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Academics at war – Bertrand Russell and Cambridge

The University and the outbreak of war

The thoughts and actions of the Cambridge mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell are central to this book. Russell was able to articulate with extraordinary clarity a fully humanistic opposition to the Great War and his ideas on war and the prevention of it directly affected the thinking of other individuals through his books, articles and speeches. On occasion, Russell’s concepts were echoed spontaneously by other like-minded people – often from dissimilar backgrounds or situations. Although Russell enjoyed personal involvement with Bloomsbury (prompted by their Cambridge links and common aesthetics), he was able and willing to strike out intellectually and practically where most others faltered. At times during the war’s course, Russell was truly a man alone, despite his seemingly secure position in 1914 amidst the Cambridge University establishment. It is interesting, then, to observe how that academic establishment reacted to the arrival of war.

On 1 August 1914 the Cambridge Daily News carried several comments by J.J. Thomson, the acute Master of Trinity College and future President of the Royal Society. He warned that ‘War upon [Germany] in the interests of Serbia and Russia will be a sin against civilisation’, while accurately predicting that, ‘if by reason of honourable obligations we be unhappily involved in war, patriotism might still our mouths’. This comment was a fair representation of the view of the academic establishment towards the possibility of armed conflict dominating Europe. To one side of this view was the opinion that war was morally wrong and would slow down dramatically the natural processes of learning (and even perhaps reverse this process) while creating barriers against international academic research and cooperation. On the other side was trepidation about the effect of the war on domestic affairs and in particular the smooth running of the country’s principal centres of knowledge and learning.

An early indication of fears of increased militarism was the public debate over military training at Cambridge University in the late spring of 1914. The respected Cambridge academic A.C. Benson wrote to The Times criticising a proposal of compulsory military training at national level. Despite years of...
pressure from various interest groups and powerful figures, most notably the aged Field Marshal, Lord Roberts, the country had never accepted the practice of compulsory military service. Benson attacked the proposed (compulsory) military training as being an interference with liberty and was in turn attacked in print by the Master of Jesus College for taking this line. Benson then replied to his critic in an article in the *Cambridge Magazine* stating:

The Master says, a little crudely, that perhaps I shall be ready to shout with the crowd, when the crowd is large enough. May this indicate an uneasy suspicion in his mind that the crowd in whose interest I am already feebly bleating, may turn out to be the larger after all?

Benson also criticised the University for using its authority to attempt to impose a private, internal scheme of compulsion, a matter which Benson felt was outside the natural province of the institution. He accepted that the country as a whole could impose such a scheme on the University but not the other way around. It was ‘a wholly undesirable precedent’, he felt, that a minority of residents could use the University Senate to impose such a scheme on the majority, most of whom, Benson predicted, would regard it with disfavour. He added that any such scheme, were it to be introduced, would be unworkable and bristling with not only administrative difficulties but also those of a more political nature.

The debate over personal freedoms in Cambridge did not die down with the coming of the war. By October 1914 there was great concern that undue pressure was being put upon Freshmen to join the Officer Training Corps (OTC). Apart from the fact that such pressure on those forced to act against real inclination would produce sub-standard officers, any such inducement was anyway ‘illegal and unjustifiable’ in the eyes of some. The war’s immediate effect seemed to be that of galvanising formerly latent energies whilst subtly cutting away at personal liberty of choice, a fact that took some time to be fully appreciated in the dramatic pace of the opening weeks of war. ‘We are no longer half of us half-asleep’, proclaimed the University-linked *Cambridge Magazine* at the start of the autumn term, ‘We no longer read only the sporting news or no news at all. We have become interested in the present, and to some extent in the past, and some of us are already preparing to speculate on the future …’ Meanwhile, the slogan of the University OTC programme had become ‘No compulsion: No slackers’, a compromise which seemed to suit the mood of the moment. The only reported problem of recruitment and training was a fear that a sense of the incongruous would overcome ‘stolid and sober’ patriotism. It was felt that some would be adversely affected when ordered about by those who were perceived as mentally inferior.

The *Cambridge Magazine* appealed for an overview of the situation; ‘We officers are dealing not with a raw troop of Walworth mechanicals but a volunteer corps of University gentlemen – mutual sympathy and compromise should be the word for all’. More effective training would be achieved by an officer or undergraduate non-commissioned officer than by a drill sergeant who was likely
to be either too good-natured or pusillanimous. ‘After all’, the magazine stated, a touch reluctantly, ‘in war it is the man of action and not the man of intellect who assumes the lead’. In tandem with the debate on the problems of training, the controversy over the question of compulsory OTC units at the University also continued, with more letters appearing in *The Times* and an article in *The Sportsman* warning that any compulsion of academia would be illegal without the consent of Parliament and that, ‘The business of the country will come to a standstill if every young man who cannot limp or blink is to be frightened out of going on with his normal career because others say, “That fellow ought to be forming fours”’.6

This line of argument was later picked up and amplified by the *Cambridge Magazine*, which was rapidly assuming the mantle of principal commentator and, in some cases, adjudicator in debates and controversy arising from a University attempting on the one hand to continue its academic life and on the other being ‘at war’. In the confusion and uncertainty of the first few months of the conflict, the *Cambridge Magazine* stood largely for a calm and fair view of events, allowing as far as possible both sides of any debate arising out of these events to have their say, in contrast with most of the national press. Unlike many university journals, it was serious in tone, and this was reflected by the scarcity of pictures, photographs or cartoons appearing in its pages. The editor was the mercurial C.K. Ogden – described as ‘an ugly little man, clever and quite interested in philosophy’7 – and a steady khaki stream of uniformed ex-students made their way up to his office while back on leave with pieces that he had persuaded them to write for him about the war. Ogden was careful to print both sides of experience in the field.

The first article written from direct knowledge of the Western Front, by W.G. Gabain, was breathlessly excited and patriotic in tone; however the second, ‘From Mons to the Marne on a Motor Bike’ by J.K. Stevens of St John’s College, was more reflective, even at this early stage of events. ‘War is indeed, an education in itself’, reported Stevens:

and the facts which it teaches remain indelible and can never be forgotten. At times, however, it seems as if I had passed through a bad dream and often I can still see before me the ghastly work done by shrapnel and bullet, and ask myself the question, ‘what have these men done to deserve such a death?’ Perhaps diplomatists will answer.8

The *Cambridge Magazine* also commented on the odd contemporary cultural event – the autumn exhibition of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers at the Grosvenor Gallery, which was described as a ‘gladdening ray of sunshine’ penetrating the prevailing ‘gloom’ of the general situation and was hailed as proof that not all current creative inspiration was the product of the ‘sad and stirring’ backdrop of war.

More importantly, Ogden tried to keep abreast of the full range of contemporary views on the conflict by commissioning articles from and about the
stance of prominent intellectuals in relation to the war, such as one in response to the well-known pacifist Norman Angell’s pamphlet for the Union of Democratic Control, *Shall this War End German Militarism?* The article in the *Cambridge Magazine*, ‘What Norman Angell Thinks Now’, bewailed the fact that it was only after the outbreak of war that people had begun to appreciate what Angell had been saying for the three years previously: namely, that war was an anachronism and evil in itself. The author of the article then followed this with his own warning that, far from ending militarism abroad – ‘misled by the catchword that we must “smash” Germany’ – Britain, in the midst of war-fever, was in danger of frustrating her aims and actually creating militarism, both at home and abroad. This cautionary note, written less than three months after the commencement of hostilities, was a typical example of the general level-headedness and foresight of the tone of the *Cambridge Magazine* during the months of conflict.

