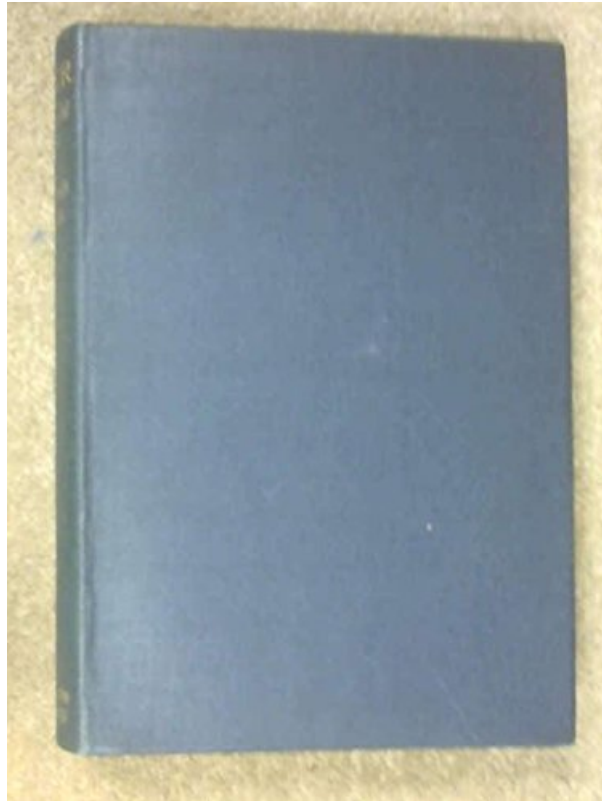
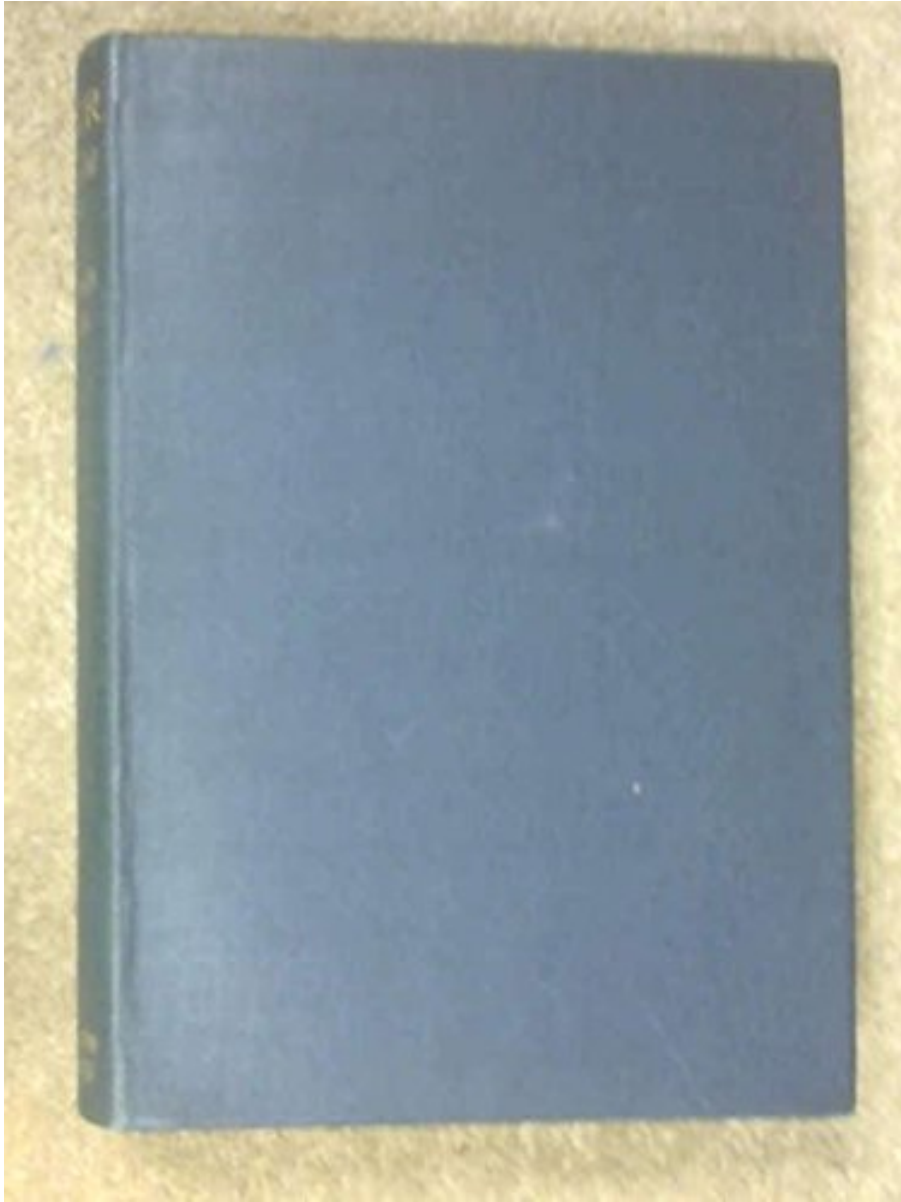


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# **POWER: A NEW SOCIAL ANALYSIS BY BERTRAND RUSSELL PDF**

The key to social dynamics that Marx found in wealth and Freud in sex, Russell finds in power. This study brings a new order of comprehension into the problems of human government.

