

The Self-Deceptions of Our Enemies

By Dr. Emanuel Lasker

Translated from the original German by Marilyn Piper

English translation edited by Taylor Kingston

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Emanuel Lasker circa 1915

Editor's Preface

This is a translation of one of Emanuel Lasker's lesser-known works, *Die Selbsttäuschungen unserer Feinde*. Closer to a pamphlet than a book, just 32 pages, it was published in 1915, when World War I was in full swing and far from decided. This English edition can be considered a supplement to *Emanuel Lasker: A Reader*, a compendium of Lasker's writings on a wide variety of subjects, including chess, philosophy, science, sociology, and mathematics, which we edited for Russell Enterprises in 2019. At that time we very much wanted to include *Die Selbsttäuschungen unserer Feinde* in the works anthologized there, but no copy, either in print or electronic form, could be found.

Two years later, as if by magic, copies became available everywhere, courtesy of the Humboldt University of Berlin, which scanned an old copy from their archives, and made it available both in print and as a PDF download. One could even purchase it from such unlikely internet outlets as Walmart and eBay. We jumped at this belated chance to obtain it.

However, translation presented certain obstacles. While this writer has little difficulty in translating German chess annotations, a work like this involves a much broader vocabulary and more subtle phrasing. Furthermore, the original book was printed in an old, ornate Gothic font that is very hard for non-Germans (including this one!) to read (see examples below). The new PDF, being merely scans of the original, naturally retained this difficult font.

Therefore we called upon an old friend, Marilyn Piper, who had earlier helped with some parts of the *Reader*. Though she is American, she has lived for many years in Germany and is quite fluent in the language. She holds master's degrees from the Hochschule für Kunst, Kiel, and the Universität Kiel. The translation you read here is almost entirely her work; only a few edits proved to be necessary. To Marilyn, my heartfelt thanks.

This work has three main sections:

- (1) Some introductory information about World War I, to give context to what Lasker wrote.
- (2) Lasker's text in its entirety, with a few explanatory footnotes added.
- (3) The editor's commentary, mainly pointing out where Lasker's claims and predictions differed from reality.

While Lasker was not always right about every topic he wrote on, and he was certainly not right in much what follows, he was always interesting. We hope the reader finds him so here.

Taylor Kingston, Paso Robles, California, USA, October 2021

Introductory Background

Emanuel Lasker (1868-1941, World Chess Champion 1894-1921), was born in Berlinchen, a town now in Poland and called Barlinek, but then in the northeastern region of what would soon become the German Empire. He had a wide-ranging intellect, and wrote on many subjects. Though by 1915 he had spent many years in England and the United States, he remained at heart a German patriot. So it is not surprising that as World War I, which began in August 1914, dragged on into 1915 with no conclusion yet in sight, he felt the desire to deliver what amounted to a pep talk to his countrymen.

Much of what Lasker writes about here may not be familiar to today's readers. The war was an event of world-shaking proportions with vast consequences felt even today, but it is not well understood by, or even known to many today, especially (we are sad to say) Americans. A full examination of the war is far beyond our scope here; interested readers are encouraged to consult such works as *The Guns of August* by Barbara Tuchman, which deals with the first month of the war, or the excellent full histories by Martin Gilbert and John Keegan. Or of course one can read the "Cliff's Notes" version on Wikipedia.

Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century was a hotbed of often conflicting nationalistic ambitions. "Balance of power" politics dominated, with the major powers — England, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Ottoman empires — making, breaking and forming new alliances to further these ambitions and curb those of their rivals. Most ambitious was Germany, which had become a unified nation only recently, in 1871. It had since striven, with considerable success, to establish itself as a power in international trade, as a continental military power, and also belatedly as a colonial empire along the lines of Britain and France, with a navy to rival theirs. The alliance lineup as of 1914 is shown in this map:



The Triple Entente, between France, England and Russia, was the least formal of these, in fact it was described by a British official as “nothing more than a frame of mind.” It did not require any of the three to come to each other’s defense, nor have them declare war against a country that attacked any of them. But when hostilities broke out, that was its effect.

The Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy was of long standing, formed in 1882. Each member promised mutual support in the event of attack by any other great power. When war came, however, Italy reneged and eventually joined with the Entente powers. But Germany and Austria-Hungary remained true to each other, and were soon joined by Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire in 1915, forming what became known as the Quadruple Alliance, or Central Powers.

A very important factor, though one not expressed in any formal alliance, was Pan-Slavism. Arising in the mid-1800s, this political ideology was concerned with promoting the advancement and unity of the Slavic peoples, who lived mainly in the Balkans, Poland and Russia. Many Balkan Slavs, especially in Serbia, one of the few independent Slavic nations, looked to Russia as their protector. The government of Austria-Hungary, a polyglot empire of many ethnicities, including substantial populations of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians and other Slavs, viewed Pan-Slavism with alarm and mistrust, fearing it would promote unrest among its many Slavic subjects.

Which it did. To get to the point most relevant here, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated by Serbian nationalists in the city of Sarajevo, near the Austro-Serbian border, on 28 June 1914. Tuchman writes “Austria-Hungary, with the bellicose frivolity of senile empires, determined to use the occasion to absorb Serbia as she had absorbed Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1909.”¹ On 5 July Germany assured Austria-Hungary that she could count on German support if any punitive action she took against Serbia brought her into conflict with Russia. Although there was little or no evidence that the Serbian government had any part in the assassination, Austria declared war on Serbia on 28 July, and on 29 July bombarded its capital Belgrade. On that day Russia began mobilizing on her Austrian frontier, and on 30 July both countries ordered general mobilization.

The next day Germany issued an ultimatum to Russia to demobilize within twelve hours. Russia did not, and on 1 August the two countries declared war on each other. But the mobilizations ordered by the German general staff included buildups not only against Russia to the east, but also against France to the west. To understand why, when Russia was still the only officially active threat, we must go back 22 years.

In response to the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1892, Germany, on the assumption that the alliance could compel her to face war on two fronts, had devised the Schlieffen Plan,² a preemptive invasion of France through Belgium (see map next page). This plan had been in place since 1899. Its goal was a quick knockout of France in the west before Russian forces were fully mobilized in the east. Besides being an order of battle, it was a complex, intricate, meticulously designed schedule of operations and railroad timetables to transport troops, arms and supplies to the front.

¹ Tuchman, Barbara W., *The Guns of August*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1962, p. 71.

² Named for Count Alfred von Schlieffen (1833-1913), Chief of the Imperial German General Staff 1891-1906 and chief architect of the plan.

Before officially declaring war on Russia, Germany, hoping to avoid a two-front war, had asked France “to state categorically that she would remain neutral in the event of war between Germany and Russia.”³ France replied only that she “would act in accordance with her interests.”⁴

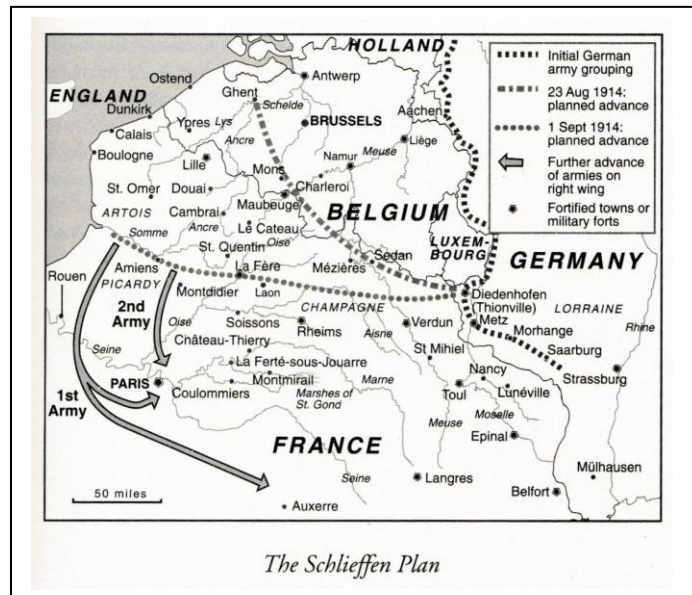
The German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, still hoped that some diplomatic deal could be worked out to avoid Franco-German hostilities, and frantic messages were exchanged between Berlin, Paris and London. A telegram from the German ambassador in London convinced the Kaiser that England could persuade France to remain neutral as long as Germany did not attack France. Clutching at

this straw, the Kaiser, late in the evening of 1 August, joyfully told Field Marshall Helmuth von Moltke, successor to Schlieffen as Army Chief of Staff, “Now we can go to war against Russia only! We simply march the whole of our army to the east!”⁵

But it was too late for that. Tuchman writes (p. 78) “Aghast at the thought of his marvelous machinery of mobilization wrenched into reverse, Moltke refused point-blank. For the past ten years ... Moltke’s job had been planning for this day, The Day, *Der Tag*, for which all Germany’s energies were gathered, on which the march to final mastery of Europe would begin.” German mobilization by the Schlieffen Plan, and also French mobilization, were already under way.

On 2 August, German forces occupied the tiny neutral country of Luxembourg. On 3 August, Germany and France declared war on each other. On 4 August, Germany declared war on Belgium, and in response England declared war on Germany. Over the next few days, declarations of war were made by Austria-Hungary on Russia and Belgium, by Serbia on Germany, by England and France on Austria-Hungary, etc. World War I had begun.

Had German forces adhered to the Schlieffen Plan as Schlieffen had left it in 1906, the quick victory he envisioned might have been achieved. However, Moltke, disregarding Schlieffen’s dying words — “It must come to a fight. Only make the right wing strong.” — had altered the plan since then, decreasing the German forces slated to march on France through Belgium, transferring some to eastern and southern fronts. This proved a grievous mistake.