Another article in the national press under analysis and hence given extra prominence by the *Magazine* in the first few weeks of the war was one from the *Labour Leader* which had been written by the Honorary Treasurer of the *Cambridge Magazine* Shilling Fund for Belgian Refugee Students, Bertrand Russell.9 In his article, ‘War: the Cause and Cure’, Russell had highlighted the fact that in the ‘sudden vertigo’ of war normal values became twisted or inverted. Any form of reason had come to be seen as treachery while mercy was now regarded by most as a strain of weakness. He looked ahead to the situation after the war when, in order to maximise the chances of a secure and lasting peace, the light of democracy had to be ‘insistent’ coupled with a lessening of the fear and jealousy which in the pre-war world had seemed to be the only common threads linking the Great Powers.

The coverage given to Russell’s ideas elicited a swift response. A week later, W.E. Heitland agreed that, ‘International relations will no doubt need to be placed on a better footing, if a way can be found, when this gruesome war is over’, but, he continued, so difficult and widespread was the problem of democracy and international relations, that ‘it will require gradual moral change far beyond the power of any constitutional reforms to being’.10 There would be no straight and easy road towards changing the habits and spirits of nations. If this far-sighted warning had appeared in the national press (which was unlikely, since the national press tended to pounce on the day-to-day events of the conflict at this early stage, expecting a short war) the general reader would probably would have assumed the author was referring to Germany and to a lesser extent her allies in effecting a change of moral climate in the post-war world (after Germany had been defeated, of course). Heitland, however, did not point the finger of blame solely at Germany; his foresight was also fair. He merely pointed out that the international treaty system had ultimately brought about only distrust and other base emotions amongst all nations, not just the Central Powers.
In his reply to Heitland, Russell emphasised that it was the negative emotion of fear which had been brought forth by the bristling of international relations in the years before 1914. ‘The sacrifices demanded from individuals’, Russell wrote, ‘in Germany and Austria, just as much as here, are so great that they cannot be attributed wholly to desire for conquest; and I think fear is the principle motive with ordinary citizens, though, of course, not the sole motive’.11

This calm, intellectual debate on the emotional causes of the war and speculation as to the moral tone of the post-war world occurred in October 1914, the same month that British troops were still arriving on the continent both from Britain and around the world – such as the 7th Division, made up of regular soldiers pulled back from stations around the Empire. With the war of movement by now largely at an end and the First Battle of Ypres raging, the chance of it all being over by Christmas had lessened considerably. While the media whipped up a storm of patriotic energy, a correspondent from the Union Society, signing himself only ‘Depressed’, wrote to the Cambridge Magazine supporting Russell (and the Cambridge branch of the Union of Democratic Control) with a suggestion that the foreign policy of nations be put under the control of the majority of the people constituting these nations, who would naturally, after the experiences of the war, oppose conflict and maintain future peace. Furthermore, he foresaw that, ‘a time will shortly come when anyone who has anything constructive to say and can rise above the blustering ferocity which is so much in evidence just now, will be sure of a ready hearing in Cambridge’.12

Bertrand Russell – the trials of an individual philosophy

Many years later, in his autobiography, Bertrand Russell compared his pre-war academic life with his experiences after 1914 and commented that the two halves of the same life were as sharply divided as Faust’s before and after his meeting with Mephistopheles. The war turned him – an aristocratic academic fast approaching middle age – into a whirlwind of activity and ‘the most eloquent moral spokesman of his day’.13 His life changed suddenly. In June 1914 he had returned from a visit to America, and he spent most of July in a Cambridge rife with talk of possible war. During the final days of peace Russell collected the signatures of over sixty Professors and Fellows in Cambridge for a statement supporting British neutrality in the coming hostilities. This he sent off to the Manchester Guardian, though, ironically, the effect of the statement was lessened considerably when most of the signatories changed their minds once Britain had actually declared war.14

To Russell, armed conflict was, ‘so irrational as to be literally unthinkable’.15 Although later in the war he might rethink and reshape his particular pacifism and his views on the pacifism of those around him, Russell’s basic opposition to the war from the outbreak of hostilities was fundamental and stemmed directly from deep personal conviction. He had inherited from his liberal, aristocratic
background strong beliefs in progress, toleration and fair play as well as a heightened regard for the values of civilisation and the power of reason. Civilisation was necessary to provide the cultural springboard whereby an individual might reach his or her full potential, and reason was the tool by which people could be convinced of the rightness of this and other concepts. Linked to the individual’s chance for betterment was a belief in the sanctity of personal liberty within the State; states which, if they were civilised, would rely on negotiation rather than force to provide solutions to disputes between countries. Most of Russell’s beliefs rested on a bedrock of assumed peace. For any advancement to occur, in anything from the individual condition to international relations, a background of peace was ‘a precondition, as well as good in itself’.16

Russell suffered mental stress not only due to the onset of war itself but also because he felt so isolated in his opposition to it. ‘I was living at the highest possible emotional tension’, he later remembered, ‘The prospect [of war] filled me with horror, but what filled me with even more horror was the fact that the anticipation of carnage was delightful to something like ninety per-cent of the population. I had to revise my views on human nature’.17 This new, personal analysis of social interactivity would become his Principles of Social Reconstruction, and its genesis occurred very shortly after the start of the war, a period of loneliness for Russell and, as he remarked to his friend Lucy Donnelly, moral upheaval. He commented to her in August 1914 that, ‘Events of a month ago seem to belong to a previous experience. All our hopes and faiths and foolish confidences are gone flaming down into hell … Hardly anyone seems to remember common humanity’.18 The terror of this spurred Russell to action. At the time he was writing to Lucy Donnelly, he was also outlining to Lady Ottoline Morrell his plans. ‘It seems to me’, he wrote, ‘the only thing one can do now is to think how wars come and how they might be avoided, and then, after the peace, do all one can to bring other people round’. Thinking for the future was vital now that the present seemed a time ‘in which we are powerless’.19

As Cambridge turned into a wartime community with two thousand troops rapidly arriving to be stationed in former students’ lodgings, Russell’s sense of disorientation was increased when he was put out of his rooms to make way for medical facilities in Neville’s Court, and he lamented the war’s probing intrusion into his life: ‘having that beautiful place filled with the horror of war’.20 All he could do after the failure of his petition to the Manchester Guardian was send a letter to the radical Nation which the editor, H.W. Massingham, printed reluctantly under the heading ‘The Rights Of War’. In this article, using language the strength of which had previously been alien to him, Russell declared, ‘Against the vast majority of my countrymen, even at this moment, in the name of humanity and civilisation, I protest against our share in the destruction of Germany’. He warned that the population had, in only a few days, been hurled ‘down the steep slope to primitive barbarism, letting loose … the instincts of hatred and blood-lust against which the whole fabric of society has been raised’.
While ‘reason and mercy are swept away in one great flood of hatred’, innocent young men of all nationalities, ‘blindly obedient to the word of command’, were being mown down by machine-gun fire. For only ‘dim abstractions’ concealed the fact that, ‘the enemy are men, like ourselves, neither better nor worse – men who love their homes and the sunshine and all the simple pleasures of common lives’. Yet all clear-sightedness and reasoning was consumed in the ‘flaming death of our civilisation and our hopes’ brought about by emotions of greed and hatred fanned to white heat by politicians and press.21

