shibboleth (speakeasy code seeking automatic group cohesion and recognition, "liberal" at Chatham House, for instance) combines with the Western stalking horse ('we' talk about the 'West,' but wink-wink, complicity elbow, 'we' really mean the U.S. with a touch of the U.K. as the 'all-purpose equerry'). Repeat the formula, the strawberries in the cream in Wimbledon so to speak, and the weasel words and phrases, the names crowd the book title with the common names. Introspection? No. Instead, extroversion and finding fault in the outsiders, no mixtures, stick to the white demarcation lines, the "Anglo Saxon ways." Toynbee and Orwell are miles ahead of our noted IR scholar.

Inexorably, Ikenberry's prose loses persuasion and undergoes a perceptible rigidification, its chapters and pages falling off almost like the deciduous leaves undergo lignification when autumn comes. This latest iteration is no different. For him, there is nowhere else to turn to. There is no metaphysical attraction seeking cosmic inspiration of undulating underwater plants a la Andrei Tarkovsky (those crazy Russians!). Continental philosophy provides daunting challenges. No word about the world of religion, not even Wilson's Presbyterianism, which was

Southern-Democrat racist first and second int is segregationist modalities. No recourse to the American 'street,' for this institutionalism either. No foreign nations for this Americanism. No dance of the disciplines for this IR. No foreign humanities, of course. *A World Safe for Democracy* is utterly devoid of stimulating images of utopias in the last two hundred years. This latest iteration of Western universalism tries to sound virtuous and pragmatic, now according to the survivalist code. No metaphysics. There is cultural overdetermination, "Anglo," and "we" always know where we are ideologically: "We" play defense, we circle the wagons, for whom the bell tolls?, this will concentrate minds. Ikenberry is not shrill or loudly demagogic, but quietly internationalist in the soft-spoken Democratic-Party modality of chauvinism. This 'good-cop' Americanism is not in doubt. The institutional piety and the public display of the virtue of this patriotism are impeccable. Add filial piety and a funeral oration in honor of Wilson qua Pericles and this silly cardboard vignette of a portable 'classicism,' surely an unsubstantiated American-style pastiche of a distant origin, Greek, befits his foundational Eurocentrism (my irony underlines his straight face lack of irony). This Europe is malnourished in *A World Safe for Democracy*. The RoW: do not even ask. The use of "allies" hides an awful lot. And IR always uses the interpellation of crisis. Build it to crises, if the audience does not pay attention. I have called the general impulse tribal and even atavistic. Against an abstract liberalism of subjects with no explicit cultural content, I invert the typical language that is typically imputed to 'others:' this is, doubt anyone?, America-First, of Anglo content of a linear modernity that has not yet gone its plural ways. Singularity of modernity then and Ikenberry admits to no limits and no boundaries and there are a thousand too many as soon as you do not stick to these narratorial ways. Our IR narrator trespass or transgresses none of these establishment boundaries and sticks to his square-one, i.e. the liberal-spoken ideological position of theoretical 'social-democratic' forms of capitalism with token sympathies towards the 'middle income' countries and the 'middle classes.' This 'public virtue' is not substantiated epistemologically in *A World Safe for Democracy*. The middle-table teams of the English Primer League, like the medium-size nations in the ranking of the world, are emphatically not the main narrative pushed forth by *A World Safe for Democracy*. It is the 'avant garde' that counts, the rule-givers and the narrators of modernity, appointed by themselves in the small rooms in the small clubs of exclusive privilege, not only in Burma, Lahore or Bombay. The Anglo world of Ikenberry is now, is anyone surprised?, undergoing some 'hiccups.' But the message is one of getting on with it, and of sticking to it. Our IR scholar remains 'safe,' moving gracefully in controlled spaces, Chatham House is one of these, and always 'pure' in intent sticking to U.S. hegemony even it is raining cats and dogs.

Ikenberry's internationalism tries to conceal a cultural determinism in the triple relation to the configuration of the discipline of International Relations, the identity of the superpower nation, his, no matter how challenged, and also the manufacture of the narration of the modernity of the world. It is white and Anglo first and 'allies' in distant second position, all others may fall into the diversity box as long as they do not attempt to alter the fundamental configuration ("U.S. on top and the Anglo element strictly come dancing"). This construction of sameness is a kind of Parmenides' absolute Being of illusory sociability that our relativistic postmodernism cannot tolerate. Its cousin, the postcolonial post-structuralism part of the cognitive family, will have no truck with this kind of Eurocentrism that, simply put, lacks exposure to non-Anglo-Saxon ways. The movement you assign the Anglo in its legitimate spaces or you combine it with other modalities, its intersecting modalities appear all complex and blurred, colors all bright and squeegeed, the foreign languages start popping up, even 'shrunken heads' come out of the cases and terrify some. But this 'primitive' emotional response, the one excited by Charles Lee "Chucky" Ray and Freddy Krueger in popular films, does not stand up to any serious study of the history of the world. This study is not easy and this world is not a good one. I would defend it is always about seeing more and no less. *A World Safe for Democracy* is grotesquely insufficient. Its absolutism of world order is unacceptable. Its proposed happiness is insular for the privileged minority ensconced in the former imperial and colonial powers now undergoing a cultural relativism in which other polities show up. Our IR scholar identifies this illusory civilization West with the best fit of U.S. foreign-policy intent.