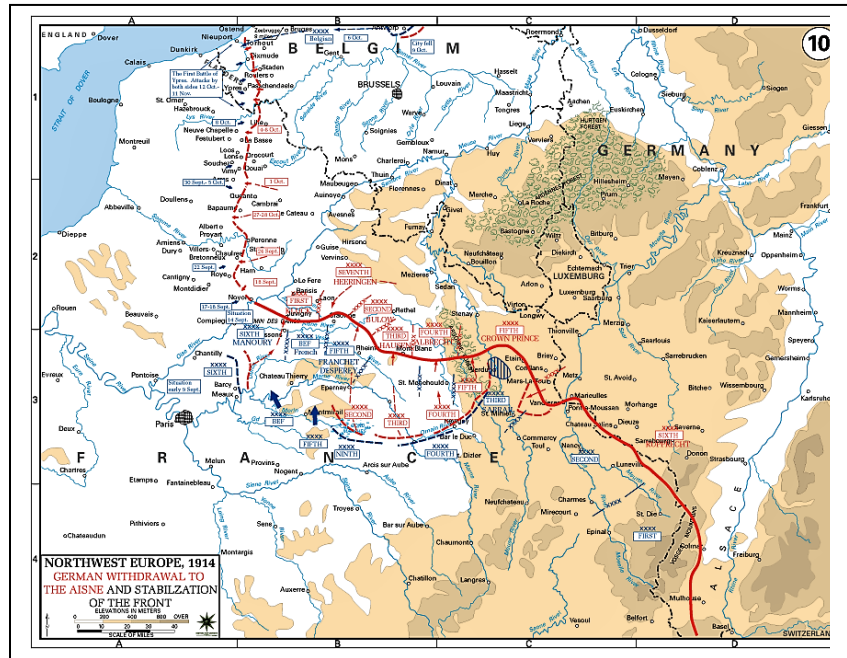
Kaiser Wilhelm II,
Emperor of Germany

³ Gilbert, Martin, *The First World War: A Complete History*, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1994, p. 27.

⁴ Tuchman, p. 77.

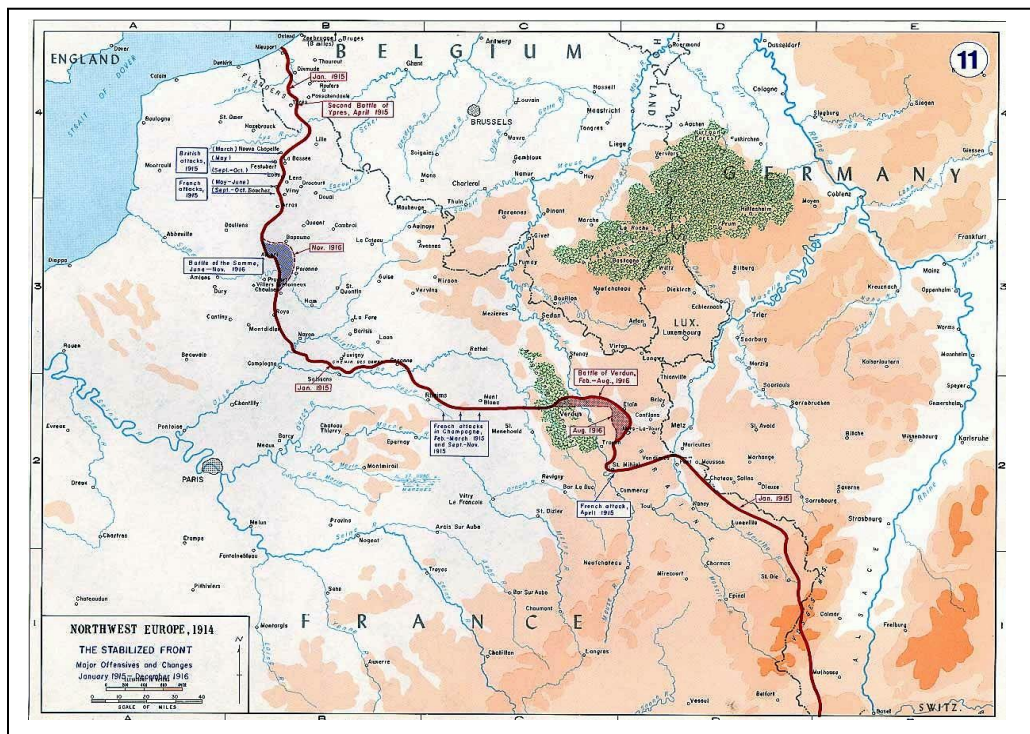
⁵ Tuchman, p. 78.

The Macmillan Dictionary of the First World War sums up the crucial first month of combat thusly: “The revised Schlieffen Plan was activated ... on 2 August 1914, but accidents and miscalculations combined to engineer its frustration. The unexpected resistance of Belgium, Britain’s immediate entry into the land war at Mons, tactical failures by field commanders and the speed of Russia’s action in East Prussia all played a part, but Moltke’s failure to maintain Schlieffen’s concentration of forces in the north was crucial.” French and British forces were able to stem the German tide at the Battle of the Marne on 6 to 12 September. German forces, which had advanced to within about 30 miles of Paris, had to retreat back to a defensible line along the Aisne River (see map above).



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By 1915, the situation was little changed, and a trench warfare stalemate had ensued, one that would, despite millions of casualties on both sides, remain much the same until 1918:



On the Eastern Front, German and Austrian forces were more successful against the very large but poorly led and poorly equipped Russian Army. By mid-1915, the Russians had been expelled from Russian Poland and hence pushed far away from the borders of the Central Powers, removing the threat of Russian invasion of Germany or Austria-Hungary.

We hope this gives the reader a reasonably good picture of the military situation about which Lasker wrote in 1915.

We wish to stress one more important point: The reader should not confuse the Imperial Germany of World War I with the Nazi Germany of World War II. Kaiser Wilhelm was not Adolf Hitler. The Germany of 1914 was authoritarian and militaristic, but it was not a one-party totalitarian police state bent on world domination and enslavement of subject peoples. Anti-Semitism of course existed (as it did to varying degrees in many European countries), but it was not government policy to oppress Jews, much less exterminate them. Lasker was himself Jewish, and many Jews fought for the Central Powers. For example Lasker's long-time chess rival, Siegbert Tarrasch, lost a son in the war, and the Viennese master Rudolf Spielmann fought for his country.

So when Lasker sings the praises of his country here, it was perhaps too fulsomely, but not without basis. And when the Nazis took over Germany in 1933, Lasker got out of the country as fast as he could, aghast at what it was becoming.

Now on to Lasker's *Apologia Germaniae*.

Original title page:

Die Selbsttäuschungen unserer Feinde

VON

Dr. Emanuel Lasker

Weltmeister



„Res nolunt male administrari.“

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Die Selbsttäuschungen unserer Feinde.

Unsere Feinde sind in einer Geistesverfassung, die uns schwer verständlich ist. Es scheint uns, daß sie sich mit aller Gewalt vor der Wirklichkeit verschließen. Es mag nun zweifelhaft sein, ob sie dies absichtlich tun, um einander und die Welt zu täuschen, oder unabsichtlich, weil sie in Selbsttäuschung befangen sind; doch nehmen wir, da uns diese Frage wenig angeht, die letztere Voraussetzung allein an. Auf jeden Fall ist es von Interesse, vielleicht auch ersprießlich, die Selbsttäuschungen unserer Feinde kennen zu lernen und festzustellen. Die Wahngedanken des Vierverbandes betreffen sowohl die Ideale, für die gestritten wird, wie die Machtmittel, mit denen die Kämpfer gerüstet sind, und er erkennt nicht, daß wir nur einen Weg gehen können und diesen zu Ende gehen müssen. In drei Teilen werden hier diese Fragen erörtert.

1. Die Ideale.

Nicht von den Kriegszielen, die die Diplomaten in ihren Verhandlungen erstreben und festlegen werden, soll hier die Rede sein. Es wäre dies nicht angebracht einem Feinde gegenüber, der sich nicht scheut, in seinen Berichten von dem, was wir sagen und tun, Wesentliches zu unterschlagen, also unsere Gedanken wie auch unsere Taten aus ihrem Zusammenhange zu reißen und auf diese Art ein entstelltes Bild davon zur Schau zu stellen. Es wäre dies auch nicht zweckmäßig denen gegen-

The Self-Deceptions of Our Enemies

by

Dr. Emanuel Lasker, World Chess Champion

“Res nolunt male administrari”⁶

Price: 0.50 M.

**Hans Joseph G.m.B.h. Publisher
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**Dedicated to the Patriotic Women’s Society, Berlin Province, in honor of
their extensive charitable works, and with heartfelt sympathy.**

⁶ This may be a slight misquotation of a Latin proverb of unknown origin: *Res nolunt diu male administrari* (Things refuse to be mismanaged long).

Our enemies are in a mental state that is difficult for us to understand. It seems to us that they want to deny reality at all costs. It may be doubtful that they do this on purpose in order to fool themselves and the world, or unintentionally, because they are caught in denial. Let's assume, since this question doesn't concern us much, the latter precondition. In any case, it is interesting, perhaps beneficial, to get to know and determine the delusions of our enemies. The delusions of the beer hall involve both the ideals which are being fought for, and the means of enforcing power, with which the warriors are armed. He (the enemy) does not recognize that we can follow but one path and must follow it to the end. These questions will be discussed in three parts here.

1. Ideals

We will not speak of the objectives of war being pursued and determined by the diplomats in their negotiations. It would not be appropriate given an enemy which, in its statements, does not shy away from omitting important points, thereby ripping our thoughts and deeds out of their context, and presenting a distorted picture. Nor would it be appropriate for those who, when the time comes, will be responsible for the negotiations. Here, the ideal goals of war will be discussed; that is, those ideals which the warring peoples espouse, and which determine their feelings. These will be moved out of the sphere of emotions into concepts, so that the light of reason can shine on them.

Various sources, mainly the enemy's public speeches and literature, reveal their wishes and hopes, and their supposed reasons for going to war.

Our enemies accuse us, claiming that "Prussian militarism" is a danger to humanity. It threatens neighboring countries and creates unrest, which can only be resolved through war.

It is very difficult to determine what is meant by the catchphrase "militarism." Perhaps the cause of the animosity results from our having such a large army, setting an example for other countries to imitate? Well, it is only fair and equitable that in the army everyone is bound to duty. One cannot allow a substitute to defend the Fatherland and fight for humanity's ideals. Every individual must do his duty to fight for justice and progress. To hire someone else to defend these most lofty ideals would mean giving up participation in the advance of humanity, and sinking into a life of idle pleasure. Therefore we consider despicable a man who will not accept this responsibility. And our philosophy is shared by most other peoples — for example by all European countries except England and by Japan — or should we be accused of using too many resources in making our army strong?

But our period of service only lasts two years. The French require three years, and the Russians require four. In addition, we do not neglect our cultural duties in favor of our army. Our universities are numerous, as are our students. For those who desire education, the schools are open to all. They offer a rich literature, and many theaters which present classical works — ours and foreign — with love and understanding. Also, we do not neglect commerce, trade with foreign peoples, social law and order, music, or any of the other fine arts.