Russell watched the undergraduates, now in uniform, undergoing their training and lamented that, ‘it is so dreadful that such a force of idealism and self-sacrifice should go into such a channel’.22 The conflict, to Russell, was diverting the creative energies of peace towards the malign purposes required by a country on a war-footing. He recognised that the young men whom he taught were now men of diverted promise, ‘in whom the creative energy existed that would have realised in the world some part at least of the imagined beauty by which they lived’. They had been swept up by the circumstances of the war and of the few whom Russell expected would survive, ‘it is to be feared that many will have lost the life of the spirit, that hope will have died, that energy will be spent, and that the years to come will be only a weary journey towards the grave’. When pointing the finger of blame at the elderly teachers in whom, according to him, not only had there been a ‘failure to live generously out of the warmth of the heart’, but also a failure to recognise this fault, Russell, beset by feelings of guilt and frustration, was not averse to including himself in this group. ‘Let us come out of this death’, he wrote, ‘for it is we (the old) who are dead, not the young men who had died through our fear of life. Their very ghosts have more life than we … out of their ghosts must come life.’23

To Russell, any action to promote ‘the greater good’ of common humanity as well as enlightened happiness and social progress was justified, even war itself in some cases. As one of his biographers has pointed out, Russell was a consequentialist when it came to the justification of war.24 Although he opposed war, and specifically this war, he was not a ‘total’ pacifist, as he admitted in an interview with Royden Harrison (undertaken shortly before Russell’s death in 1970) during which he commented that his approach had always been utilitarian and a case of balance between the effects of conflict or surrender. He had earlier written that, during the first few weeks of the war, ‘I was myself tortured by patriotism. The successes of the Germans before the battle of the Marne were horrible to them. I desired the defeat of Germany as ardently as any retired Colonel.’ Nevertheless, he set aside his love of England (‘a very difficult renunciation’) as his personal feelings were ‘swallowed up by the magnitude of the tragedy’, and he realised that there were higher priorities at stake.

In the case of the Great War, Russell,

... never had a moment’s doubt as to what I must do ... when War came I felt as if I heard the voice of God. I knew it was my business to protest, however futile protest
might be. My whole nature was involved. As a lover of truth the national propaganda of all the belligerent nations sickened me. As a lover of civilisation, the return to barbarism appalled me. As a man of thwarted parental feeling, the massacre of the young wrung my heart. I hardly supposed that much good would come of opposing the War, but I felt that for the honour of human nature those who were not swept off their feet should show that they stood firm.25

Alternatively, in some other situations of conflict, Russell believed that if the results of a war were promoting some greater good, such as the hypothetical spread of European ‘civilisation’ as a consequence of colonial wars of expansion or the repelling of an aggressive invading army, then it could sometimes be justified.26 However, Russell realised that the majority of war’s consequences were mostly harmful in their effect upon mankind and thus made conflict very hard to justify in the majority of circumstances, if at all. Any justification of violence had to be balanced against war’s impact on society, an impact that in the majority of cases was likely to be detrimental.

As the State reorganised ready for war, some of those opposed to the coming of war also organised themselves – most notably in Russell’s sphere, the Union of Democratic Control. This group, born of meetings at the Morrell’s in London’s Bedford Square in September 1914, was not a pacifist organisation, though the jingoistic Northcliffe press soon labelled them ‘pro-German’; rather, it was aligned more towards principles shared with Russell, whose mind, according to the later recollections of the writer Mary Agnes Hamilton, dominated the group’s thinking at that time. Talk centred around a distrust of politicians and ‘secret diplomacy’, support for an international peace body and opposition to the growth of ‘Prussianism’ and decline of personal liberty in wartime Britain. Any similarity of aims between Russell and the UDC was only of a general nature however. Russell was somewhat sceptical of most of the initial UDC leaders involved – he famously described them to Lady Ottoline as ‘eight fleas talking of building a pyramid’ and later remembered, ‘I was interested to observe that the pacifist politicians were more concerned with the question of which of them should lead the anti-war movement than with the actual work against the war.’27

Russell was always distrustful of politics, especially during war. ‘I don’t want to be in Parliament; it seems to me one is freer outside, and can achieve more’, he wrote to Lady Ottoline in November 1914, concluding, ‘I should want … to be unfettered in saying what I believed.’ A significant proportion of the initial founders of the UDC were from an Independent Labour Party background and Russell also commented that he would only ‘swallow socialism for the sake of peace’ in order to better plan for a secure post-war world and fight the current tyranny of the war.28 In July of the following year he declined to join the Independent Labour Party when it launched a large campaign to recruit new members for the UDC, and by the summer of 1916 he was protesting to his mistress Constance Malleson that socialism did not adequately embody the spirit of freedom in which he placed so much value.29
For all his distrust of the leadership of the UDC Russell recognised their similar goals, and he attended the first meeting of the General Council of the UDC on 17 November 1914 as well as the first public meeting of the Cambridge branch (which had initially met in Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson’s rooms at King’s College) on 4 March 1915 – Russell was later to become President of this branch. By October of that year he found himself a member of the General Council of the UDC.

By 1915, Russell had been totally subsumed by the war, both mentally and physically, and he wrote in May that:

I have been without any personal feelings at all – all private affections seemed swallowed up in horror. And my own inward struggle to keep hold of reason and love used up my force … England, Europe, Civilisation, are more real and vivid to me than oneself or anybody at such times – all my passion goes to them.

This culmination of mental upheaval and final recognition of the war’s effect upon his personal priorities was to mark the start of Russell’s more independent line of thought and action. The change in his position can be marked at roughly the same time as he was publicly able to sum up his private musings on the first year of the war in his paper, ‘The Philosophy of Pacifism’, delivered at Caxton Hall in London 8–9 July 1915 as one of a series of lectures gathered under the overall title, ‘The Pacifist Philosophy of Life’.32

Once he realised that there was little chance of bringing an early end to the war, Russell commenced his work on the psychology behind not only the war in progress, but also war in general. Some of the results of this early work appeared as articles in the various newspapers and more radical journals willing to publish them, as Russell’s protesting voice was seldom heard in the popular press. His study (which eventually crystallised as the lectures constituting Principles of Social Reconstruction, given between 18 January and 7 March 1916) acted as Russell’s personal opposition to the war, drawing on his academic background and intrinsic pacifistic and forward-looking feelings. This formulation of his personal stance was largely isolated from his more practical day-to-day work with the UDC, despite sharing similar objectives. Russell publicly analysed the reasons behind the war-mood which had swept over the nation and so horrified him in his article ‘Why Nations Love War’, written for Norman Angell’s journal War and Peace, pointing out factors such as the herd mentality of populations stimulated by patriotism, a general suspicion of those whose customs were foreign resulting in collective hostility to strangers (which Russell saw as the root of the love of war) and, most powerful of all, a desire to let loose activities which were instinctive but normally kept in check by the restraints of a civilised life, such as the avowed Bloomsbury goals of pursuit of goodness and the contemplation of beauty in life as well as art.

According to Russell, modern patriotism was the stimulus upon which primitive instincts towards conflict, such as hostility to strangers, depended and, as such, had become an ideal (however false) which must always generate strife at
some point. For Russell, the ‘ideal’ of patriotism was only partial and inadequate and hence not valid. This ideal, being imperfect and fragile, could then be more easily removed in its role as a stimulus to aggression. Thus any further risk of war could be similarly removed.

