

MAKE YOUR OWN WORLD

by Susanne K. Langer

In the accompanying article, Susanne Langer, one of the most creative of U.S. philosophers, shows that businessmen, merely as a matter of common sense, must assert international ideals against the obsolescent ideals of militant nationalism. "There exists," she writes, "only one supranational force that might have impetus enough to override all the world's politics: powerful business interests, driven by despair." To this end she suggests some necessary intellectual weapons for the task of breaking down the barriers of tradition and creating a world order.

AMID all our talk and confusion, the one thing that is clear to Tom, Dick, and Harry is that we must have a new world. We are getting one, anyway; since there'll always be a world, and the old one is systematically being smashed, there will be a new one very soon. But whether it will be as awful as the one we are ushering out, or a little better, or really much better (for it can hardly be worse), depends on who is going to shape it, and how.

THE "REALITIES" OF HISTORY

The rise of any civilization is unconsciously sponsored and steered by whatever happen to be the real forces in society at the time. The greatness of the Roman world was achieved by men of a military type, and all of it bore the stamp of organization, discipline, formality, and sanction—of reckoning in large numbers, dealing with classes rather than individuals, using the weak as auxiliaries to the strong, and thinking in impersonal terms about the major issues of life: marriage, education, citizenship, the family, and even religion. The military power was not explicitly the highest power, but it was *the most real force*; it was felt as the prosaic, brute reality that framed the Roman course of progress. It gave enormous prestige to all strong-armed authority; the spirit of the army was reflected in the genius for civil administration, the legalism and authoritarianism characteristic of Roman culture. Conquest and rule, statute and privilege were the dominant "realities" in the daily life of men and women, whether they were citizens, aliens, or slaves.

The wider European culture of the Middle Ages was made by a different force—Christianity. It was a different world. Instead of being legalistic, it was moralistic; its emphasis was on the individual, not the class he represented. So, although it took over whatever was left of Roman legal and institutional machinery, its social control was confused, and its military powers reverted from the impersonal discipline of the Roman armies to a primitive pattern of personal allegiance and voluntary sacrifice. But as classical virtues fell into decay, new ones arose from the all-permeating power that was the great "reality" of the new Europe—the power of religion. As the Caesars failed, the Church took over. And at

the height of Christian culture it was the framework of people's daily, prosaic activity as well as their highest ideal. Social life, for the average person, was parish life; education was in the gift of the Church; birth, marriage, death, and burial were governed by its rite, workday and holiday by its calendar, music and art existed only under its sponsorship. As a military power had made Rome, a religious power made Europe.

As everyone knows, the Religious Era was succeeded by the Era of Science. Medicine, technology, modern manufacture, and the incredible speed of travel and communication are its most amazing fruits. But in the sphere of social organization it has had mainly a negative effect. It has broken down the old religious unity and the dynasties that held sway under its auspices; but it has not constructed a new system. Consequently, social tendencies that were already potent, though suppressed, before the day of science were simply freed by its influence, and developed along their own lines without much reference to the great technological boom. They were, for the most part, not scientific, but emotional and even mystical forces of popular self-realization, class feelings, race feelings, a sense of cultural unity that tended to replace the lost religious solidarity, tribal hero worship, and the resurrection of obsolete languages—in short, all the sentiments and enthusiasms that converge in the cult of nationalism. From this awakening of the masses, the national states have arisen; and their glorious career is the last phase of the European age.

END OF THE EUROPEAN AGE: TOTAL WAR

The breaking up of our ancient European culture is complete and terrible. The great civilized nations, which developed under the auspices of Christian solidarity, have grown into so many sheer, uncontrolled "powers," freebooting in a world where no authority, no law, no discipline rules over them. Their growth from tribes to kingdoms, from kingdoms to vast national states, has caused them to crowd the earth's surface, which once looked so ample for their expansion; the rise of modern science and the complex life it has produced make all these close neighbors practically and materially interdependent. Yet despite their mutual relations they claim entire moral independence, admit no communal responsibilities, no duty to anyone but themselves, no higher obligations or limitations. It is each country's pride to be absolutely sovereign in the world. The political community of states is an anarchy in theory and practice.