No, the English feel something entirely different, when they talk about Prussian militarism. Without being consciously aware, they mean our overall talent for organization. The strengths of our people are combined and put in order in a way that every society-enhancing goal is reached by

working together. The English notice this, especially in our trade. They do not understand this type of higher organization, and so they instinctively hate this difference — maybe more so, when its practical significance becomes apparent to them.

The hate of the English for our organizational talent is also the hate of those left behind by progress. Individuals made England great. A small trade organization conquered India for England. Rhodes gave them ownership of a large part of Africa, and Disraeli's genius built the basis for England's world empire. The English education system is geared toward breeding a small number of superior humans. They don't have many good schools and universities, and these are very expensive. Thus a large part of the middle class is limited to mediocre education. Their entire system of law gives preference to the ruling minority, and does so through indirect methods, which, like indirect taxes, are very effective. English law is long-winded and very expensive. The English masses get an outdated education. The English laws governing social goals are still in an embryonic stage. In contrast, German universities are very inexpensive, as is the administration of justice. We offer the best in education. As a result, the masses are educated to a relatively high level, and our social laws show a healthy development. Let us compare our cities to those of the English. Our cities are clean. The streets are wide. The houses are tasteful and have color. The homes are comfortable and often show the stamp of personality of those who live there. English cities are dirty. The streets are narrow. The houses rarely show any pleasant color or form. The houses where the poor are crammed together in the major English cities are decidedly ghastly. Of course, we too are in the process of development. We also have much work to do, but compared to England, we have gained an immeasurable lead, thanks to our talent for organization.

There can be no doubt that our idea of life in the city is the more progressive. The root of our idea is social, the root of the English idea is egotistical. We strive for an intelligent, healthy, well-mannered people, who experience joy in life. The difficulties which must be overcome are, of course, not insignificant. Opinions about the right way to do this vary, but who can deny that our basic tendency is toward lifting up our entire people to a higher level in life, given our undeniable progress of the last ten to twenty years. The English idea ensures that only a few become rich and powerful, but keeps the majority of their people limited, forced into servitude, denied possibilities for happiness. Thus they are driven to alcohol, the raw pleasures of boxing matches, and to kitschy music halls. There can be no question as to which of the lifestyles compared here has a future.

All things considered, the accusation of militarism is a delusion, a "life built on a lie," with which the English, perhaps unconsciously, shield themselves from an embarrassing truth.

Besides the accusation of militarism, our enemies also accuse us of failing to respect the "principle of nationalities."

This principle of nationalities, which plays a major role in the speeches and publications of our enemies, has highly questionable content — perhaps no real content at all. The word "principle" means a doctrine which makes sense and is helpful in uniting a whole series of questions under one point of view. With this, one must expect the "principle" of nationalities to lay out a clear path for politics. If one asks what it means, one halts at the word "nationality." What is that? Is it a country? If so, why not just say "the principle of the nation" and simply count it among the principles of general people's rights? Apparently, our enemies imagine a different meaning — one

based on a commonality of the blood, language, and customs within a nation, such as the Flemish in Belgium. But what does the principle of nationalities mean? What duties does Belgium have in regards to the Flemish population? What duty does it put upon us that we are disregarding?

It is difficult for us to follow our enemies' thoughts, and that is not our fault. We only ask that the speech directed at us is clear and decisive. That is the foremost basis of logic, but our enemies do not follow this. This much is certain — that we are being accused of neglecting some sort of rights of “nationalities,” for example, of the Danish-speaking population of Schleswig.

In Germany, however, judgments and rulings are based on the law. Everyone has a right to education. He can choose his own vocation freely. He can settle wherever he wants. No one is exempt from the duties owed the German state. Every German right and duty is in balance. Only those who disobey the laws will be punished. To a great extent, this also applies to the many foreigners who have settled here. What rights of the “nationalities” are not being respected here? Does England treat the Irish, or their subjects on Malta and Gibraltar and in India the same as the long-established inhabitants of England? Does Russia afford its Finns, Estonians, Poles, Ukrainians, Turks, and everyone the same rights as the inhabitants of greater Russia? That is highly doubtful. We, on the other hand, give every German absolutely the same rights and the same opportunities.

In place of the wishy-washy “principle of nationalities,” we can remind the enemy peoples of several principles whose sense and justice is beyond doubt. It is justice that every person and every people use their strength to do the work necessary for all humanity. It is justice that each individual and every people be judged according to their inner values, their work and the whole of their actions, and not according to random superficial traits. It is justice that someone who accuses an individual or a people provide stringent proof of the accusation.

These principles are invoked by our enemies, but only to accuse others — never to be followed by themselves. It may sound exaggerated, but one can safely say that our enemies have never followed these principles themselves. On the side of our enemies are the conqueror nations. Among them are two of the greatest the world has ever suffered: England and Russia. They have stolen the independence of numerous capable peoples. To make their acts of violence seem acceptable, they accused those peoples of inferior culture, and then dominated them as a “punishment.” They were both prosecutor and judge and reaped much advantage for themselves. Their moralistic indignation was the gastric juice that enabled them to digest their new plunder.

Now they want to play the same game with us. They want to divide Germany and Austria's territories and reduce these two powers to minor states.

Of course, one cannot prove the ambitions of our enemies as easily as $2 \times 2 = 4$. Their interest lies in portraying their plans as peaceful and useful for humanity, and to insist that they are the ones being attacked. But their speeches have frequently proven to be sophistry. They haven't abided by the rules of logic. Their language has double meaning and is sometimes built on lies. Should one, to prove this, refer to the promises they have made and broken? To the way they hide their selfishness behind pretty words? Is it more beneficial to put their deeds under the microscope, rather than their words? Their deeds cannot be falsified.

During recent decades, our enemies have divided up nations among themselves. They have shut us out of their markets, and subjugated Persia and Turkey. Surely it was their goal to treat these two countries as they have treated Egypt, Transvaal, the Orange Free State, Morocco, and so many other countries. They have surrounded us. Their people have spoken openly about the violent reclamation of Alsace and Lorraine, the destruction of the German fleet, and the partitioning of Austria. In the midst of peacetime, as can be proven, they have boycotted German industries simply because of their origin. Their governments have prepared for war. They have conducted suspicious negotiations with Belgium. The circle around us is being drawn slowly tighter.

They believed they didn't have to hurry. Success seemed assured in any case. What were Germany and Austria supposed to do when faced with such overwhelming power on land and sea? Their people understood that, too. They told each other that in 1917 at the latest, the German fleet would be sunk, German trade would be destroyed, and they would march on Berlin and Vienna. To be sure, maybe those who talked this way misunderstood their own governments. Maybe the Entente wanted nothing more than peace. Maybe the Sarajevo assassination was not a symptom of conspiracy. But the deeds of our enemies were a language that was clear and highly threatening to us. If they weren't planning anything bad, then their attitude was foolish beyond understanding. Should we believe their diplomats were foolish? These diplomats have already played many a clever game. No doubt after they had just about seized three continents and appropriated a large piece of the fourth, they felt secure in the belief that they had the last stronghold of freedom — Middle Europe — under their thumb.

This attack was doomed, and not only because we are industrious, or because our soldiers fight with devotion, or because they were splendidly led. We Germans believe in an old proverb: *Res nolunt male administrari* — things do not want to be mismanaged long. Basically, all of our enemies' failures are based on this revenge of the poorly managed things. Petersburg, London, and Paris have forced many peoples to be subjugated. Now they have been forced to stop. Now, there is still time. There are still enough free and proud men left on the Earth to turn the tide of events.

True to their old reliable methods, our enemies now accuse us of barbarism. Should one, in order to refute this accusation, direct attention to the accomplishments of great Germans? That would be a weak defense, because such a directive would never do justice to Germany's accomplishments. Besides, what proof do these accusers bring against the German people, who have such a tremendous history? If you examine the charges, they stand there like unmasked villains, they are mostly either anonymous or hysterical or obviously lying. The "morally outraged" enemies have certainly only accused us, because they imagine Middle Europe to be ripe for "punishment."

We do not answer this irritating attack. We have nothing against English or French culture. Wherever human genius blossoms into a beautiful flower, we recognize its beauty and are glad of it. We do not want to make this Earth poorer for lack of the geniuses of France and England.

However, we indict our enemies for their way of thinking. They have disgraced reason.

Of course, our enemies' politicians are proficient in and seek to be right about logic, the books they teach, and even more so about law and art. The English even have a very special skill in all

the arts used by lawyers to convince a less-than-sharp-thinking jury to accept their position. In Russia, the numerous guilds of the professional political slanderers have not only mastered all the rules of debate given by Schopenhauer, but have demonstrated such imagination in their use that it would earn high praise, if used for a worthy cause. But all such cleverness can be filed under the concept of deception or trap or swindle, and has nothing to do with the capability for reason given to humanity for the purpose of bringing order to the world and directing actions accordingly.

This reason — serious, conscientious, orderly, productive — seldom shines through words and sentences. Instead, it is revealed primarily in the concurrence of actions between themselves and with high ideals. Words which explain this sense are almost superfluous and at times cumbersome, for the deeds of goal-oriented people speak a clear and eloquent language. Let us now consider the deeds of our enemies, unencumbered by their phrases! Out of all their deeds, we will choose some of the most meaningful. We want to examine how the enemies treat, first, their own people; second, the other peoples of Europe; third, the peoples of the four other continents. In doing so, the errors of their deeds will be proven.

The enemies withhold much important information about the war. For example, only England publishes lists of those lost, and these are imprecise and full of holes. The enemies censor news about the war, which at times allows invented false items to get through, and at times apparently suppresses believable items. Do the enemies feel that the truth would be hard to digest for their people? So far, no one has been clever or powerful enough to put something in the place of truth which would have been more beneficial to humanity.

European countries were measured by our enemies with an unequal standard, and therefore purposefully and falsely judged. With this, they deliberately break the first rule of reason. For example, they consider Belgium's neutrality and Greece's neutrality to be two different things.⁷ Of course, this leads to contradictions, and — unfortunately, one has to say: of course — they cheekily deny these contradictions.