Russell also placed his faith in the individual. He commented that, ‘a stable peace can only be attained by a process of popular education and by a gradual change in the standards of value accepted by men who are considered to be civilised’. As a starting point, Russell had faith that belief in most of the old, barbarous standards of value, such as the championing of the rightness of physical force, ‘has largely died out as between individuals in a civilised country’.33

As early as March 1915, Russell pointed out to an American readership in Atlantic Monthly the evils of secret international relations, national pride and mistaken fear as well as the virtues of diverting public opinion away from aggressive instincts and the establishment of machinery for settling international disputes. He pointed out that the rapid development of industry and commerce stretching back to the previous century had resulted in a ‘savage community’ in which the natural instincts of man had been left behind by the rapidly changing nature of the prevailing materialism. This lack of balance between instincts and real needs had created a system of false beliefs underpinned by unrecognised amoral passions, and it was these which the pacifist found himself in opposition to. The task of the pacifist, according to Russell, was to highlight the false-ness of the prevailing beliefs in order to expose the amorality of those emotions lying beneath. This target of false belief was to be found embedded in the essential conflict of interests between nations and could be easily recognised ‘by any candid mind’.34 Russell placed his faith in the common individual, ideally unaffected by war-fever and false patriotism. The war corrupted statesmen, whatever their nationality; ‘What is true here in England is equally true in Germany. There, too, those who decide the nation’s policy, being men accustomed to power, have a far greater lust for dominion than is to be found in the ordinary citizen’.35

Russell continually appealed to the common humanity and collective wisdom of the individuals who constituted ‘the patient populations’, while bypassing the rulers and statesmen in whom he felt pride had destroyed individual humanity. This type of appeal is evident in Russell’s article ‘Can England and Germany be Reconciled After the War?’ which he wrote for the Cambridge Review in early 1915 and in which he postulated the idea of a post-war international navy to guard against potential future arms rivalry.36 This was Russell writing on a local, academic level in territory he thought he knew well but in which he felt increasingly isolated and under attack from fellow academics – such as Professor Sorley, who had publicly rejected Russell’s call for reconciliation with Germany in the Cambridge Review since, according to Sorley, that country had been responsible, if the media were to be believed, for the bayonet-ing of children and other atrocities. Russell was forced to defend himself in a
letter to the *Review* which was published under the heading of ‘Mr. Russell’s Reply to his Critics’. He upheld his naval ideas whilst pointing to the ‘Christmas Truce’ of 1914 and the difficulty of keeping the soldiers of both sides from fraternising as an example of instinctive common humanity overcoming the jingoistic prejudice of the media. ‘If Professor Sorley believes this’, Russell wrote of the bayoneting rumour, ‘it seems surprising he should not hate them [the Germans]; but it is not surprising that they should hate us, if we believe such things’.

Instead of concentrating on the actions of the politicians and statesmen at the centre of attempts to make international relations more accountable to ordinary people, Russell focused on the ordinary people themselves and the war’s effect upon them. ‘In conflicts between civilised nations’, he wrote, ‘whatever difference there may be in the political aims of the government, there is probably little difference in the intrinsic value of individual men.’ It was some of these ‘individual men’ on whom the war’s effect would be most devastating, he declared. The more sensitive and humane type of soldier was prone to nervous collapse, in some cases so complete as to require months of medical treatment, and in others producing a terrible listlessness and lack of creative effort. He warned that ‘It is to be feared that those in whom the war does not produce a callous brutality will be broken in will and incapable of playing their part in the national life.’ This was what mattered to Russell above all else after watching his undergraduates march off to a war they had no part in starting, only to return unable perhaps to complete their studies and fulfil their potential or to fit back into ‘normal life’ at all. Some, Russell lamented, had never returned at all and had been robbed of all chances for future creative development.

To Russell, the whole climate of war was wrong, including the inversion of former values that he experienced all around him. ‘The moral effects of war are almost wholly bad’, he lectured, ‘Hatred, cruelty, injustice, untruthfulness, love of violence, are all recognised as vices in time of peace; but as soon as war breaks out, they are universally praised and stimulated, while lukewarmness in any one of them is denounced as a form of treachery.’ This theoretical side to opposing the war was to Russell as important as practical opposition – the two went hand in hand. He wrote to Lady Ottoline in July 1915 at the time of his ‘Philosophy of Pacifism’ lecture at Caxton Hall that, ‘What is wrong with mere opposition to war is that it is negative. One must try to find other outlets for people’s wildness’, and although he described the pacifists around him as ‘an awful crew’, he was referring here mainly to the UDC with whom he was becoming disillusioned, especially over their concentration on the problems of post-war international diplomacy and seeming inability to match theory with action. He had commented to Lady Ottoline before his lecture that, ‘I think I will make friends with the No-Conscription people. The U.D.C. is too mild and troubled with irrelevancies.’

Russell complained that the attitude of people around him was ‘so Sunday-Schooly’ and that they lacked the necessary ‘intensity of will’ to be effective in
his eyes. Indeed, he felt as if their attitude was perhaps adversely affecting his own, as if ‘some great force for good were imprisoned within me by scepticism and cynicism … How passionately I long that one could break through the prison walls of one’s own nature.’ Above all, despite his UDC activities, ‘it all makes one feel very lonely’, he admitted, acknowledging his feelings of frustration and the more isolated position towards which his individual position on the war was drawing him.

Russell was attracted to the No Conscription Fellowship mainly due to its firm stance over the issue of compulsion, an issue which he was firmly against and which the UDC had decided not to oppose. In January 1916, the month that the Military Service Act and hence conscription became law, Russell wrote to Lady Ottoline that he felt the situation was hopeless, as the nation was clearly still in the mood for a victory at all costs, and he personally felt helpless until the general mood of the country changed – a change he hoped the eventual unpopularity of conscription would achieve. For the time being, he wrote, ‘The whole conscription outlook seems utterly black. The conscriptionists have all had the cleverness and all the driving force’. He concluded (and affirmed a personal creed), ‘Politics is no good just now – one must work through individuals’.

Russell came to develop a great respect for the leading individuals of the N.C.F. such as Fenner Brockway and Clifford Allen for, although he would not in peacetime have been in total political alignment with them (they both came from staunch, journalistic/Labour backgrounds), a shared opposition to war united them, and he was drawn to their strength of independence and moral fortitude set against an overwhelming tide of adverse opinion. Russell had observed the work accomplished by the organisation since its early beginnings in November 1914 and began to work officially for the N.C.F. as soon as men above military age were permitted to join in spring 1916.

By the first half of 1916 Russell had moved on again from his position a year earlier. From defining his own stance on the war, he now took full charge of his own destiny within the anti-war movement and put his concept of theory and action going hand-in-hand into full effect: he switched to the N.C.F., he worked on Principles of Social Reconstruction and he continued to author letters and articles such as ‘The Danger to Civilisation’, which appeared in America. In this article, Russell again pointed out that the war was leading civilisation towards self-destruction (this was an extension of his private early fears, expressed to Lady Ottoline, that the war had to be halted, ‘before the tradition of civilisation has died out’), but the writing was now backed up by an obvious weight of experience and associated continuity of thought. He delved below the crossfire of blame and political diplomacy, warning that, ‘There is some risk of forgetting the good of individuals under the stress of danger to the state: yet, in the long run, the good of the state cannot be secured if the individuals have lost their vigour’, while declaring that the State
existed only in the separate lives of its citizens which now were directly threatened both at home and abroad.

Russell also looked to the near future and warned that the longer the war continued, the more conflict would be viewed as a natural state of affairs, with a corresponding increase in general callousness, cynicism and despair as well as the sinister growth of an unquestioning passive obedience towards those who continued to head the war effort. Above all, in Russell’s eyes, the conflict meant, ‘humane feeling decays’. Hence he was strident in his warning that, ‘War is perpetuating this moral murder in the souls of vast millions of combatants; every day many are passing over to the dominion of the brute by acts that will kill what is best within them.’ He concluded by actualising the collective effect of the individual ‘moral murder’ that the war was responsible for: ‘If the war does not come to an end soon, it is to be feared that we are at the end of a great epoch, and that the future of Europe will not be on a level with its past.’