Every social force has its inherent cargo of evil that creates the special hell of the age it governs. In the Roman world it was slavery, which finally culminated in the intolerable arrangements of serfdom; in the Christian culture it was the tyranny of doctrine, which brought with it an incubus of ignorance, superstition, and fear, smothering the popular mind for centuries, until mental and physical revolt broke the very frame of that culture. Usually it takes centuries to reveal the full measure of such implicit evils. But in our present world, life is a fast

moving drama, bewildering in its headlong progress, like no other history since the brief, meteoric career of the ancient Greeks. The insufferable evils of our society are already full grown, and threaten to destroy us.

They all add up to one thing: total and unending war. The unbearable curse of our time, the special horror that is blasting our civilization, is modern warfare. War itself is nothing new; it is as old as mankind; and though it has always been terrible, it has often been the vanguard of culture. The peace of Rome and the gospel of Christ were spread by the sword. But such wars were essentially local, and once the issue was decided, the community that had felt the scourge might not suffer fire and siege again for centuries. Wars would be fought in other fields, and eat up other shires. Such disasters humanity could take in its stride.

The rise of technology has changed the character of war from combat between men to a gigantic contest among destructive machines. And this change coincided with another, also due to technology—the unification of the whole world into one economic nexus, one concert of nations (which used to comprise only Europe), and one vast theatre of war. Consequently when hostilities are going on there is no hinterland where the arts of peace are preserved. The monsters of destruction roam everywhere. Machines of war do not select among friends and foes.

A CREED OUTWORN

In a world that is, *de facto*, a community of nations, the claim of each national state to sovereignty, or unbridled freedom, is as fantastic as the proposal of our political “anarchists” to dispense with civil law. Anarchy has never been seriously tried in any large community of men. Its most probable results are just too probable. Yet in the community of nations it is the prevailing system, and its actual results are exactly what one should expect. Where no law prevails, no higher authority than each member’s own will determines rights and obligations, and the only duty of states is to advance their own interests, every neighbor is a potential enemy. Friendly neighbors are states that share some vital fear, and must needs make common cause against a foe whom neither could keep in check unaided. But when that fear is removed, there are no real bonds between nations; so the stanch allies of yesterday may be rivals and antagonists tomorrow.

The greatest obstacle to any help from this anarchy, i.e., to the creation of any worldwide civil order, is the fact that national sentiment has made unlimited, ruthless egotism a moral ideal instead of a moral failing to be countered and controlled by institutions of justice. It is the “duty” of each state to advance its own interests even at the cost of untold suffering among other peoples; to take, by force if necessary, any strategic place that covers its borders; to withhold from others even the surplus of its wealth; and, above all, to brook no criticism, respect no “natural rights” of others, and generally think of itself first, last, and always.

This complete rejection of all social responsibilities is the principle of sovereignty, which all patriots will defend with their lifeblood. Sovereignty is the “national honor”; not only dictation by another power, but even the thought of a universal authority, which would treat all states alike as legal persons, offends against that “honor.” The highest expression of nationalism is the pride of sovereignty.

Now the sovereignty of a state is only as good as the power that defends it. It is not a “right” in any legal or moral sense because, as long as states do not recognize laws or moral obligations as binding upon them, there is no principle on which a right could rest, and no authority that could grant it. Sovereignty is simply a claim which is valid as long as no one is in a position to flout it. In the concert of nations, states are quite properly referred to as “powers,” for that is all they are to each other—each one a sheer physical power, to be evaded, overcome, or pressed into use for one’s own business.