Their biggest sin against reason was in replacing the concept of humanity with their concept of "race." According to this concept, humanity is not a unified entity, but instead is divided into pieces — the "races" — which according to the enemies' theory show certain lasting differences. If this theory were correct, then every violent action could be excused by alluding to the inferiority of the raped "race." War would not be a disaster, not a sickness, not a process of healing, but the natural state between the hammer races and anvil races. The enemies have the audacity to suggest such a view through their theories on race. They portray this theory in detail. The English sayings are "My country, right or wrong" and "There are only Englishmen or niggers." In Russia, Pan-Slavism became powerful, declared western culture to be decadent, and seeks to "invigorate" it through Slavic culture — that is, destroy it. The French talk about "Latin" peoples and demand solidarity from them for no other reason than a supposed unity and supposed cultural supremacy

⁷ It is unclear what Lasker meant about Greek neutrality. Officially neutral at first, Greece was torn politically between a pro-German king, Constantine I, and a pro-Entente prime minister, Eliftherios Venizelos, whom the majority of Greeks supported. As the war moved closer to Greece in 1915, Constantine opened negotiations with Berlin in March, while in June Venizelos ordered mobilization to aid Serbia (an ally by treaty), and invited Entente naval forces to use the Greek port of Salonika. That would have been the situation around the time Lasker was writing. He may even have been writing months later, after the Entente disembarked an army at Salonika in October 1915.

of the Latin race. Consequently, they consider the “boches”⁸ somehow different from themselves in the core of their being, and hopelessly inferior to them. One would think that with such confident language from the enemies, the concept of “race” would be established beyond all doubt, and the serious hard-working men of science would have determined the differences between the races — differences that are much more important than those between two types of animals; for example, between lions and tigers. However, the exact opposite of that has been scientifically proven. Conscientious, selfless seekers of the truth have proven through strenuous, patient research that the so-called races cannot be distinguished from one another through any consistent traits. All people’s blood is the same. The apparent differences between all “races” of the Earth are the result of climate, nutrition, and education, and can be blurred and erased through changing effects and influences over the course of time. For example, Huguenots who immigrated to Prussia became good Prussians. Every human has the capability for morality, intelligence and art.

With respect to the circumstance which confronts us daily, that minor differences between people, for example in the way they eat, speak, or move their hands, can result in irritation and conflict, it is a tremendous responsibility to claim that people differ from one another in lasting, that is to say never-changing characteristics. The weight of this responsibility would include the duty to prove this assumption using the most stringent empirical methods. If the premise is proven false, then its promotion would be an infamous act. Our enemies, in preaching this worthless theory of the races and acting accordingly, are indifferent to morality or have been disgraceful. There is no other alternative. With their theory of the races, our enemies have excused their actions against the natives of America, Australia, Asia, Africa, and many islands. They attributed no rights to the “wild races.” First, the natives were robbed of their independence, then most of their lands, then instead of being given their natural rights, were subjected to legal concepts which they did not understand, but which one must understand to enjoy their benefits. The “pioneers of culture” suppressed the “wild” ones’ progress and the naturalness which cannot be imitated, and gave them instead liquor, tuberculosis and syphilis. If the methods of colonization used in previous centuries — primarily by the British — become known, then white people will have to hang their heads in shame.

Now the native inhabitants die — according to the official theory because they are not capable of living up to the higher culture of the whites — but in truth because their conditions of existence have been drastically changed: they have been raped in mind and spirit, and ravaged by the most horrible sicknesses. And even if the time when these sins were committed lies in the distant past, what have England, Russia, and France done to elevate the peoples they subjugated? Have the three “cultured nations” offered the hundreds of conquered tribes science, technical expertise, or healthy lifestyles? Those tribes have been forced to do degrading work, to accept immoral contacts — in short, into hopeless slavery.

On Germany’s side there are only nations which are free from these sins. Germany in particular can proudly point to the colonies it has managed. Kiautschou is an example.⁹ On a sandy plain a

⁸ Boche: French slang for cabbage-head, a derogatory term used to denote German soldiers.

⁹ Kiautschou: Germanized form of the Chinese word Jiaozhou. The Kiautschou Bay Leased Territory was a German possession in China, administered by naval officers, from 1898 to 1914. What Lasker says about this particular colony is basically true; as will be seen below, he was quite wrong about others.

mighty city was built, led by incorruptible officials. German hygiene and German schools have benefited the natives.

Our enemies have been punished for the continued contradiction between their preachments and their actions. Their way of thinking has become uncertain, lacks independence, and is full of contradictions. Let us observe England. England has long become impotent in the area of mathematics, the mother of the technical sciences. Gottingen towers over Cambridge. In philosophy, England is stuck in half-truths, operates without clear concepts, over-values experience, and is prone to confused mystical thinking.

On the other hand Germany, whose thinkers do not hold back, and logically think their systems through to the end, is constantly evolving. It is the same in art. In England, the structure of the novel, of drama, of painting, is prescribed and therefore stagnant. Art is strangled by a thousand irrelevant considerations. In Germany, artistic genius develops in freedom, seeking fulfillment of its desires in many varied ways. The Englishman with all his half-thoughts and confusion is no longer capable of formulating healthy clear thoughts, and is therefore not capable of acting sensibly. The capacity for reason, which he has disgraced, now deserts him.

Furthermore, we accuse our enemies regarding their type of culture and their attitude toward humanity: They want to rule the world by controlling interaction. Here, the concept of interaction [*the German word used is "Verkehr"*] stands for the most general concept of mutual communication, cooperation, fusion, and intermarriage between the different peoples.

When France annexed Madagascar, it acquired the duty to open the island to interaction, to a fruitful mental and spiritual development. France went there to rule in the name of culture, and if they fail to do so, then they have no right to rule there. The French, however, exploit the island for their own purposes and refuse to allow the natives interaction. This then is an example and a symbol of the politics of violence, of exploitation, of unenlightened self-serving, propagated by the Entente.

Our time has been renewed through the richness of its interaction. People's flexibility, both in movement and in spirit has increased enormously compared to earlier times. The different peoples share their wares, their thoughts, their goals with one another, and even this war will not limit this tendency toward communication, toward interaction in the highest sense, in the long run.

This interaction is of high value. It brings raw materials, goods, people, and also thoughts to where they are necessary, and thus lifts up the general state of living and life wisdom.

Our enemies are only interested in promoting interaction insofar as they can rule and exploit it to their own advantage. Otherwise, they are opposed to interaction. Russia has the distinction, through laws which it conceives for these purposes, of limiting the freedom of movement and activities of foreign merchants and companies as much as possible. This does very little for education. It apparently has the purpose to prevent the interaction of their people with other peoples, and so prevent their people from exposure to foreign thoughts. England takes all actions which would promote interaction under consideration. For whom would the interaction be useful?

If other peoples would benefit from it, England blocks the beneficial actions through all kinds of mischief without even considering what humanity will lose by doing so.

England caused the greatest of difficulties for the Baghdad railway, a connecting, beneficial mode of transportation, simply because it was built by Germans. But this is only one of many examples. It has never occurred to the English to do something out of the goodness of their hearts that would benefit all, even foreigners. They lay cables, build railways and ships, arm warships and fortify straits only to give the English merchants advantages and to deal a death blow to foreigners. Their behavior is wholly egotistical and therefore detrimental to interaction.

Germany, in contrast, enhances interaction and welcomes all foreign influence. It has had peace for 44 years, longer than any other major power. It has even tolerated provocations for the sake of peace. Germany has sent their teachers to all peoples in order to train them in the technical arts and in the sciences, content to serve humanity without asking whether it affords Germany an advantage. Germany has honored and loved the genius of every country. Numerous foreign artists have been its guests. Numerous foreign researchers have worked at German universities. Even its merchants do not hate their foreign competitors, but only seek to compete with them. Germans buy goods without asking which country they came from. “A real German doesn’t like the French, but he loves to drink their wine.” Consider in contrast the British “Made in Germany.”¹⁰ The officials in German colonies have created something exemplary. In short, it is the German way to promote and increase interaction between peoples, the exchange of their goods, of their blood [*i.e., by intermarriage*], out of a spirit of joy for the enrichment of culture.

Germany’s and its allies’ ideal goal of war is characterized by this contrast. Our enemies want to control the peoples and their interactions. We want the peoples and their interactions to be free amongst one another.

Middle Europe fights for an interactive community which is accessible to all peoples of the Earth equally and fairly, which promotes progress, and is beneficial in every sense. Germany’s social laws, Germany’s freedom of scientific research, the right of hospitality with which Germany has freely given to foreign thinkers and works — all that is just a preview of the great freedom of interaction which will come from peace — from that peace which will once and for all tightly rein in the short-sighted egoism of our enemies and their voracious appetite for the domination of nations.

2. The Means of Enforcing Power

Our enemies have overestimated their power significantly. They have believed that they can be assured of victory due to their greater numbers and because they can prevent our access to the sea. They have compared us to a castle under siege, whose defeat is only a question of time. Their prediction was that shortly after war broke out, the Russians would be in Berlin, and the French

¹⁰ Apparently a reference to the Merchandise Marks Act of 1887, which required that goods imported into England be labeled with their country of origin. The act stopped foreign manufacturers from falsely labeling their goods as British-made and selling them in Britain on that pretense. Lasker fails to mention that most of these falsely labeled goods had been coming from Germany, and that Germany had adopted a protectionist policy to prohibit the import of foreign goods that competed with German industry, thus decreasing the “interaction among peoples” he so values here.

would be on the Rhine, while the German fleet would be destroyed by the all-powerful English fleet. Something quite different happened. The Russians lost ground even though strong bases, navigable rivers and many railways gave them a powerful position for both offense and defense. The French fight in their own country, and barely hold the balance against us. The German fleet keeps the enemy fleet busy and forces them to be cautious. The area conquered by us and our allies stretches to the middle of Asia and mocks the futile attempts to surround us, instead threatening to expand further.¹¹

Under these circumstances, which include the occupation of almost all of Belgium and all of Serbia, we declare victory. But our enemies still harbor delusions. They give reasons as to why they expect a shifting of the current state of affairs to their advantage — weak reasons.

As Lord Kitchener explained, our enemies plan to put new armies into the field. In 1916, these armies are to break through our positions in France, Belgium or Russia, and force us to retreat and to accept a degrading peace.

This hope is an illusion. The renewal of our armies and those of our enemies is a given. Whether the enemy needs its new troops for defense is still an open question. So the position that we have is a strong one for offense and well-equipped for defense. The probability that our line in the West, East or South will be pushed back a little is not great. There is no possibility that our lines will be broken. It is, however, certain that the enemy will have horrible losses from such an attack. For it is not just an opinion and not just an inference from analogies, but instead an irrefutable law of nature: If one forces an attack against a diligent opponent who is in a solid position, terrible losses will occur. It seems that people must be used to destroy barbed wire, sand, and cement. So much living power against so many obstacles. And again, people are sacrificed in order to win ground. That is the hard unchanging logic of war, which one cannot evade through any bluff or any plans devised by the human brain. That is a law of nature which, indifferent to every illusion, is so often proven as the attackers are blind enough to try and test it. Our enemies, who have already lost so many of their people, would have to use ten times their people's effort than we would in order to carry out these desperate attacks, and regardless of this effort, they probably would not win any ground, or if any, then an insignificant amount.