With continuing articles such as ‘The Danger to Civilisation’ combined with his activities for both the UDC and N.C.F. and increased celebrity resulting from this work (not to mention his forthcoming very public prosecution), by the early summer of 1916, with Principles of Social Conscience completed, Russell had thus moulded a public anti-war face which gave shape to his internal fusing of intellect and passion. Once the lectures constituting Principles of Social Reconstruction had been delivered (on Tuesday evenings at Caxton Hall in London between January and March 1916), Russell lost no time in moving again from the theoretical to the practical side of protesting. While on a short post-lecture holiday, Russell was sent an appeal for help from Catherine Marshall, who had come to the N.C.F. from the Women’s International League and who now found herself overwhelmed with work organising the N.C.F. office at 6 St John Street. Russell typically pledged his free time from as soon as he returned to London on 1 April. Marshall chose well, as Russell, who could not be called up due to his age, was able to stand by in readiness to take over positions on the national committee should any members be sent to prison. He also became an associate member and thus able to work immediately on the Associates Political Committee, the initial meeting of which had already taken place while Russell was on holiday. Russell also helped with the liaison between the organisation and Parliament as well as with the ‘converting’ of significant individuals to the cause, such as the Bishop of Oxford (with help from Lady Ottoline).

As well as this work, there were now also the individual cases of men trapped by their consciences under the Military Service Act. The Act made use of the same system of tribunals as the previous Derby scheme, but it was not until the summer of 1916 that proper guidelines for the hearings of conscientious objectors were issued by the War Office. By then, the 2,086 tribunals had already had to deal with almost six thousand objectors, many of whom were now in military hands. To Russell, the whole issue of compulsory military service ‘was the epitome of illiberalism’ and as such, became the main focus of his anti-war
work from the spring of 1916. He described the tribunal system to Lady Ottoline as ‘monstrous’, let alone the hasty legal framework which supported it, which he regarded as ‘bad enough’. ‘It is simply a madness of persecution’, he wrote, the only hopeful aspect being the courage and convictions of the men on trial, the spirit of whom Russell likened to ‘the beginning of a new religion’. He also declared his frustration at not being able to fully experience this new ‘religion’ by not being liable for call-up.

However, his chance to be in the dock soon arrived with his summons, under the Defence of the Realm Act, for admitting authorship, via a letter to The Times, of his article (published anonymously by the N.C.F. on 19 April) defending Ernest Everett, a teacher and member of the Liverpool branch of the N.C.F. sentenced to two year’s hard labour. Russell used the very public opportunity of his hearing before the Lord Mayor on 5 June to declare that, along with respect for the individual conscience, the tradition of liberty was the ‘supreme good’ that Great Britain had produced, the inference being that both were under direct threat from the authorities who, Russell declared, under ‘the stress of fear’ had forgotten these traditional principles, the result of which would be a tyranny of ‘disastrous’ proportions unless the whole system of persecution were resisted. He was then interrupted by a bellicose Lord Mayor who declared he was not prepared to listen to a political speech.

The remainder of Russell’s argument was later published in the Tribunal on 6 July and contained the clearest statement yet of Russell’s personal course of action from then on:

The noblest thing in a man is the spiritual force which enables him to stand firm against the whole world in obedience to his sense of right; and I will never acquiesce in silence while men in whom spiritual force is strong are treated as a danger to the community rather than as its most precious heritage.

Although Russell was pleased with his truncated defence, it was ironic that his public espousal of liberty led directly to a personal loss of freedom and increased persecution in his more private academic world. The authorities moved swiftly and only two days after Russell’s hearing (at which he was convicted and fined £100 with £10 costs) the Foreign Office instructed the British Ambassador in Washington to inform the President of Harvard that Russell would not be issued with a passport and hence would not be able to accept the University’s earlier invitation to lecture there during early 1917. The authorities had not waited for the result of Russell’s appeal, due to take place later in the month and he could only retaliate by writing defiantly to Professor James Woods of the Harvard Philosophy Department that he would not be silenced and that the war was, above all, ‘a war for liberty’. However, this letter was intercepted by the authorities and never reached America.

The curtailing of Russell’s academic life was further advanced by the abrupt decision of the Council of Trinity College on 11th July to remove Russell from his lectureship, despite the fact that only seventeen months previously the College
had offered Russell a Fellowship. The action was taken whilst Russell was conveniently away in Wales on a lecture tour, under the auspices of the N.C.F. and the National Council Against Conscription, where his provocative speeches, such as that given at the Cardiff Friends House on 7 July, cannot have advanced his case with the mostly aged and reactionary dons. Despite this, twenty-two Fellows of Trinity led by mathematician G.H. Hardy signed a memorial to the Council protesting at the action taken. Russell now had no regular occupation and hence made plans for another series of lectures to be financially sponsored by regional Quaker groups. He was freed from his work for the N.C.F. for two days a week in order to prepare.

It was typical of Russell to increase the wider, practical side of his anti-war work in response to the curtailing of his academic activities centred on Cambridge. However, although he had told Lady Ottoline in the years before the war that the University town had become like a home to him and he felt of real use to the young men he so admired, by the middle of the war his attitude had changed. After only a month of war he had complained to Lady Ottoline how remote he now felt from his academic colleagues, how he now found himself, ‘in a different world altogether … there is an orgy of hate, running through all their humanity’. He had then predicted, with chilling accuracy, ‘I fear sooner or later they will attack me … I want to escape.’ He had already experienced tension with his college over his rejection of their offer in February 1915 of a research Fellowship in favour of special leave of two terms duration in order to pursue his anti-war work. He had firmly thrown back the offer made by the College and University to him to nestle further into the academic nest by diving into the mêlée of public anti-war activity.

Russell’s decision to pursue his own path was underlined by his growing sadness and disillusionment with a Cambridge robbed by the war of its formerly cherished characteristics. In the spring of 1916, Russell described the city to Lady Ottoline as ‘dead’ and full of melancholy, apart from ‘bloodthirsty old men hobbling along victorious in the absence of youth’. The pervading influence of the war had managed to penetrate beyond the present, in Russell’s case, and affect the past also:

All that one has cared for is dead … I look round my shelves at the books of mathematics and philosophy that used to seem full of hope and interest, and now leave me utterly cold – the work I have done seems so little – so irrelevant to this world in which we find we are living.49

Russell had known that sooner or later his activities would be challenged in a more forceful manner by the academic establishment than by letters to the Cambridge Magazine, and he was well aware that he was unpopular; ‘I am intensely disliked by the older dons and still more by their wives, who think I should not mind if they were raped’,50 he wrote, a month before the dons finally took action.

Russell was under no illusion what his activities could cost him – as he wrote to Lady Ottoline the day before the Council of Trinity met, he realised that he
Bertrand Russell and Cambridge would have to get used to being poor, ‘having lost America [the Harvard offer] and probably Trinity’. Despite the war cutting off his academic background, Russell wrote almost joyfully that, ‘I have somehow found myself … I have no inward discords any more’. The action taken against him had further strengthened his purpose and allowed him to emulate, to some extent, the conscientious objectors whom he so admired. He admitted to Lady Ottoline that he thought persecution useful in that it made people see that no good could come out of war.

The fact that the controversy over Russell’s dismissal occurred after almost two years of conflict, during the carnage of the first battle of the Somme, and the respect accorded to him as one of the world’s leading philosophers and mathematicians meant that the twenty-two Fellows who put their names to the memorial condemning the Council’s decision were not the only source of public support which Russell received.