The only way to avoid enslavement in a society without rights is to be beholden to nobody; and that means to be self-sufficient. This makes the scope of each country’s needs practically unlimited. There are about sixty sovereign states, which have to share the world among themselves, each with the conviction that it “ought” to have the most desirable portions. Since each is afraid of becoming somebody else’s vassal, each one must strive for self-sufficiency. It requires not only sources of food, oil, coal, and all other necessities, but exclusive control of these sources—in other words, possession.

As long as the states of Europe were the only “powers” they could go abroad for their resources. Europe is a tiny portion of earth; the outside world was so great that the mighty anarchists could allow each other’s claims for a while. But now their expansion has reached its limit, and as their technology and their nationalist ideals spread over the globe, the non-European nations have themselves become powers, so the mushroom growths of European empire are shrinking again before those new claims of sovereignty.

That self-defeat of imperialism marks the end of the European era. For at this point the ideal of sovereignty, demanding as it does the self-sufficiency and mutual independence of all states, is operating in defiance of the world’s actual, present setup. Economically the nations are more dependent on one another today than they have ever been in the world’s history. Politically they are so involved with each other that the occupation of the remotest island by any power may cause a crisis or even a war among the nations.

The pride of sovereignty is a tribal romance enacted in a world which is no longer tribal. The real world is like a body with many distinct organs, none of which can function in complete isolation from the others. Every organ has a law of its own, which normally is different from the functional pattern of other organs. But they all live on each other—they are autonomous, not sovereign. Sovereignty belongs to the body they constitute. And, to finish the parable, *sovereignty in the organic, modern world can belong only to humanity, which is the actual body politic.*

THE NEW “REALITY”

What we need is a new ideal to guide the world that has come into being. A true ideal has to meet true moral needs, which means that the world it seeks to guide must be the real world; and if the ideal is to inspire a program, not merely a dream, it must be able to enlist and use the dominant realities of the time to implement its cause. The one new ideal that might save humanity from destruction is that of a civil world order. But what is the new reality which is actually shaping the unconscious, instinctive ways of mankind in our emergent age?

That dominant and “most real” power may be named with

one familiar, not very unctuous word: business. Industry and commerce, capital and work, distribution, traffic—these are the realities that frame modern life, the driving forces that make war and the compromises called “peace,” that dictate our laws, raise men to social prominence or reduce them to disgrace, and build up the general fabric of culture in our age. For better or worse, ours is the business age. If there is to be a “brave, new world,” it will not be made by generals, or priests, or professors, or even well-intentioned statesmen. It will be made by the power behind every throne and every gun. Industrialists, merchants, distributors, laborers, farmers, bankers, and brokers must make it.

Oddly enough, that is the world’s one hope of salvation. If the order of human life were made in the interests of work and traffic, it would be an essentially lawful, peaceful, and fairly reasonable order. It would, undoubtedly, offer as much scope for cruelty and crookedness as any other social pattern; for no mere arrangement of itself makes virtue and vice. But at least it would not be bloody. Violence would always be a *disorder*, not a prepared and premeditated action. Stable and progressive trade relations, industrial development and long-range investments require a civil order; a world geared primarily for business would be a complete civil community with adequate legal machinery to make formal transactions among all men or groups of men possible and binding. It would be the one thing needful to modern life—a world geared for peace.

One does not usually think of business, and especially so-called “big business,” as a moral force. It does not take a cynic to point out that the great business interests have fostered and even made wars, that they care nothing for human life, have no ideals whatever, will cut each other’s throats unless they are drastically restrained by law, and will sell their own country to its enemies without compunction. In the name of “realism,” men of affairs are wont to deny all social responsibility; public spirit, patriotism, and even common decency are not “realistic,” and cannot be expected of the hardheaded businessman. For decades we have heard about his unpatriotic practices in all the great industrial countries—of selling arms to potential foes, refusing to boycott rival nations, entering into cartels controlled by foreign interests, even dickering with the enemy in wartime so as to make a profit no matter which way the war goes. And all this is commonly done, not by gangsters and social outcasts, but by respectable men, who regard their actions as somehow immune against moral censure—amoral, not immoral.