It is understandable that this course would be considered by a consciousness shaken by fear and hate. But the enemy does not have the strength to accomplish this. The concept of humanity has not suddenly gone mad. People may fight, but they do this because their ideals are not clear. In the end they all fight for the realization of an idea, which, even though it may be erroneous, presumes a love for humanity. They do not fight, as some believe, for power, but for justice. Justice cannot be determined in every detail. It is still a matter of pure reason. Instead, it grows in the course of sometimes passionate development. If justice stood above all opinions, then there would be no wars. Some important questions cannot be solved through logic. Instead, they need to be tested by people's strength and morality. In this framework, wars are not unjustified. But the unavoidable

¹¹ Lasker grossly exaggerates here. The "middle of Asia" would lie roughly along a north-south line bisecting India. In 1915 the easternmost extent of the Ottoman Empire, the only Asian ally of Germany, was to Basra on the Persian Gulf, in what is now Iraq, about 2,000 miles west of that line. Basra was not a recent Turkish conquest; rather, it had been part of the Ottoman Empire since the mid-16th century. The empire had in fact shrunk a great deal since then; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Territorial_evolution_of_the_Ottoman_Empire.

condition is that the war must be productive of justice. A war of attrition is not, for this is an approach to unending war, which would lead to the bankruptcy of human thought.

If the French were so blind as to want unending war, then they would only be ensuring their own destruction. Then the fortunes of war, in a way that would seem accidental, but would be founded in an internally justified animosity, would turn against them in a cold, cruel manner. The horrible thought of unending war would stir up things which do not want to be managed poorly, and which have a violent strength within.

Do they perhaps seek to intimidate us by discussing this plan in their newspapers? That would be a mistake, because in the past we have trusted in the justice which expresses itself in events, and we will surely trust in it in the future. Truly, it would be a crying shame for Europe, if a war of attrition were really to be planned. Even if this were so, we would be guaranteed victory in the end, because somehow, sometime, such a devilish plan would be foiled. But the many victims of such a plan would have died for nothing. However, it is not believable that such a plan would succeed. A small minority, crazed from hatred, may make such a plan. But will the majority, who are basically friends of humanity, let themselves be led and deceived by the fanatical minority for long? One must doubt that very much.

It is possible that the French imagine something different when thinking about a war of attrition. They have fought long wars with England many times, and are perhaps still thinking about English stubbornness. It is possible, since the English are now their allies, that they view this determination as their savior in time of need.

One must give recognition to the Englishman's virtue of being able to stand his ground for a long time. He has a little of the ingenious battle strategy of the Dutch Prince Dranien, who lost a hundred battles and regrouped after every defeat, until at last the Netherlands won the day. The average Englishman has a sluggishness which keeps him from taking imprudent steps. He is suspicious about everything that has not yet been successful. Therefore, he is suspicious regarding clever, lofty plans. All that indicates that the English use their strengths slowly and carefully.

One should however not compare the current war with just any war of the past. Not only are the technical means and the troops more numerous and varied than ever before, but the military strategies are more complex and grandiose. The problems that England had to solve in the past were child's play in comparison to the current problems. This raises the question of whether a certain degree of audacity and a lively imagination are not necessary to comprehend such plans as are needed most in the new situation.

The whole of strategy has experienced a huge upheaval. There was a time when field officers of the European continent searched only for extraordinary plans and ignored the obvious — ignored the natural simply because it was obvious and natural, and therefore did not seem to them worthy of the high art of strategy. This was in a romantic, sentimental time, and that time is not long past. The error of this whole attitude towards things was that it was assumed that the ingenious plan had to also be one which was surprising and would provide a magnificent astounding show. In reality, however, the ingenious is very simple, and is hardly noticeable. As the history of art and science has taught, the masses only recognize genius long after it has appeared. It was easy for the

Englishmen to fight against a strategy that ignores every simple blow and is always on the lookout for an amazing idea. For this, level-headedness and persistence suffice. By examining the plans of the impassioned opponent, one can surely discover a weakness, which can be easily exploited, so that by the conflict's end the Romantic has not realized any of his lofty plans, and has only delivered trivial blows. This is how in the past the English fought against enemies who had too much imagination and too little introspection. But this simple plan is no longer sufficient. Now, the English must invent a new strategy which is bolder, deeper, and yet sound. For now there is a new breed, at least in Germany. Now everyone seeks to recognize reality, and does what he can, be it a little or a lot, to conform to this reality with selfless dedicated work. From this, a reality-based strategy naturally follows, which conforms to the new circumstances, aspirations and ideas. Here, there is no more room for romanticism. The plans are geared toward what is achievable and factual. One does not care about the plan's outer ornamental appearance, but instead only about its effectiveness, which one determines carefully. In doing so, the unhealthy tendency to forcefully convert reality (which often seems quite sober in nature) into a showpiece is eliminated. Aspiration toward genius is subordinate to understanding reality. Within these boundaries there is genius, for genius lives forever. Because of this, in the current circumstances, military plans are possible which are wonders of intelligence, invention, and effectiveness.

How do we act, and how do the English act under these new circumstances? If one compares the paths of both peoples in past wars: Our path is straight, its goal worthwhile. The path of the English is crooked, his goal uncertain. For example, our march through Serbia was a clear, simple, straight-line affair which bound us tightly with Bulgaria and Turkey. In contrast, the landing of the troops of the Entente on Gallipoli was a cockeyed operation, with the result that they are now stuck in an insecure position. Overall, one fails to find a vision for sound actions and a sense of justice in many of the actions of our enemies. The assessments which they have published regarding the military situation are distorted, and some are laughable. Their logic is off the rails. They apparently make rules and laws for others, but not for themselves. Therefore they do not seem to have the ability to judge their own and others' strength, nor their own or others' justice, which is the unconditional prerequisite for every effective, meaningful action. But one does not need to elaborate on this question just to prove that English persistence is not dangerous for us. Sheer persistence against strategy which is both inventive and sound has no more chance to win than a bull has against an experienced swordsman.

Or maybe hunger will accomplish what direct attack or protracted delaying tactics have not? The enemy has cut off our access to many countries through unscrupulous use of sea rights, and thereby also declared war against women and children.¹² Maybe the enemies imagine that this until now unthinkable method of fighting a war will bring us to our knees through lack of raw materials and food?

But the sun is more generous than England. The vast stretches of land which we control together with our allies allow us to grow more than enough to feed us all. The enemies misinterpret the necessities of our situation. Our freedom is worth to us a thousand times more than any luxury.

¹² Lasker fails to mention Germany's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. The sinking of the RMS Lusitania in May 1915 is the prime example, with about 1,200 of the 1,962 on board lost, many of them women and children. Lasker's mention in the preceding paragraph of "our march through Serbia," which began in October 1915, indicates he knew about the Lusitania.

The idea of Cossacks riding through Friedrichsstrasse and shooting out the windows, or Gurkhas¹³ in the Potsdam Gardens planting the flag of English tyranny, are threats which make any restriction in our daily lives seem as light as a spider's web.

In peace, we have allowed ourselves many luxuries which our parents, used to a simpler life, did not have. It is easy for us to return to simpler ways. Also, the need for limitations is only for a short time, and only applies to the wealthy. The masses live with less worry, regardless of whether it is in service to the armies, in the craftsman's cottage or in the fields. The poor, with a few exceptions, have more as a result of the war, because workers are highly sought after, and even women earn more than in the past. Whether or not the rich live with more or less is not important for the welfare of the people. It is only important for the outcome of the war that the poor also receive sufficient nutrition. And that is taken care of.

We don't need to waste any more words regarding the threat to limit our trade. German trade has actual advantages. It produces that which is needed and delivers the goods where they are needed. He who buys German wares serves themselves and their customers. That is the only thing that matters. Trade which does not produce anything which satisfies needs, and does not have a quality which makes it irreplaceable, cannot in any way achieve value in the world — not even, for example, with the help of extensive capital. On the other hand, trade which proves to be of necessary service to humanity will succeed due to its necessity. This has always been so, and will be again following the war's interruption of humanity's steady progress. In trade, German principles are sound and will remain so; therefore German production will be useful and valued. The oppression suffered by German merchants at the hands of England in the enemy and neutral countries only serves to characterize the intolerant spirit of England, but cannot hurt Germany's robust trade in the long run.

All this makes clear our position, that our enemies do not hold any strong trump cards, and our victory is inevitable given time. The only thing remaining for the enemy is the date when our victory is recognized, which they can postpone, but only if they accept many losses.

It follows that our enemies have the duty to accept the new unchangeable situation without making unnecessary sacrifices, and to act accordingly.

They owe this duty to their peoples, from whom they cannot demand endless sacrifice. They owe it to humanity, which needs peace to realize its higher goals. They even owe it to us, linked as we are in a long common history of culture, commerce, and trade. To neglect any of these duties would be a monstrous crime, and the march of history, that is, the meaningful connection between events, would surely and severely punish such a crime. The only reasonable course of action for our enemies would be to prepare a peace in which they recognize themselves as the defeated, and create a situation which makes the discontent and fear which has filled Middle Europe for centuries unnecessary.

¹³ Gurkhas: units in the British Army drawn from Nepali-speaking men of Indian Ghorka ethnicity. The Gurkhas were among the most feared of all troops fighting under the British flag.

There is no doubt that they are capable of creating such a peace. The enemies rule most of Europe, a large part of America, all of Australia, almost all of Africa, half of Asia, and countless islands. They don't have to be afraid for their security if they give up their intentions of subjugation, and no longer seek to extend their dominance, which is hated by most peoples. If they do this with sincerity of will, then peace is assured. All peoples could then turn their attention to the urgent tasks which thrive when humanity is at peace, and for which there is no time when England, Russia and France lust after our territory and that of Austria, Turkey, and other nations.

But if the enemies insist on cultivating their lust for annexation and their self-deceptions, then they need to think about what they risk by continuing the war. They will likely listen to the language of facts. And this language will be very clear.