The Cambridge Magazine followed the case closely and reported in its first issue of the autumn term how Russell had been ‘unceremoniously hoofed out’ after the sale of his Cambridge belongings. An article in the same issue protested, ‘that Trinity of all places should have wantonly proved false to the traditions of tolerance and freedom for which Cambridge had hitherto stood in the eyes of the world, is beyond all things disheartening’. Comments from contributors and those who had written letters on the issue were printed, such as that of Hilton Young who called Trinity’s decision ‘more discouraging than a German victory’ and that of D.S. Robertson who described the action as ‘an inexpressible disaster to tolerance and liberty’. Both Young and Robertson were of Trinity and, interestingly, both on active service. In addition, Gilbert Murray (the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford) was quoted from his letter to the Nation of 23 September in which he commented wryly that, ‘the times are indeed out of jolt when Oxford can give Cambridge a dig in the ribs as the home of intolerance and irrationalism’, while Jean Nicod was quoted from the French paper Le Journal du Peuple in an article describing how the war had stirred ‘this famous thinker’ [Nicod] to the depths of his soul, uncovering a firm ‘moral foundation’ which supported Russell in his cause.

By November, the Cambridge Magazine was being used as a posting house for signatories to a further memorial for Russell, intended for those outside of Trinity, who also wished to signal their disapproval. They could do so by informing the editor by letter or postcard which would then be sent on to those organising the protest. The idea behind this new memorial was to strengthen the hand of Russell’s supporters inside the college.

In addition to attaining a new level of notoriety, Russell had by now moved further in terms of confidence in his practical and public persona due to the success of his Welsh anti-war speaking tour during the summer. Although an academic approach lay behind all his ideas and actions, he firmly rejected the chance to return to the world of mathematics when it was offered to him; he
had discovered a firmer voice and the time of accepting lecturing work at Harvard or anywhere else was over.

Russell’s possible return to mathematics was suggested by General Cockerill, the Director of Special Intelligence at the War Office, who offered that the ban on Russell’s movements, which he had incurred as a direct result of a supposedly ‘vehemently anti-British’ speech in Cardiff, would be lifted if Russell returned to his former life. Russell, although cordial towards Cockerill, rejected the offer and, remembering the cheers that had greeted him in Wales, set out on a second tour in October 1916 which he entitled ‘The World as It Can Be Made’. He had been barred from most of the British coast and all large ‘sensitive’ cities following his Cardiff speech of 6 July, in which he had warned that if the war ended in bitterness, post-war artistic, social and scientific progress would all be impossible. He had written in the Cambridge Magazine that, ‘under the stress of war, everything that had been learnt has been forgotten, and conscience must once more fight the old fight to free the human spirit from the tyranny of fear’.

This theme of the war’s effects and the consequences for future civilisation was carried over to the second lecture tour, and Russell’s lectures were read for him in areas where he was prohibited from travelling to, such as Glasgow. The text of that particular speech, read by the President of the Miner’s Federation, Robert Smillie, was later published as an N.C.F. pamphlet, making a nonsense of the Government ban, which Lord Hugh Cecil described to Home Secretary Herbert Samuel as ‘both oppressive and timid – as though we were rather afraid of what might be said against us’ – evidence of Russell’s concept of a ‘tyranny of fear’, induced by the war’s effects. By the end of the year, Russell had reached a new level of confidence in his public actions which he was never to lose and which he could finally match to his formidable academic background and intellectual gifts. As he wrote to his new mistress, actress Constance Malleson, known as Colette, ‘Quite lately I have had a sense of freedom I never had before’.

However, Russell’s personal wartime apogee did not last for long; quite apart from the continuance of the war itself, he could not be totally satisfied with the disparate activities and motives amongst the organised anti-war movements. ‘Odd things give me a sense of failure’, he wrote to Lady Ottoline, ‘for instance, the way in which the C.O.’s all take alternative service, except a handful’. He was also disappointed by the relative failure of his open letter to President Wilson, smuggled to America and published in the New York Times on 23 December 1916, in which he appealed to America to bring a swift peace to an ailing Europe, only to be confounded, four months later, with America’s entry into the war, which Russell complained would help prolong the war by delaying the exhaustion of Europe. Although on the domestic front there was still plenty of work to do by the first few months of 1917 with over one thousand ‘absolutist’ conscientious objectors serving prison terms, Russell felt as if he lived in ‘two layers’ by this point in the war:
... one superficial, in which I have plenty of life and good spirits, and another underneath, where I feel lost and worn out and isolated and rather hopeless – that is the deeper feeling but I keep on fighting it off with an effort of will. Nothing can be done for it while the war lasts.\textsuperscript{58}

The winter of early 1917 was a particularly bleak period for Russell, as it was for so many others. As he later admitted to Colette, during that period he lost all his active love for mankind, which was replaced by despair and hopelessness. He now found the human race to be ‘hateful’ and all former well-springs of affection to be dried up after over two years of war. Not just feelings of affection seemed to have disappeared; he complained to Lady Ottoline in the spring that, ‘I have no vivid feelings at all except constantly increasing horror of the war’,\textsuperscript{59} and, two months later, ‘just now all fundamental feelings are rather dead in me’,\textsuperscript{60} adding that only superficial feelings remained and that the last time he had felt alive was when lifted by the hope of his letter to Wilson. He ended by reiterating that he now had no love for humanity; instead, ‘vehement hatred of all that has happened since the war began has made one think worse and worse of mankind’.

Russell also admitted to Lady Ottoline in his earlier letter that he was losing interest in the NCF – the earlier ‘spirit of freedom’ that it had provided him with via his anti-war work had ebbed by this point. As Russell pointed out, all the best people such as Clifford Allen were in prison, and the rest, as earlier with the UDC, now incurred Russell’s frustration with their ‘petty quarrels and sordidness’. His friendship with Lady Ottoline was cooling by this time partly to his continuing relations with not only Colette, but other women such as Vivienne Eliot (the wife of T.S. Eliot). His emotional life and search for love became further complicated as he lost patience and faith with the sincerity and emotional truth of a wider world at war with itself.

The late spring and summer of 1917 saw the zenith of his affair with Colette and an associated re-awakening of his academic interests. He expressed to her a desire to study the psychology of opinion and especially the ‘unmasking’ of the ferocity hidden at the base of opinion, hidden behind a veil of morality. The war and its effect on individuals had emphasised to Russell the duplicitous nature of the human character; the aggressive strength of man’s nature, which Russell had warned must be channelled in the right direction to avoid conflict, was not always immediately recognisable, and Russell was motivated by what he saw as an opportunity to highlight it. ‘I am creeping back into life’, he wrote to Colette, ‘but not N.C.F. life – scientific rather’.\textsuperscript{61}

As Russell later admitted to Lady Ottoline, ‘I realised that I had been much too optimistic about human nature.’ By this stage in the war he felt that his only motivation was despair while human life had come to seem valueless and possessing of no possibilities for the future – gone now was the earlier optimism of \textit{Principles of Social Reconstruction}. He described himself, not for the first time, as an alien amongst people he could not communicate with anymore. ‘I simply...
don’t know how to express the utter devastation inside me’, he explained, ‘I feel I am rotting away inwardly.’ He even confessed that he felt he had no real hold on life and that sometimes he longed for death, ‘with the same kind of intensity with which I long for the end of the war’.62

Despite the excitement and hopefulness associated with the Russian Revolution and the meetings of support in Great Britain (at which violence often broke out before his appalled eyes), Russell found he had to re-evaluate his own position completely. At the end of the summer he declared:

I used to live with a sense of some kind of co-operation with the community – even the most abstract work always appealed to me instinctively as part of the life of the world. Since the war, I have lost that feeling. That is the root of the despair that comes over me.63

By the autumn, he was resigned to at least another two years of war, especially since he was forced to recognise that the ‘Russian outlook’ was getting steadily worse.