I have included at least one good example of British-establishment complicity with Ikenberry's LIO formulations (Chatham House). Toynbee, originally associated with the same Royal Institute of International Affairs in the first half of the last century, and Orwell, suffering its Burmese Days in the early years of the same past century, prove to be corrective measures to the ungenerous dictum that all English must be therefore just be plain wrong imperialists and colonialists, even if they call themselves liberal internationalists or wish to decolonize museum collections. We should always be careful with the levels of analysis (the geopolitical, the institutional and the popular-cultures, the 'streets'). Today, there is a perceptible retreat from civilizational levels and some put the "west" without capital letters anymore, as though bringing down the bombast and shrill Kiplingesque tones, but the song remains the same, and the meaning is the same, now in the invocation of humanitarian crises, women and education in the Asian plains. This is one type of neo-victorianism that combines well with our previous Museum vignette about puritanically decolonizing labels and cleaning up the prose,

admonishing generic visitors how to best handle their excessive emotional response, presumably non-indigenous. We can finally entertain some disruptive options of these symbolic productions. What about reading more than Ikenberry's bibliography? What about speaking, eating differently, traveling to other places and seeking shelter in humble abodes where we may even fall in love as the foreign Baroque poet said it centuries ago? Are we going to continue with the cover-up of unpleasant deeds and words? When are we going to remove the Egyptian mummies from the British Museum? The *argumentum ad absurdum* proves the absurd situation of endless clean-up, fixing and giving new splendor to the bits and pieces that are allowed to stay because they no longer offend the sensibility of those travelers, visitors, students, customers who may or may not be interested in approaching different ways of saying and doing things in the first place. But, who says 'we' should be prevented from seeing gore, horror show, freak show, beauty and masks, weapons, clothes, utensils, etc. of imperialism and colonialism? If the museum does not do, the cinema will, if the BBC does not show, Aljazeera might.

And what about the exact opposite, just for fun, bringing bullfighting to the pet-loving nation? What about releasing the Babel clatter of the 'languages' to the eminent domain of the *lingua franca* (audiovisual dimensions could be added to the museum space so that we could all see and hear a bunch of things with or without understanding)? What about exposing ourselves to the gastronomies of the world, the obscene rituals of others, the funny body and facial gestures, the funky clothes, the loud or subtle music, the weird thoughts, the outrageous ideologies, etc.? "Modernity" (i.e. capitalism) may sound 'positive' to the conventional monolingual Anglo ear, but it is ideological construct through and through, and it always needs interrogation. It must surely pass through other 'cultural systems,' as our curators at the Pitts Rivers Museum would like to tell you. Whose hand is doing the puritanical veiling? Who is doing the restricting? What are the allocations and the demarcations, areas and studies, set up in place in the think tanks, the classrooms, the study plans, the case displays and museum brochures? What is *not* in place? What is missing?

The dangers and horrors of the likes of Ikenberry have to do with not being in control of the narrative and losing the grip of the power struggle over competing authorities. What about contrasting models of intelligibility? Our IR scholar of liberal disposition only offers the options of the neoliberal *laissez faire*, the so-called "embedded liberal or social-democratic model," with its safety net, social welfare or "economic security," the traditional European model since WWII, and the so-called "developmental statism" model which he attributes to Asia (Japan, South Korea, China).

He talks of the middle-income countries as the swing states (South Korea, Mexico, Turkey, Australia). *The World Safe for Democracy* proves that his heart and mind are not there.

But, we are talking about cultural modalities of capitalism, typically euphemized as development. Ikenberry's stratagem dichotomizes in predictable Manichaean ways, the "open," and "modern" and "individual" against the "closed" and presumably collectivist and "authoritarian," now epitomized by China. China is "mercantilist" and "statist." Hence, "bad," from the standpoint of the American hands-off *laissez faire* and the theoretical social-democracy of limited state intervention. What if it does not hold, what if the state also intervenes in myriad ways in the West? No way: China is a "spoiler." It is not a model for others to follow. This IR setting is no Pitts Rivers Museum decolonizing itself of plural cultural ways. The model remains singular modernity, evergreen liberal without prefixes, also without deadly fractures, hard times, wars in the Asian plains, racial or ethnic unrest in the streets, Guantanamo Bays, Abu Ghraib, crisis of legitimacy, shaky self-belief, isolationism and exceptionalism... Doubts are heaped up on the closest competitors and the foreign model is always denied its desirability. Grass is always greener on this side of the fence. No public washing of the dirty laundry in Chatham House and other venues.