First, the enemies must run the risk that peoples threatened and oppressed by them will break their bonds. These peoples are not bound by chains of gratitude, but by irons, and irons can be broken through violence. The more often this threat is realized, the stronger it will become, for every successful revolt of the oppressed will inspire new threats of this nature. This threat will be that much greater the longer it grows without being addressed. This is very significant. Most threats are played out, when they are realized. They indeed create a new situation, but this one is no longer a threat. They are comparable to an illness with which the patient struggles for a while, then recovers and is now done with the reason for the illness. Those illnesses which do not culminate in a crisis are more malevolent, since they do not reach a turning point. This is the case with dangers which threaten the structure of a nation. In a strong nation, a sharp crisis is not just a minor symptom. The Entente is not facing any such crisis regarding the aforementioned threat, but must instead anticipate a continued increase in danger. Will they not take the only way out? Even when this only way out is a peace accord which does justice to our ideal of freedom for all people? Whatever their current opinion is, the forces shaping reality will allow only a single answer to this question.

Second, the enemies must fear that their own peoples will demand peace. These peoples are not at all determined to continue a war until annihilation. The ruling minority made accusations toward us which are monstrous, unbelievable, and which for that reason inflame and incite. However, these accusations have been proven to be contemptibly weak. The masses are not capable of comprehending the art of diplomatic sophistry, which twists and falsifies the clear sense of words and sentences. Neither have they learned, when listening to proofs, to act precisely and strongly according to what they have heard. However, there are some among them, and not the worst, who have learned all that. Therefore, it is not impossible that the enlightened among our enemies will doubt and question, and that the weaknesses of the enemies' arguments will, while not precisely recognized, be felt with sound instincts. Then the masses, whose strength and trust are limited, will become indignant at the ever-increasing and yet pointless demands.

3. Our Path Is Clear

Our actions are a logical result of our philosophy. Our philosophy is in short: We were forced into war. We regret this compulsion, but will carry out the war to its logical and just end.

The world is off the rails. After people have worked for centuries exploring science, promoting sensible education, populating the Earth, promoting interaction between peoples, and making customs more civilized, research and education are at a standstill. Hatred and mistrust have almost erased reason and culture. We want to do what we can to rescue international life from this outrageous circumstance and steer it toward the old track.

But we live in a world of conflict. It is not just up to us to make sacrifices. Others also must do that to which we are obliged. Peace would not be possible in this world, if the will for justice was not exhibited by all. Therefore, if we, anxious and worried, ask ourselves what we should do to make the world productive again, then we must also expect our enemies to address this question honestly.

In reality however, our enemies are not yet ready to leave the path of destruction. They still suffer from delusions: They believe themselves to be moral, but they are only limited and egotistical. They believe themselves to be the stronger while they drift toward inescapable and catastrophic defeat.

For us there can be only one conclusion — regardless of all willingness to come to a just peace — and that is to remain steadfast in war. This conclusion applies to our soldiers and also to those at home.

Our task for the moment is to organize our conquered areas and thereby prepare for the final compelling decision. We have progressed from stormy action, to the development and readying of new strengths. In such a moment, one is no longer caught up in the whirling river of events. One looks around, attends to other thoughts and feelings, so that it is therefore natural that built-up tensions ease. The need every person has for quiet, peace and joy expresses itself, perhaps as an unconscious desire, with double the strength. This is a dangerous moment in any conflict. It is then especially important to defy the seductive, and to quietly, sensibly, and without prejudice consider how to do that which is necessary. It is important to call the enemies' bluff, and when necessary, to parry with a strong counter-thrust.

For us remaining at home, steadfastness is needed, because it pains us that this generation, which has already accomplished so much, has now been called upon to do so much more. We consider Hamlet's words: "The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite, that ever I was born to set it right!"¹⁴ Such a Hamlet is today's generation of Germans. And we don't feel that way for our own sake, but for the soldiers.

We have a great love for those who have gone out to defend our homeland. In them, we see a future of freer, truer, more beautiful humankind. Our life has meant nothing, if it has not benefited them. They are supposed to take over the construction of the building we have been working on, and continue the work. We are content to die if they live. For they are the strength and the hope for Earth, and the fulfillment of our dreams. But now the opposite is true. They die, and we live.

¹⁴ Laker's German translates to "The world is off the rails, oh pain and sorrow, that I came to the world to set it right."

Nevertheless, we must remain steadfast. Those who stand vigilant in the field are part of us and need our steadfastness. Especially since that which they fight for will certainly come to pass in a short time.

Our enemies probably believe that if the war goes on longer, our determination will weaken. But our fear does not come from a fear of people, and our enemies' policy is very rash, if they are counting on a weakening of our will. Whatever happens, we can desire only one goal. Our situation is clear, and allows us to act only in a certain way. Any energy spent in trying to deter us from this one well-formulated goal is wasted. We must not risk the danger of becoming oppressed or of starving to death again. We are a free people who love being productive and love progress, and there is no force which would compel us not to strive with all our might and last strength to remain such a people.

Defending our way of life to the last breath is only half of our task. The second half pertains to our productivity. The things we have accomplished in Belgium, Poland, and Serbia in building roads, schools, and other means of progress, are merely a symbol of our goal: Every kind of constructive progress, in technology, education, science, art, and law in free interaction with other free peoples. In war or in peace, this is always our mission.

We are imbued with our mission and cannot abandon it under any circumstances. Middle Europe must remain a center of free interaction between all nations, and a place from which a great people can offer a wonderful forum for science and art. Filled with this determination, we are forced to remain steadfast in our actions, and dare to stay steadfast in our hearts regardless of our love. We mourn the victims, but do not lament them. For the sacrifices we bring are necessary to make the world a better place. Our noble dead fought and died for the sake of humanity. It will be written on their memorials, and people will sing their praises in future centuries: In the fight against those who almost enslaved the whole world, they saved freedom.

Editor's Commentary on *The Self-Deceptions of our Enemies*

There are many points of disagreement we could bring up here, but our intended focus is on those where Lasker has misrepresented things, whether intentionally or from ignorance, with the effect of putting Germany's conduct of the war, or German policy in other areas (such as colonialism), in a better light than facts warrant. Or conversely, when he puts actions of Germany's enemies in an unduly bad light. Also his predictions that proved wrong. These will be considered in more or less the same order as in Lasker's text.

Lasker's basic thesis throughout is that Germany is the injured party, beset on all sides by foes who want to conquer or at least humble her; that German cultural, social, intellectual and scientific attainment are far above those of her adversaries; that those adversaries are oppressive and racist in their colonial policies while Germany is benevolent and progressive; that it is Germany above all other nations that carries the banner of truth, freedom, justice, and equality. Now to specifics:

Prussian Militarism

In discussing "Prussian militarism," Lasker presents a false dichotomy, implying that the only alternative to Germany's large army would be "to hire someone else to defend these most lofty ideals ... and [sink] into a life of idle pleasure." The question was never one of kind, as Lasker would have it, but of degree. In August 1914 the standing German army numbered some 1,900,000 men, about 2.8% of the population. Next largest were Russia (1,400,000, 0.85%) and France (1,290,000, 3.23%).¹⁵

Moreover, no country had a stronger military orientation than Germany. The unification of Germany into a single nation was largely the work of Prussian leadership. Prussia, under the "soldier king" Friedrich Wilhelm I had, in the mid-18th century, become more an army with a country, rather than a country with an army: 73% of the national budget went to the military, and the standing army numbered 83,000 out of the 2.5 million population (33.2%). There was gradually built up a large class of professional officers on the one hand, and a much larger class, the rank and file of the army, on the other. These enlisted men had become conditioned to obey implicitly all the commands of the officers, creating a class-based culture of deference.¹⁶

The interests of the army came to be seen as identical to the interests of the country as a whole, and a military approach to external affairs became dominant. Under the leadership of Otto von Bismark (1815-1898), the "Iron Chancellor," Prussia had conducted wars against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866), and France (1870-71) in the process of creating a unified German state. While Lasker is correct that Germany had fought no wars since then until 1914, the militaristic mindset remained very strong, much stronger than in, say, England (whose standing army numbered only 120,000 in 1914). Thus when Austria-Hungary prepared to take military action against Serbia, Kaiser Wilhelm, a vain, pompous man as eager to use his armed forces as a boy to play with new toy soldiers, quickly promised support if Russia mobilized in support of Serbia (which of course did happen). It was this militarily-based decision, perhaps more than any other, that set the awful mechanism of the various alliances into motion, quickly expanding into full-scale war.

¹⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I/Forces-and-resources-of-the-combatant-nations-in-1914>

¹⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Militarism#Germany>

In fairness, it should be mentioned that France's 1914 army was almost as large as Germany's, and exceeded Germany's as a percentage of population. France lusted after revenge for their humiliating defeat in the 1870-71 war, and many in Germany felt that war had failed to subdue fully the threat France represented. So when war was declared between them, there was widespread rejoicing on both sides.¹⁷

Concerning the lengths of military service, Lasker wrote "But our period of service only lasts two years. The French require three years, and the Russians require four." This is disingenuous. Keegan describes the situation more accurately: "In the German army, a conscript spent the first two years of full adulthood in uniform ... During the first five years after his discharge from duty he was obliged to return to the reserve unit of his regiment for annual training. Then, until the age of thirty-nine, he was enrolled in a unit of the secondary reserve, or *Landwehr*; thereafter, until the age of forty-five, in the third-line reserve, the *Landsturm*."¹⁸

Also in his discussion of militarism, Lasker digresses into comparing the quality of life in Germany and England, saying for example "the English masses get an outdated education," "there can be no doubt that our idea of life in the city is the more progressive," and "English cities are dirty [and] decidedly ghastly." Whether true or not, it is entirely irrelevant to the issue of justifying Germany's actions in the war.

"Subjugation" of Persia and Turkey

Lasker wrote "During recent decades, our enemies have divided up nations among themselves. They have shut us out of their markets, and subjugated Persia and Turkey." With regard to Persia (modern-day Iran) he has a point; the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 had divided the country into British and Russian "spheres of influence." For Britain the main concern was ensuring a continued supply of oil from Persian fields.¹⁹ While the agreement was reached without consulting the Persian government, and was thus a violation of Persian sovereignty that earned Britain their long-term enmity, the British never subjected Persia to the sort of harsh rule implied by the word "subjugation," nor established any permanent military presence there.²⁰

As for Turkey, the Ottoman Empire had been gradually shrinking for many years, and its most recent losses had been not to Britain, Russia or France, but to Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria in 1908, to Italy in 1912, and to Bulgaria, Montenegro, Greece, and Serbia in 1913.²¹ Note that the first three of the countries involved were German allies. Despite these losses, the greater part of the empire: Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and the Levant, remained under Ottoman control. At no time before 1914 could any nation, on either side, have claimed to have "subjugated Turkey."