This doctrine of the “amorality” or “realism” of business, which allows dignified citizens to indulge in outrageous practices without qualms of conscience, stems from the peculiar conditions under which the industrial system has developed and labors even now. For industry and commerce in their modern forms—technology, mass production, world traffic—

MRS. LANGER AT WORK

Susanne Langer, author of “The Lord of Creation” in *FORTUNE* for January, 1944, and of *Philosophy in a New Key* and other books, is known among philosophers for her work on symbolism, myth, and language. Though an ardent student of strict logic and philosophy, she is prominent among those philosophers who are taking an active and articulate interest in contemporary problems. She brings her scholarship to bear on the needs of our own time in order to achieve clarity about the real situation we face. One of her sons is fighting in Europe, the other is a Navy pilot.



find themselves the prime realities *in a world that is not designed for business*. Business is not patriotic, because, the modern cult of patriotism is inimical to business. Its ideals of national independence, self-sufficiency, sovereignty, separatism in language and currency, run counter to the businessman's scheme of things. Commercial interests are worldwide now, and essentially interdependent. Race, creed, custom, and history are reflected in them only as special conditions of labor and markets. A place that is self-sufficient should be "opened up"; countries that produce only for their own needs are "backward"; money should flow from every center to every fertile valley and jungle, through white and brown and yellow hands, and back again to the great industrial capitals, like ocean currents that wash the shores of China and Japan, Russia and America, or of English and French and Spanish speaking nations, in one impartial sweep. So, as global business gathers force, it tends more and more to break the barriers that the principle of national sovereignty has built and is upholding.

Consequently, businessmen are pursuing their enterprises in a scheme of things that is essentially meaningless to them; despite their tremendous power, they are still exploiting a given situation, not making and controlling a world situation of their own. The whole nationalistic outlook is unrealistic to them, and the patriotic interests to which they are pledged are something to be negotiated—used whenever possible, otherwise evaded or ignored—rather than something to be created and promoted as an integral part of their own affairs. Since our standards of the public safety and welfare all rest on the ideal of national sovereignty, and demand discrimination against groups of other national allegiance, men who think in terms of world traffic feel the acute conflict between what they call "moral" notions and "realistic" thought, i.e., thought in keeping with the new reality they are creating. They feel it, but do not bother to fathom its true implications, so they make philosophical shift with the easy sophism that business is amoral, something apart from standards and obligations, a form of action that has no ethical status at all.

MEN OF THE HOUR

But men of affairs, great and small, are the rank and file of mankind. If they disclaim responsibility for the public welfare, there is no one left to take it. No other class of people is strong and effective enough to sustain a moral order if the average man, the man in industry or finance, stands aside from it. Government, education, law and order are impossible without his unreserved and spontaneous support.

What we need is a new political pattern, designed primarily to control and facilitate business relations all over the globe. The "real" power in our civilization must be the leading power; instead of exploiting a world geared for political anarchy and international war, business interests should create a world geared for economic development and interstate peace. The captains of industry should stop paying lip service to a political ideal they do not really hold, and bravely proclaim a new ideal for all good and rational men to embrace—the ideal of world citizenship and a civil world order.

Whoever calls the tune must pay the piper. If businessmen are to lead the world, as in this age they should, they will have to assume a burden of political responsibility; their immense social importance will demand new social virtues. They will

have to be the educated men of the new world, farsighted and informed, who can bring their influence to bear deliberately and consistently toward the organization and administration of a global estate. They will have to take an interest in legal developments, in standards of living, and in public education for the new world citizenship which their economic order will bestow on all people. They must be the patrons of science and art and letters, as emperors and prelates were in the past; for their scientific culture must be kept alive from within, and the human spirit must keep pace with the material advance.

