



PROJECT MUSE®

Causes of War

Bertrand Russell

Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies, Volume 43, Number 1,
Summer 2023, pp. 83-84 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rss.2023.a904088>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/904088>

CAUSES OF WAR

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Introduced by ANDREW G. BONE
Russell Research Centre / McMaster U.
BONE@MCMASTER.CA

Russell's authorship of this anonymously published entry in *An Encyclopaedia of Pacifism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), pp. 12–13, has only just come to light, thanks to the recent sale at auction of a letter to him from Aldous Huxley. If this determination had been made earlier, the text would have featured in *Papers 21*. In acknowledging receipt of “Causes of War” on 14 December 1936, Huxley, the volume’s editor, also wondered whether Russell would like to examine his subject “at greater length—say in 1,000 words” (internet print, RA3 I,850). The original editorial plan, to which Russell must have adhered, allocated a single page to each topic, which ranged alphabetically from “Armaments, Private Manufacture of”, to “Women in Modern War, Position of”. But as Huxley explained, such compression was “impossible” for some subjects. Russell evidently declined the offer (no reply is extant), for his published contribution amounted to 300 words only. It nevertheless lucidly distils a complex and contested issue. In the spirit of the publishing enterprise Russell had joined, “Causes of War” is also somewhat didactic. Yet there is little hint of either the psychological predispositions towards war he also regarded as crucial, or the absolute pacifist doctrines he had recently embraced and elaborated in *Which Way to Peace?* (1936). The latter ground, however, was well covered elsewhere, in entries on “Force” and “Non-Violence”, most explicitly, but also in those disparaging armed revolution, for example, or the use of sanctions to enforce international law.

The two cross references at the end of Russell’s entry are probably not authorial. The text presented below is the only known version, from the cheap softcover edition of the *Encyclopaedia* (priced 6d) published by Chatto & Windus under the auspices of the Peace Pledge Union—the British pacifist group of which both Huxley and Russell were sponsors, along with, in all likelihood, other of the work’s anonymous contributors.

CAUSES OF WAR

The main causes of war are of three kinds (1) the pursuit of wealth, (2) the pursuit of glory, (3) the advocacy of a creed. Usually all three are combined in varying proportions, as, for example in the Book of Joshua. The economic motive has various forms:

- (a) Occupation of fruitful territory—e.g. Whites and Indians in United States.
- (b) Plunder—e.g. Romans in Asia Minor; Cortez and Pizarro.
- (c) Trade—e.g. English and Dutch in seventeenth century.
- (d) Markets and fields for investment—most modern imperialist wars.
- (e) Raw materials—e.g. Japan in China, France and Germany as regards Lorraine.

The notion of glory is usually dynastic or governmental—for example, the ancient Assyrians and Persians, and eighteenth-century wars so far as the Continent of Europe is concerned. But it can be made popular by propaganda, and always has been made so since the French Revolution.

Creed wars may be religious or political; usually they are both. They almost always also have economic motives. The early Mohammedans, for example, had economic motives (a) and (b); the Protestants wished to secure church lands and revenues; and so on. The English Civil War combined religious and political motives in equal measure. The Albigensian crusade was, on the part of the instigators, more economic than political. The French revolutionary wars, the American Civil War, and the various civil wars since 1815, involved important politico-economic issues, and were all, in a greater or less degree, creed wars.

The main causes predisposing to modern war are: first, the competition between States for markets and raw materials; secondly, the competition between classes as regards the distribution of the national wealth. These two causes are intertwined, because different governments stand for different economic systems. (See *Economic Reform and Pacifism; Education and Peace.*)