Although he still thought that the pacifist movement would bear fruit in the end, Russell no longer felt he could predict what those results would be and on a personal level, he no longer believed in the effectiveness of what he could achieve for peace ‘beyond writing books’. All pacifist work, he told Lady Ottoline, except by those who had not been pacifists from the start of the war, seemed to him now to be ‘quite useless’, and he announced that a return to his books would be a return to sanity, although a sanity of a ‘sober and drab’ nature. At the end of the year he resigned from the executive of the NCF, and one of his few solaces at this time was a visit to Westminster Cathedral where the chanting of the choir drew his mind away from the exasperation and hopelessness of yet another year of war and towards the ‘permanent’ beauty and splendour of the church and timeless music.

Notwithstanding his resignation from the NCF executive, the start of 1918 found Russell still contributing articles to the *Tribunal*, one of which, entitled ‘The German Peace Offer’, gave the authorities the excuse they had been waiting for to prosecute Russell again, this time more harshly than before. The article was submitted on 3 January and suggested that an American garrison in England (and capable of intimidating strikers) would be the result of any further prolongation of the war. It was this supposedly dangerous comment that resulted in Russell’s appearance before magistrate Sir John Dickinson at Bow Street Magistrates’ Court in early February. Sir John interrupted Russell’s impassioned defence and pronounced a sentence of six months in prison under the harsh second division, though this was later commuted (due to the influence of powerful sympathisers) to the first division to allow Russell to continue with his philosophical studies. This he did, working on *The Analysis of Mind* and his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, whilst also managing to read over forty books and articles during his time in prison – one of which was Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians*, which he greatly enjoyed.
Though he was now more at peace than previously, Russell read of the war’s daily development in *The Times* and still worried about the conflict’s effects on the world outside. ‘I feel mankind is these days like a pitiful dumb animal with an open wound out of which the blood drops and life is oozing away’, he wrote to Colette, ‘and one’s own life must go with it, or else one must grow callous for the time’. He began to resent being separated from the people and events of his former world: ‘One’s life is not life unless it is linked on to that of the world.’

Luckily for Russell, he was released on 14 September, before the end of his sentence. He soon moved in with Clifford Allen (whose own imprisonment had aged him dramatically) and continued to devote his time to academic work, while resuming his affair with Colette.

Russell’s war was effectively over; his personal conflict and the wider one had sapped his spirits, and he wanted merely to continue with the academic work he had long planned and begun while in prison, using the energy that remained to him. ‘I am gradually crawling back into the atmosphere of philosophy’, he wrote to Allen with relief. He confided to Colette of his acute loneliness and the fact that the world he encountered on leaving his confinement seemed ‘small and sordid’ and most of the weary people ‘loathsome’. He kept apart from the celebrating populace of London on a rainy Armistice Day, merely observing the damp crowds and feeling like a pale ghost from a different sphere; the war to him had resulted in a drabness that the flagged colours of victory could not assuage. Nothing seemed vivid or worth the pain of existence, and he complained to Lady Ottoline of a ‘weariness of spirit’ and a lack of energy for ‘new beginnings’, for there would have to be some kind of new start, he realised; a picking up and rearranging of the pieces left by the shattering impact of the arrival of war four years earlier. ‘What is wanted’, he had written to Lady Ottoline from prison, ‘is to carry over into the new time something of the gaiety and civilised outlook and genial expansive love that was growing when the war came.’

He had summed up his outlook and position with regard to his own observations of the war to Colette shortly before he had been released:

> It is so difficult to forget the horror of the world. There is knowledge that has to come to one, during the war, that one can never forget. Old men at tribunals, every bit as cruel as a cat with a mouse. Envy and fear, the two great motive forces. I find it so difficult not to hate; and when I do not hate I feel we few are so lonely in the world.

The only alternative to hate for Russell was a ‘pitying comprehension, which removes me to such a terrible distance that I shiver from the cold of isolation’. He felt as if the war had somehow disconnected the vital link that had previously linked his life to that of the world. ‘Something seems destroyed, some connection severed’, he wrote, and this had left him isolated from previously familiar and trustworthy precepts; ‘although politics may be better or worse, I can never again make them a vehicle for ideas’, he realised. All that was left was
the future and this was in peril from those, scarred by the experience of combat, who might simply return from battle ‘into mutual admiration and a set of soft lies in which vitality is smothered’. The war was a critical juncture in Russell's long life; propelling him from the dry world of academia to an embattled public arena which he effectively was never to leave. The year 1915 (particularly his speech at the Caxton Hall in July on the ‘Philosophy of Pacifism’ and the concurrent build-up of ideas which would later constitute *Principles of Social Reconstruction*) marked a turning point in the way in which he articulated his individual protest against the war, even if this course meant greater personal isolation and eventual imprisonment. The conflict presented to Russell a stimulus that was both intellectual and emotional in origin and tone and was of such strength that its call diverted part of his thinking towards an examination of wider areas of philosophy and sociology, concerning the instincts of human beings towards war and peace and the effect of total conflict upon both the individual and the moral value system of society at war. This interest was born of Russell's passion for learning and his extreme despair at observing his undergraduates and other young men marching to war, their latent creative talent being stifled or simply blown away at the front. Russell's awareness of the war's 'diverted promise' of youthful spirit was to be echoed in the thoughts and actions of others.

The moral weight of the war upon his conscience deprived Russell of his former faith in human nature and brought him near to total despair. Yet the war did not crush Russell to the point of complete nullity, 'emotionally he remained fundamentally a liberal individualist' as he exhibited in another letter from prison, this one addressed 'To All and Sundry':

Once men get away from … the struggle to take up more room in the world than is their due, there is such a capacity of greatness in them. All the loneliness and the pain and the eternal pathetic hope – the power of love and the appreciation of beauty – the concentration of many ages and spaces in the mirror of a single mind – these are not things one would wish to destroy wantonly, for any of the national ambitions that politicians praise. There is a possibility in human minds of something mysterious as the night-wind, deep as the sea – calm as the stars and strong as Death, a mystic contemplation, the ‘intellectual love of God’. Those who have known it cannot believe in wars any longer, or in any kind of hot struggle. If I could give to others what has come to me in this way, I could make them too feel the futility of fighting.

However, he concluded crucially, 'I do not know how to communicate it; when I speak, they stare, applaud, or smile, but do not understand'. The war both interrupted and then transformed Russell's life. From the last days of peace, his response was one of both heart and mind – even as he began his descent into despair, he was organising petitions and writing articles based on his fundamental opposition to the conflict, an opposition which, though it sprang from deep emotion, was then thought out and articulated clearly in his numerous writings as the war progressed.
Russell and others shared the view that theirs was a civilisation gripped by a sudden vertigo in which previously accepted values, as Russell postulated, had been twisted or reversed by intense fear which then produced impulses of hatred and blood-lust. Others also recognised that these intense energies – inflamed by war – could be better harnessed for good in times of peace, while latent impulses of creativity were misdirected, suppressed or nullified entirely during the conflict. To Russell, those that survived the war had ‘lost the life of the spirit’. He was not alone. It was a shared awareness of this potential loss that provided others with a platform on which to build their own humanistic opposition to the war.

Notes
7 Frances Partridge, letter to J.P. Atkin, 28 March 1996.
9 This fund was established specifically to aid students from the medieval Louvain University, burnt by the attacking Germans.
14 With the Archduke Franz Ferdinand dead and declarations of war fanning out over Europe, Russell privately determined not to be dominated by base instincts and feelings of hate, as he remembered he had been during the Boer War. He placed his faith in Reason (‘the force that in the long run makes for peace’) even though the situation appeared bleak. ‘The war is awful’, he wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell: ‘I can’t think of anything else. It all looks hopeless now. It seems nearly certain that England will be involved. I don’t think we ought to be, but I can see a point of view which makes it seem an honourable obligation. It is a ghastly irresistible fate driving everyone on … war is madness – now there will be a new legacy of hatreds and humiliations and brutal triumphs … Nothing seems of any importance beside the prospect of war’. McM,BRP, B. Russell to Ottoline Morrell, 31 July 1914, no. 1016.
16 Ibid., p. 4.
17 Bertrand Russell, Autobiography, (2 vols London, 1970), vol. 2, p. 18. The breakdown of peace threatened Russell’s fundamental beliefs and this, together with the effect of recent developments in his personal life, galvanised him into action. As he wrote in his
A war of individuals

Autobiography, ‘I underwent a process of rejuvenation, inaugurated by Lady Ottoline and continued by the war’. The conflict also served to cast off the dust-sheets of his old life; it ‘shook me out of my prejudices and made me think afresh on a number of fundamental questions’. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 15.