In short, the industrial age will have to produce its great men, as military and religious and imperial ages have done. The capitalist, the labor leader, the distributor, will have to bear the burden of a civilization made to their measure. Above all, they will have to avow standards of honor and justice, the claims of communities, the duties of governments and of the men who control them, the rights of individuals; they must recognize ideals, and affirm or deny them squarely.

The evil of our day—the anarchy of nations—is so great that no minority group, no moral crusade, no international commission can prevail against it. There exists only one supranational force that might have impetus enough to override all the world's politics: powerful business interests, driven by despair. Only the most self-confident and realistic of men stand any chance of conquering such a monster as the terrible war machine that calls itself the "concert of nations"; and nothing could move them to attempt that gigantic task except the threat of wholesale failure and complete extinction. But this threat is upon them now. The cities of Europe are burning, factories and mines and docks lie shattered; the world's large, but not unlimited, oil supplies are rapidly being used up or deliberately set afire; reservoirs, power plants, laboratories, railroads, all the assets of industry and the means of commerce, are meeting with systematic destruction. Furthermore, the pattern of international politics is such that more and more wars of global dimensions must follow upon each armed peace, and each peace will be more diabolically armed.

Our only hope of deliverance is that probably no setup—social, political, or ideological—which is inimical to business can survive indefinitely in a business age, even though it may have gathered prestige and power through a thousand years. If production and commerce are frustrated by political institutions, then—and only then—those institutions will finally be changed; but the change cannot be effected by a brief and violent revolution, it requires too deep a reform in the minds of men the world over. Like Christianity, chivalry, democracy, and all great cultural movements, it can only be slowly achieved—sometimes by radical reform, sometimes by common-sense arrangements that become established and displace the arrogant methods of national states, but most of all by a *new outlook*, a shift in human feeling from a tribal to a cosmopolitan attitude.

THE NEW IDEAL

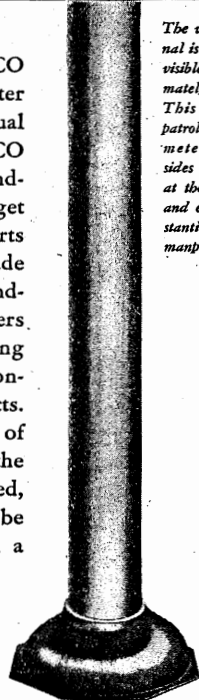
To achieve a different public attitude requires nothing short of a new burning ideal. Mankind has always held ideals—dreams of utopia, paradise, perfection. Without some deeply emotional dream, life is not really consummate. And a life in which business were the highest aim—not an instrument, but the only end—would never feed the hungry heart of the



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Make Your Own World

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average man. Animals exploit the world; men want to transfigure it. What has a "world geared for business" to offer them as a new holy ideal?

More than any world of chivalry or empire; the old eternal ideal which the Buddha and the Christ proclaimed—the Brotherhood of Man. In the ages when they proclaimed it, it was impossible to realize, because human society was organized on principles of heroic dominance, tribal glory, and tribal religion. Any attempt to treat mankind as a single democratic family was bound to conflict with other ideals which had the advantage of being embodied in actual institutions. An ideal cannot be realized unless it is implemented by the mechanisms of practical life—the laws under which people live, the political arrangements that frame their actions. As long as human society is organized along tribal or national lines, the Brotherhood of Man is a mere Sunday-school concept. It cannot be pressed too far, or its proponents will be "conscientious objectors" to the demands of their social faith.

But a civil world order offers a mundane, political form which is a fitting host for the spirit of brotherhood. It is the first practical scheme that has ever been thought of for the realization of an ideal which is the core of all the great humanitarian religions—the fraternity of all men, rich and poor, black and white, young and old. We have always preached this truth, but have never been in sight of its demonstration. The nations have been too divided, too disjointed; the "One World," wherein all men could be brethren before God, existed only in the imagination, in a platonic heaven.

But in our day, the "One World" is an economic and physical fact; the creation of a political framework to regulate its affairs is an immediate practical need; and suddenly we have at hand an earthly mold that may give tangible form to that ancient and universal dream—the Brotherhood of Man.