What does the future hold? Admittedly, there will be less of the U.S. and Europe in it. But these are two monstrous entities. Do we still mean the strengthening of ties with the EU and NATO? Does Brexit make any difference at all? The impulse is one now that seeks allies. "Friends" are needed when you cannot go it alone, as you thought you could in the 1980s. And these are imagined landscapes of elite groups inside nation-state confines. Subjects are always abstract nationalities, useful or not. There will be ad hoc arrangements. Links with EU and NATO are no longer automatic. The UK will play solo, but it is still near. The horror for Ikenberry is that there will be a mounting opposition, which he will of course label anti-Western and anti-liberal (the "not-I" according to the mirror image of the ego ideal sitting above the ego and the id). Two worrying names go first, China and Russia. There are others. Will these units draw a majority of the world to their side? If 'we' (U.S., Europe, Britain) "play our cards right, we will be able to build majorities," he claims. The weasel phrase ("openness and rules-based order") is not culturally determined, explicitly speaking. Implicitly, it clearly is. No number-one for the U.S.: utter horror for this LIO vision.

Wilson is Ikenberry's 'shrunken head' in a too-respectful funeral oration that is meant to be a renaissance of the same. *A World Safe for Democracy* is neo-Wilsonian encore, reprise, modulation with slight changes, the latest American appropriation of Western universalism on its way out. Ikenberry is our example of a 'shrinking head' in the Allan-Bloomesque

sense of the "closing of the American mind" that started at least for our purposes in the 1980s, the Fukuyaman "end of history" in the Reagan/Thatcher decade, if not earlier. Our IR scholar is the contemporary equivalent of the older conservative literary and cultural scholar who defended the centrality of the civilizational West for the benefit of the imperial history of the United States not looking too much elsewhere (what do Africa, Latin America, Asia have to do with the official national identity of the U.S.?).

Ikenberry arrives late to this party of the repressive same. This IR brush stroke is thick-nomothetic, Anglo-reductive and simplistic. And why do it differently and mix a bit with idiographic modalities and 'cultural diversities'?, he might wonder. His is a liberal version, no need for "neoliberal" in his mind, a conservative-institutionalist variation of a West that is Anglo-framed, Eurocentric in the short timeframe of the last two centuries. This is the civilization with barbarism in it, an impoverished narrative of nomothetic account of a modernity according to LIO, only in so far as it serves, *menina*-like, the foreign-policy designs of the U.S. State Department. *A World Safe for Democracy* is this 'wonderful' unbroken identity of church and town, and gown, and superpower nation-state leading the 'world.' The cynicism of our IR scholar normalizes the 'dark arts.'

If these pages say anything at all in the end is that we must not stick to Ikenberry's historicism and futurism. Agamben helps us dramatize this type of bureaucratic core of anonymous authority in the loss of the canon of the entire political culture of the West (p. 18). Ikenberry's narration remains in the end brutally incomplete, because it is done by a cynical, 'pure' institutionalist, idealist subject who serves the institution and the nation, naturally. The good intentions of the bureaucracy speak through him. In tackling this self-styled LIO position, the critical analysis does not have to stay at the 'low' level of strategies and stratagems. There is something much more large, ominous, 'deep,' ungrounded. The LIO position is here left dangling in the winter cold. The crises have pluralized, matured and grown into the foundations of the House of Being, the telos of the West, the structural and systemic levels of the so-called market democracies. Let us have a listen at the revolt of the masses, not in the think tanks or the institutions but in the popular culture and the streets, certainly in the U.S., and less so in the U.K., by the time I finish this writing.

Capitalism and democracy, neither messy notion shows up too much or too distressingly in the front lawn of this exclusive club of unclear rules of belonging and participation that is not a Royal Institute of International Affairs in Lahore and it is not the P.X. store. *A World Safe for Democracy* is vivid proof of this unwitting disintegration of the Western cognitive power and not only in the sense of a civilizational notion of the West hijacked by the discipline of International Relations. And where do we put the

"Latin" in this new Area Study? Unlike Toynbee, Ikenberry does not do comparative civilizations. No Anglo, his epistemicide does not fundamentally care about the majority of the world that has nothing to say in his latest iteration. His version of the world is the order of the world, always according to an all-American identity of university and state, Princeton and the U.S., with some light-pop Brit touch. The bulk of the British establishment, Chatham House included, does not deviate from these American premises, rain or more rain. "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain." By George! Here, Ikenberry sells his liberal wares in shibboleths, stalking horses, weasel words. There, it is more doubtful. Let us go here and there, shall we? The final suggestion is not to buy these wares and treat them like they are the pinnacle of civilization and the best the history of the world can do. No. The debate must open up and the rules must be equal for everyone. A keener look into "the desemanticisation and suspension of concrete praxis in its immediate reference to the real... that characterises language and law and the formation of all social institutions," is needed.⁶¹ This brutal gap of talk and walk, ideas and nouns as though these were divorced from institutional interests and bureaucratic practices (the church and the town, and also the gown, add superpower nation), cracks open the mirror image of this ego ideal of liberal persuasion. Such is the big crack at the core of this latest iteration, American appropriation, of a miserable narrative of victorious modernity now seemingly playing defense. But it is surely a ploy of the savvy IR scholar, like a ruthless coach addressing his players, and try to get them hyped up, not so much about the old history of the wonderful civilization of the world, West or not, but essentially about the next match with the serious competitors that is coming soon.

⁶¹ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 37.