19 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 15.
20 Ibid., no. 1073.
21 B. Russell, ‘The Rights of War, the Nation, 15 Aug. 1914. Russell expected men in positions of trust and power to act responsibly and with caution. To him, men of intelligence were presumed to intend the consequences of their actions and hence he saw the war in part as a consequence of human pride and self-assertion. He regarded the younger generation as being uncorrupted and full of ‘admirable spirit’ - in contrast to the older people, most of whom he felt were consumed with the false hatred of prejudice. The old teachers at Cambridge he perceived as being dominated by a ruthless logic instead of reason and hence able to allow the young men to be sacrificed for ‘some coldly abstract end’.

22 McM,BRP, B. Russell to O. Morrell, undated [Sept. 1914], no. 1136.
23 Ibid., undated [Aug. 1914], no. 1092.
26 See B. Russell, ‘The Ethics of War’, International Journal of Ethics, XXV, Jan. 1915, pp. 127–42. Russell could be impractical when applying carefully thought-out ideas to practical wartime situations; for example, he tended to overestimate the willingness of people (such as Belgian and French refugees and citizens living under armed occupation) to be passively non-cooperative. In Russell’s opinion, passive non-cooperation was the best method of limiting the damage that the war inflicted on individual character which, to him, was now one of the main threats that the conflict posed to the fabric of European civilisation. In taking this line, he was echoing the views of his godfather, John Stuart Mill, who had placed great value on the freedom of individual judgement and the placing of this principle on a moral level high enough to avoid interference by the State. The necessity of this principle was, for Russell, thrown into sharp relief by the restrictions implicit in a state continuously mobilising for war.

28 McM,BRP, B. Russell to O. Morrell, 11 Nov. 1914, no. 1147.
29 The lectures which Russell gave as Principles of Social Reconstruction marked a theoretical shift towards a more personal concept of socialism that was decentralised and liberal in character. This was echoed by a gradual move in Russell’s anti-war activities away from established groups and accompanying doctrine towards an increasingly individualistic approach. By the middle of the war, Russell had begun to feel isolated. As he wrote in March 1916, ‘People with whom I have intellectual sympathy hardly have any spiritual life … and the others seem to find the intellectual side of me unbearable.’ McM,BRP, B. Russell to O. Morrell, 4 March 1916, no. 1123.
30 Russell, looking ahead, commented to Lady Ottoline that Britain was ‘likely to be far more successful than would be best for the welfare of Europe’ and, in fact, ‘no decisive victory of one side is in the interests of either Great Britain or of Europe’. Ibid., 6 Aug. 1914, no. 1095.
31 Ibid., 19 May 1915, no. 1218.
32 Up to this point, Russell had been formulating his response to the war by authoring a series of articles and letters. In penning these articles, he was also acting as an eloquent mouthpiece for the UDC and fulfilling what he saw as his moral duty to publicly protest. George Bernard Shaw wrote to Russell (after Russell had agreed to chair a Fabian meeting on the war) that, ‘Our job is to make people serious about the war’, while lamenting to his fellow thinker that, ‘It is the monstrous triviality of the damned thing and the vulgar frivolity of what we imagine

Russell agreed, and to that end he expressed his position on the war whenever he got the chance, such as his reply to H.G. Wells’s ‘The War That Will End War’ in September 1914 in which, while declaring that, ‘War will only end when people realize its horrors … the only road to a secure peace lies through a reform in the thoughts and feelings of common men’, he also used the first of many opportunities to appeal to common humanity when he warned that, ‘The brutal humiliation of a great and civilized nation is not the road to universal peace.’ This would only be sowing the seeds of bitterness ‘whose fruit is war’ and, if this outcome was to be avoided, the conflict – through the efforts of individuals – ‘must produce a different spirit, and above all it must make us forget, in the claims of humanity, our fiery conviction of the enemy’s wickedness’. B. Russell, ‘Will this War End War?’, *Labour Leader*, 10 Sept. 1914. This article was rejected by H.W. Massingham at the *Nation* as too controversial.

37 B. Russell, ‘Mr. Russell’s Reply to his Critics’, *Cambridge Review*, 24 Feb. 1915. During the summer of 1915 Russell fought back, specifically targeting the academic arena in an article for the *International Review* titled ‘On Justice in War-Time. An Appeal to the Intellectuals of Europe’. He appealed to the international academic fraternity by pointing out that men of learning, of whatever nationality, were the guardians of certain ideals essential to human development, ideals such as just thought and the disinterested pursuit of truth, which were under threat during the moral muddle of the conflict; ‘The war is trivial, for all its vastness. No great principle is at stake, no great human purpose is involved on either side. The supposed ideal ends for which it is being fought are merely part of the myth’. B. Russell, ‘On Justice in War-time. An Appeal to the Intellectuals of Europe’, *International Review* 1, 10 Aug. 1915, pp. 145–51; 1 Sept. 1915, pp. 223–30.
40 McM,BRP, B. Russell to O. Morrell, 11 June 1915, no. 1286.
41 ibid., 1 Jan. 1916, no. 1344.
42 In *The Open Court*, no. 30 (Chicago periodical), March 1916, pp. 170–80.
45 Ibid.
47 Cited in Vellacott, *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists*, p. 82.
48 McM,BRP, B. Russell to O. Morrell, 10 Sept. 1914, no. 1105.
49 Ibid., 19 March 1916, no. 1361.
50 Ibid., 12 May 1916, no. 1383.
51 Ibid., 10 July 1916, no. 1388/1.
52 *Cambridge Magazine*, vol. 6, no. 1, 14 Oct. 1916, p. 17.
53 Ibid. Despite his long-standing public support for Russell (he had been one of the signatories of Russell’s statement supporting British neutrality in July 1914) Murray also wrote propaganda for Britain’s war propaganda bureau at Wellington House in London. See Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words* (Vancouver, 1987), pp. 46–8.
56 McM,BRP, B. Russell to Colette, 28 Sept. 1916, no. 711200009.
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57 McM, BRP, B. Russell to O. Morrell, undated [Sept. 1916], no. 1423.
58 Ibid., 18 Dec. 1916, no. 1448.
59 Ibid., 2 March 1917, no. 1449/1.
60 Ibid., 5 May 1917, no. 1453/1.
62 McM, BRP, B. Russell to OM, 27 July 1917, no. 1467.
63 Ibid., undated [Aug. 1917], no. 1492/1.
64 McM, BRP, B. Russell to Colette (via Miss Rinder), 17 June 1918, no. 711200299A.
65 McM, BRP, B. Russell to Clifford Allen, 5 Nov. 1918, Rec. Acqu. 16.
66 McM, BRP, B. Russell to O. Morrell, 27 Aug. 1918, no. 229–30/1 (also numbered 1489L RA by McMaster).
67 McM, BRP, B. Russell to Colette, 1 Sept. 1918, 711200344.
69 McM, BRP, B. Russell to ‘All and Sundry’, 30 July 1918, no. 66 of Prison File.