Lasker's statement that "Their governments have prepared for war," in the same paragraph is absurdly out of place as an indictment of the Entente. As we have already shown, no nation had prepared as thoroughly for war as Germany.

¹⁷ Tuchman, pp. 74 (Germany) and 86 (France).

¹⁸ Keegan, John, *The First World War*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York 1999, pp. 20-21.

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Russian_Convention

²⁰ <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/great-britain-iv>

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissolution_of_the_Ottoman_Empire

Belgium and Barbarism

It is with matters involving Belgium that Lasker commits some of his worst gaffes and fallacies. Of the Entente, he says “They have conducted suspicious negotiations with Belgium.” Perhaps Lasker did not know that the Schlieffen Plan had always called for a mass German advance through this small, neutral, relatively weak nation. Perhaps he did not know that as far back as 1904, the Kaiser had offered Belgium’s King Leopold II substantial French territories if Belgian forces would not resist the German Army’s advance through his country. “Leopold gazed at him ‘open-mouthed’, then attempt[ed] to pass it off with a laugh” (Tuchman, p. 24). Later an offer of two million pounds may have been mooted; if so, it too was declined. Tuchman continues “Even after Leopold was succeeded in 1909 by his nephew King Albert ... Belgium’s resistance was still expected by Schlieffen’s successors to be a formality,” perhaps taking the form of “lining up along the road taken by the German forces.” She relates how at a 1913 royal dinner in Berlin, Moltke tried to scare the Belgians off, telling King Albert that war with France was coming, and “Your Majesty cannot imagine the irresistible enthusiasm which will permeate Germany on ‘The Day’.” Moltke further pressed Major Melotte, the Belgian military attaché, as to what Belgium would do if invaded. Melotte said “We will oppose with all our forces whatever power violates our frontiers.” Moltke replied pointedly “You must also have an army capable of fulfilling the duty which neutrality imposes.” (Tuchman, pp. 106-107)

So much for “suspicious negotiations with Belgium.” However, Lasker’s ignorance (or suppression?) of this is of minor importance. It is in connection with another matter involving Belgium that we see one of Lasker’s greatest offenses against fact and reason. He writes “True to their old reliable methods, our enemies now accuse us of barbarism. Should one, in order to refute this accusation, direct attention to the accomplishments of great Germans? That would be a weak defense, because such a directive would never do justice to Germany’s accomplishments. Besides, what proof do these accusers bring against the German people, who have such a tremendous history?”

The “accomplishments of great Germans” and their “tremendous history” are completely beside the point when we look at what was perhaps the most barbaric act in all World War I, the Rape of Belgium. The Wikipedia article about it is particularly well supported, and for a quick summary we can do no better than to quote its introduction in full:

The Rape of Belgium was the brutal mistreatment of Belgian civilians by German troops during the invasion and occupation of Belgium in World War I.

The neutrality of Belgium had been guaranteed by the Treaty of London (1839), which had been signed by Prussia. However, the German Schlieffen Plan required that German armed forces pass through Belgium (thus violating Belgium’s neutrality) in order to outflank the French Army, concentrated in eastern France. The German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg dismissed the treaty of 1839 as a “scrap of paper.” Throughout the beginning of the war, the German army engaged in numerous atrocities against the civilian population of Belgium, including the destruction of civilian property; 6,000 Belgians were killed, and 17,700 died during expulsion, deportation, imprisonment, or death sentence by court. Another 3,000 Belgian civilians died due to electric fences the German Army put up

to prevent civilians from fleeing the country, and 120,000 became forced laborers, with half of that number deported to Germany. 25,000 homes and other buildings in 837 communities were destroyed in 1914 alone, and 1.5 million Belgians (20% of the entire population) fled from the invading German army.²²

The fact that 120,000 Belgians were put into forced labor rather undermines Lasker's argument that it was the Entente powers who wanted to "enslave the world."

The Germans also systematically looted Belgium, confiscating bicycles, stripping the country of anything made of copper, nickel, pewter or other useable metal, looting churches and museums for their art treasures, curtailing freedom of the press, censoring mail, summarily shooting suspected spies and saboteurs, and enforcing curfews and other harsh restrictions.²³

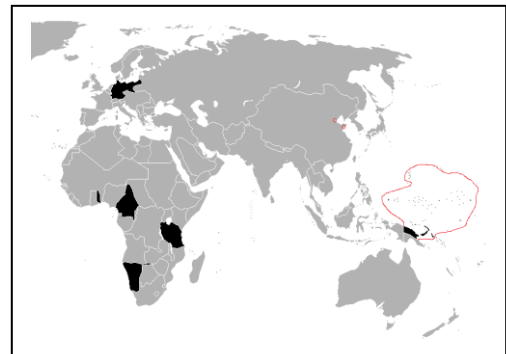
Some passages of Lasker's text indicate he was reading British as well as German newspapers, and so he could not have failed to see reports of German atrocities in Belgium. Perhaps he dismissed them as propaganda. In any event, the atrocities were real, and Lasker's attempt to deflect the charge of barbarism by invoking "accomplishments of great Germans," and what-aboutery with how the English treat the Irish or the Russians treat Estonians (a *tu quoque* fallacy if there ever was one), is utterly irrelevant to the fact that Germany did indeed act barbarically.

Toward the end of his text, Lasker goes even further, saying "The things we have accomplished in Belgium, Poland, and Serbia in building roads, schools, and other means of progress, are merely a symbol of our goal: Every kind of constructive progress, in technology, education, science, art, and law in free interaction with other free peoples."

Incredible! Lasker seems to think Germany invaded those countries out of pure altruism, to help them and make them happy! The occupation of Serbia was if anything worse than that of Belgium, and the Polish campaigns devastated much of that country. Many thousands of Poles were forcibly conscripted into the German and Austrian armies, hardly an example of "free interaction with other free peoples."²⁴

German Colonialism

The map at right shows, in black or outlined in red, Germany and her colonial possessions as of 1914. Becoming a unified nation only in 1871, and for some years after that lacking any significant navy, she was a late-comer to the race for overseas colonies that had preoccupied many European nations in the preceding two centuries. Thus the British, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese had already taken (and then lost) most of the



²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rape_of_Belgium. See also Tuchman, pp. 173-174, 225-227, 313-322, and the *Macmillan Dictionary*, p. 66.

²³ See for example the site <https://stamgent.be/en/digi-expos/gent-bezette-stad>. It deals just with the Belgian city of Ghent, but much the same hardships applied across the whole country.

²⁴ *Macmillan Dictionary*, p. 367

Americas, but along with Belgium they still held much of Africa, Asia, and the southwest Pacific, by the time Germany was ready to act on the global stage.

In his discussion of colonialism, Lasker's criticism of British and French policies has considerable basis, but again he is either uninformed or dishonest when it comes to Germany's colonial record. The one specific example he cites, Kiautschou in China, was indeed very much to Germany's credit, but her record in Africa was far less good.

In German South West Africa (present-day Namibia), where German rule was oppressive, an uprising by the Herero and Nama peoples was brutally suppressed. In a conflict lasting from 1904 to 1908, a German force of about 20,000 inflicted about 80,000 casualties (some sources say as high as 100,000), while losing only about 2,500. Since the Herero and Nama armed forces numbered only about 10,000, the great majority of the native casualties were civilians.²⁵ In 2004 the German government finally, officially apologized for the atrocities,²⁶ and in 2015 they officially admitted that the massacres were equivalent to genocide.²⁷

An even bloodier event was the 1905-1907 Maji Maji Rebellion in German East Africa (modern-day Tanzania). Triggered by a German policy of forcing the indigenous population to grow cotton for export, the revolt was crushed with pitiless force, some 2,000 Germans armed with modern firearms killing 75,000 native warriors armed only with spears and arrows. The scorched-earth policy of the German colonial governor, Gustav Adolf Graf von Götzen, led to a great famine that claimed another 125,000 to 175,000 lives.²⁸

Lasker makes much of English and French racism, and claims Germany was "free of such sins." He seems unaware of Eugen Fischer (1874-1967), a German professor of medicine, anthropology and eugenics who conducted "medical experiments on race" in concentration camps built to confine survivors of the Herero Rebellion. He performed sterilizations and injections of smallpox, typhus and tuberculosis. He advocated the genocide of alleged "inferior races," stating that "whoever thinks thoroughly about the notion of race, cannot arrive at a different conclusion." Fischer later became an ardent Nazi, and his ideas informed the racist Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which codified the Nazi Party's belief in German racial superiority, especially over Jews.²⁹

Another prominent German racist was Carl Peters (1856-1918), a colonial ruler, explorer, writer and politician, a believer in the racist Social Darwinist and *Völkisch* philosophies, the founder of the German East Africa Company, and a major figure in establishing the colony of German East Africa. There he used local girls as concubines, and punished one's infidelity by having her and her partner hanged, and destroying their home villages. The incident provoked outrage among the local Chaga people and necessitated costly military action. To the German government's credit, when in 1893 the incident became known in Berlin, Peters was recalled, and in 1897 he was dishonorably discharged from the colonial service. Yet many in Germany considered him a

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herero_Wars

²⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/16/germany.andrewmeldrum>

²⁷ <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/voelkermord-nachkommen-der-herero-und-nama-verklagen-deutschland-a-1128885.html>

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maji_Maji_Rebellion

²⁹ Olusoga, David and Erichsen, Casper W, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*, Faber & Faber, London, 2010

national hero, and in 1914 the Kaiser restored to him the title of Reichskommissar (Imperial Commissioner), along with the pension he had lost in 1897.³⁰

While the mainstream German press may have been forbidden to publish anything about these matters, African writers working in the British Gold Coast Colony published critical articles. In the process they built an international network of sympathizers. Exposés of the Herero and Maji Maji rebellions followed in the print media throughout Germany. “A wave of anti-colonial feeling began to gather momentum in Germany,” affecting the Reichstag election of 1906 and leading to a “complete overhaul” of the colonial service.³¹

So, could Lasker have been unaware of all this? To be fair, yes. He was living in the United States for most of 1902-1907, and probably saw few if any European newspapers. He returned to Europe for a title match with Tarrasch (1908), the 1909 St. Petersburg tournament, and a title match with Schlechter January-February 1910. In March-June 1910 he toured the USA and Latin America, but returned to Europe for a title match with Janowski in November-December. 1911-1913 was taken up with getting married and writing his 491-page philosophical work *Das Begreifen der Welt*. In early 1914 Lasker toured Russia, then won the 1914 St. Petersburg tournament, before finally returning to Berlin, where he would stay through 1918, and most of several years beyond.³²

So it is plausible Lasker had little time or opportunity to learn about German colonial crimes, but also, no doubt, little inclination. All one can say is that he should have researched the subject more carefully before presenting such a falsely glowing picture of Germany in Africa.