AGENDA

Meanwhile, what could and should the farsighted and practical citizen do? Granted that he accepts his social responsibility and reaches for the new morality, what existing or proposed institutions shall he encourage, what real choices of action shall he make? If he renounces the narrow, isolationist standard he has been taught to call "patriotism," what is to be his new measure of the "public welfare"?

World peace is the public welfare. It is a welfare he can understand, because he is its foremost beneficiary. And world peace demands an all-inclusive civil order, which is possible only under world government. His patriotism, or interest in the country's highest good, should therefore seek the quickest and most thoroughgoing extension of law from a national to an international plan. He should give his active and constant support to all promising, intelligent attempts at creating legal instruments to regulate intercourse between governments, and to hold the parties to their commitments.

At present, industry is irresistibly attaining worldwide proportions; and as civil administration does not follow the trend, business interests can only take the problem of covenants and regulations into their own hands. Since they have to create a code, they create it to suit themselves. The result is the much-decried cartel system that functions in lieu of any other universal administration. Of course it oppresses small business; of course it ignores the consumer; neither the consumer nor the

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Make Your Own World

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small shopkeeper chose to recognize the conditions and problems from which it sprang. We cannot demand that the world's commerce be regulated in our interest if we oppose the creation of any really representative body which might conduct such regulation. The men and groups of men who undertake it, out of necessity, cannot be expected to do that work for the good of others who refuse to give thought to it. After all, they are not public servants. If we would abolish the cartel system, we must have something else to meet the need from which it arose—the need for some restraint on the use of economic power.

What is necessary to sound business in a country is equally necessary in a world community; and modern business can save its own neck only by extending principles of fairness and restraint to competitors, customers, and workers all over the world. What we need, and what the leaders of our age should aim at and foster, is (1) transnational thinking, (2) international planning, and (3) supernational administration and law.

Big industry, by being the first to venture across nationalistic lines, has got the jump on other interest groups in shaping the world order. For a while labor tended to think internationally, but its internationalism was not supported by global investments and foreign stakes, and lapsed under the greater force of nationalistic ideals. It might, however, still prove to be a vanguard of progressive thinking in a new economic world. The vast consumer public, though it is certainly feeling the evils of world anarchy, is not organized to wrestle with it. Yet business leadership should not lie with a capitalist class or a laboring class, and exclude the third estate of the consumer public, which distrusts them both. It is this anomalous public that is most inimical to clear thinking and consistent action, for *it does not know its own interest*. Capital and labor have their broad lines of policy; these may conflict with each other, but from their respective standpoints they both make sense, and could be adjusted by suasion or compromise. But the vast number of people who belong to neither camp are not conscious of a vested interest in any political attitude. They are swayed by individual conceits and suspicions, operating against a background of sheer confusion, and their collective power usually goes to the mere frustration of any rational plan that expert committees can propose or Cabinet and Congress may entertain.

Our immediate need, therefore, is a coherent popular point of view on world matters. But popular points of view are always inspired, at the outset, by the thoughts of great men. The power that will make the new world must, therefore, be articulate, a power to set a new pattern of thought for men's minds. Private insight avails nothing until it is translated into public feeling. So the clear-sighted man of affairs, who sees where politics should go and how laws should read to make a more congenial world, must also be an intellectual leader among men.

The challenge is indeed a great one. But it confronts the most vigorous, versatile, and inclusive class of men, from which all sorts of genius may be expected, once the need of it is really driven home. Business, after all, commands the best brains and most energetic natures today; that is what makes it the most effective force. Empires are dying, dynasties have almost passed away, nations are mingling in war and peace and merging their identities—but industry and commerce are still a rising and swelling stream. If we can turn this flood to sweep away the curse of warfare, we may yet achieve a better world, before humanity, in the name of barbarous ideals, completes its own destruction.