Lasker’s rosy opinion applied not just to Germany but to her allies, when he wrote “On Germany’s side there are only nations which are free from these sins.” Two comments: (1) If Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria were without colonial sin, it was only because neither had any colonial possessions, and (2) Lasker fails to mention the Armenian Genocide, carried out sporadically by the Ottoman government starting in the 1890s and 1909, and more systematically and ruthlessly 1915-1917. The full death toll may never be known; estimates range from 600,000 to 1.5 million. The Turks tried to keep it secret, but word leaked out through Western newspapers, and on 24 May 1915, the Triple Entente formally condemned the Ottoman Empire for “crimes against humanity and civilization.” German diplomats were at least partially aware, but made no protest and took no action.³³

So Lasker had little or no basis for highlighting colonial policy and a supposed absence of racism as proof of the moral superiority of the German cause.

³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Peters

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_colonial_empire#Rebellions_and_genocide

³² Hilbert, John, in *Emanuel Lasker, Volume I: Struggle and Victories*, Excelsior Verlag, Berlin, 2018, p. 159ff; and Isaak and Vladimir Linder, *Emanuel Lasker: 2nd World Chess Champion*, Russell Enterprises, Milford CT, 2010, pp. 254-255.

³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_genocide

“We were forced into war.”

We need not dwell on this, one of Lasker’s more baldly absurd claims; as shown above, Germany had planned for and wanted war, even lusted after it for years, and welcomed it when it came. Equally absurd is his indignation, earlier in his text, over the fact that “The enemies censor news about the war.” Did he honestly think the German government was placing no wartime restrictions on the press, and that the army kept the public fully informed about every setback?

Lasker’s Predictions

In the last part of his text, Lasker makes a number of predictions, which all boil down to “German victory is inevitable.” Of course, that is not how things turned out. We will now look at some specifics.

Lasker writes “Truly, it would be a crying shame for Europe, if a war of attrition were really to be planned ... the many victims of such a plan would have died for nothing.” This is the most profoundly true statement in the whole of Lasker’s tract, even if the phrase “crying shame” is a gross understatement; something like “cataclysmic tragedy” was more fitting.

But he goes on: “Even if this were so, we would be guaranteed victory in the end, because somehow, sometime, such a devilish plan would be foiled ... it is not believable that such a plan would succeed. A small minority, crazed from hatred, may make such a plan. But will the majority, who are basically friends of humanity, let themselves be led and deceived by the fanatical minority for long? One must doubt that very much.”

But in fact, even as casualties mounted into the millions, the Great Powers kept on fighting, mostly with the support of their respective populations. The one exception was Russia, which under its new Bolshevik government,³⁴ declared a cease-fire on 15 December 1917, and signed away a great deal of its territory to Germany in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. But on the Western Front, France and Britain, newly joined by the United States, continued the fight.

Lasker continues “Maybe the enemies imagine that this until now unthinkable method of fighting a war [of attrition] will bring us to our knees through lack of raw materials and food? But the sun is more generous than England. The vast stretches of land which we control together with our allies allow us to grow more than enough to feed us all ... Our enemies probably believe that if the war goes on longer, our determination will weaken.”

This proved seriously wrong. Food supplies did dwindle, and German determination did weaken. The Battle of Jutland in May 1916, in which the German Navy failed to break out of its enforced confinement to coastal waters, ensured that the British Royal Navy would continue its command of the seas and its blockade of the Central Powers. British historian Martin Gilbert writes “Behind the lines, those nations whose food imports were being stopped by a naval blockade had begun to suffer greatly. In Constantinople, as many as 10,000 of the city’s inhabitants had died of privation

³⁴ In a clever strategic move, Germany had secretly transported the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin by train from exile in Switzerland back to Russia in April 1917, in hopes that he might foment a revolution and take Russia out of the war. This indeed did happen.

in 1917. In Austria, hunger led to strikes and food riots in Vienna and Budapest that forced the government to recall seven army divisions from the front, and to do so permanently at the beginning of 1918, to prevent violence in the streets. In Germany more than a quarter million civilians had died in 1917 as a result of hunger, directly attributed to the British blockade.”³⁵

Further on Martin continues “Hunger and privation at home were as much an influence for war weariness as the killing ... In Berlin [on 28 January 1918], more than 400,000 workers went on strike, demanding peace. Within 48 hours these strikes had spread to six other cities ... Civilians were being forced to eat dogs and cats ... Bread was made from a mixture of potato peelings and sawdust.”³⁶

The final surrender of Russia in March 1918 gave the Germans hope that they might, by transferring forces to the Western Front, yet achieve a decisive breakthrough there. On 21 March they began their last great onslaught. Initially successful, it could not be sustained, and major counter-attacks by French, British and American forces starting in June turned the tide, leading to Germany’s surrender on 11 November 1918.

Lasker concludes his tract by saying “Our noble dead fought and died for the sake of humanity. It will be written on their memorials, and people will sing their praises in future centuries: In the fight against those who almost enslaved the whole world, they saved freedom.” This is outrageous hyperbole and florid rhetorical extravagance. The victorious Western allies did not enslave anyone, and many peoples who had been unhappy subjects of the Central Powers — Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Slavs, Arabs, Lebanese etc. — as well as the Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians and Poles under Tsarist Russia, attained at least partial, or in many cases full national autonomy.

A Way In Which Lasker Was Right

And yet, no matter how wrong Lasker was in all these arguments and predictions, there is a sense in which he might be considered very much in the right, though for reasons he knew nothing about in 1915. Other than the war not happening at all, the best outcome may well have been a quick German victory, according to a very interesting book, *What If?*, a collection of essays by military historians on various might-have-beens ranging from Greeks versus Persians in 480 B.C. to Nationalist Chinese versus Communists in 1946.³⁷

In “The What-Ifs of 1914,” historian Robert Cowley envisions a scenario where the Germans adhere more closely to the 1906 version of the Schlieffen Plan and achieve a quick knockout in the west. The result would have been hard on France, which Cowley says “would pay huge reparations, enough to keep it underarmed and angry for another generation. Anti-Semitism, ever the bane of defeated European nations, would become a problem for it and not Germany.”

³⁵ Gilbert, op. cit., p. 391.

³⁶ Gilbert, op. cit., p. 395

³⁷ Cowley, Robert (ed.), *What If? The World’s Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*, Berkley Books, New York, 1999.

He points out, though, that “There is a brighter side, though, beyond the survival of the million Frenchmen who might die in the next four years (not to mention many of the best and brightest of the other combatants) ... [We] would have skipped a more sinister legacy, and one that has permanently scarred our lives: the brutalization that trench warfare, with its mass killings, visited on an entire generation. What men like Adolf Hitler learned in that first Holocaust, they would, as John Keegan has written, ‘repeat twenty years later in every corner of Europe. From their awful cult of death the continent is still recovering.’”³⁸

Cowley also describes how, after the initial German western offensive had stalled, Moltke, on whom rested much of the blame for this failure, was replaced as army chief of staff by Erich von Falkenhayn. Cowley writes “On November 18th [1914], after the disaster at Ypres [*in which German forces suffered about 130,000 casualties*], Falkenhayn, deeply depressed, met in Berlin with the German chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg. He told Bethmann flatly that the war could not be won ... If a negotiated settlement of some sort wasn’t concluded, the country faced a dreary prospect: ‘The danger of slowly exhausting ourselves.’ Bethmann-Hollweg turned him down. He was still convinced, he said, that Germany could and would win the war.”³⁹

How things might have gone if Falkenhayn’s advice was taken, and a peace settlement reached in late 1914 or early 1915, is pondered in a brief companion essay, “The Armistice of Desperation” by Dennis E. Showalter, president of The Society for Military History. He writes:

The titular victor is unimportant. Europe’s great powers undertook World War I for negative, not positive, reasons. Even Germany’s war aims in 1914 were a cobbled-together post-facto shopping list. The scales of destruction and disorder accompanying a quick end to an unwanted apocalypse were likely to generate at all levels a renewed sense of Europe as a community ... International order would be stabilized ... Germany and Russia in particular were likely to undertake domestic housecleanings. In the Second Reich, the diminished prestige of kaiser and army favored the introduction of genuine parliamentary government. Russia, never suffering the exsanguination of 1915 to 1916, was in a position to continue its economic and political development.

As for Vladimir Lenin, in this alternate world he would have died an exile in Switzerland.⁴⁰ Adolf Hitler became a familiar figure in Munich’s bohemian circles ... It was a Europe safe for men with briefcases and potbellies, whose younger generation occasionally bemoaned its ordinariness. But while memories of the Six Months’ War of 1914 to 1915 endured, older heads thanked God and the fates that they no longer lived in interesting times.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 277-287

³⁹ Cowley, op. cit., p. 285

⁴⁰ Cowley concurs in this view, saying on page 286, “Lenin would have remained sulking in impoverished Swiss exile. There would have been no German-arranged sealed train to carry him and his political pestilence to the Finland Station. It follows that without Lenin there would have been no Stalin, no purges, no gulags, no Cold War.”

⁴¹ Cowley, op. cit., p. 293

But of course no such outcome occurred. The war dragged for more than four years, claiming anywhere from 15 to 24 million lives, about half of them civilians.⁴² That the toll was so high was due in part to the stubborn attitude Lasker urged upon his countrymen.

On the whole, *The Self-Deceptions of Our Enemies* must be considered unworthy of Lasker, an embarrassment for a man of his high intellect and learning. He cannot be faulted for supporting his homeland in time of war, but he must be faulted for writing such a biased, gratuitously offensive and factually inaccurate propaganda tract. It seems that in 1915, no one harbored more self-deceptions than Lasker himself.

⁴² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I_casualties. It bears mentioning that one of the civilian casualties was the Viennese chess master Carl Schlechter, who had nearly won the world title from Lasker in 1910. He died of pneumonia and starvation in Budapest in December 1918, age 44.