- Sales Rank: #4200246 in Books
- Published on: 1938
- Number of items: 1
- Binding: Hardcover

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Broad Scope, Fascinating

By Wade Finger

Bertrand Russell's *Power* is very ambitious in scope. Support for his thesis that the taming of power should be of chief concern to thinking people (his favorite audience in the three Russell books I've read) includes support from references to ancient China, medieval Europe, Machiavelli, the American businessman, the rise of the Catholic Church, American reverence for the Constitution, causes of the Protestant Reformation, ancient Greece and Rome and their governments, and more. As is to be expected of Lord Russell, his writing is an edifying, entertaining glimpse into the mind of a genius.

Russell's descriptions of the motivations behind power seeking individuals and organizations, the appeal of leaders, types of power and the basis for authority are compelling. The means for acquiring and exercising power are described by Russell in a systematic, conspiratorial manner. By understanding its appeal and the methods by which it is attained, Russell argues, mankind can hope to tame power. I felt that in this book Russell sought to deliver a "world-view" a la Karl Marx, whose communist ideas were based on the belief that the source of conflict in the world was man's alienation. With a twist, Russell might say that man's (and man's organizations, which he grants develop an organic life of their own) grasping for power is the chief cause of pain, stifled freedom, and stunted progress.

It's important to keep in mind that this book was first published in 1938 - though it's not hard to do while reading since Russell continuously warns of an impending great war. He refers to WWI as the "War" and an imminent WWII as the "Great War." I think, perhaps, the great motivation for writing it may have been to explain the rise of despotic and totalitarian governments during the era preceding its publication. A defining quote is:

"No other organization rouses anything like the loyalty aroused by the national State. And the chief activity of the State is preparation for large-scale homicide. It is loyalty to this organization for death that causes men to endure the totalitarian State, and to risk the destruction of home and children and our whole civilization rather than submit to alien rule."

Russell is my favorite philosopher and I'm planning to read many more of his books. I strongly recommend his *History of Western Philosophy* and *The Conquest of Happiness*. Russell wrote so many books on such a wide variety of subjects. My qualms with *Power* are its over ambitious reach, the frenetic pace of the writing and Russell's disdain for business and economics. Enjoy!

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Intelligently channel the desire for power

By Jordan Bell

I feel this book has too much vague history, e.g. in the village there was autocracy/democracy/fill in the blank. I agree with his thesis that power is a fundamental quantity that should be studied, like energy in physics, and that it's better to talk about desire for power than just economic power or political power. I also liked how he says that religious leaders are not really power abdicating unless we don't know about them; if I make a point of starting to spread my creed then I'm really not someone who wants to retire from the world. Kind of like how if you make a donation in your name, then it's partly inspired by love of respect. Followers follow a leader because they feel it's the best way to get a share of power. Devolution of government is a good way to solve problems whenever possible.

The following page numbers refer to the Allen & Unwin edition of the book.

p. 139: "If, in the name of Reason, you summon a man to alter his fundamental purposes- to pursue, say, the general happiness rather than his own power- you will fail, and you will deserve to fail, since Reason alone cannot determine the ends of life."

p. 299: "The temper required to make a success of democracy is, in the practical life, exactly what the scientific temper is in the intellectual life. Truth, it holds, is neither completely attainable nor completely unattainable; it is attainable in a certain degree, and that only with difficulty."

p. 300: "Expose children to the most vehement and eloquent advocates on all sides of every question, past and present! Then have the children summarize the arguments used. This will gently show that eloquence is inversely proportional to solid reason. Learn from advertisers, who have led the way in the technique of producing irrational belief. Education should counteract this natural credulity, the habit of believing an emphatic statement without reasons, and of disbelieving an unemphatic statement even when accompanied by the best of reasons. Give them sweets, one with awesome ads and one with scientific data; or vacations, etc. Warn them that all of them, unless they are very carefull to cultivate a balanced and cautious judgement, may fall overnight into a similar madness at the first touch of government incitement to terror and bloodlust."

p. 302: "Through music or poetry, history or science, beauty and pain, the really valuable things in human life are individual, not such things as happen on a battlefield or in the clash of politics. Community life is necessary, but as a mechanism not as something to be valued on its own account. This is analogous to what all the great religious leaders have spoken of. We all reach our best in different ways, and the emotional unity of a crowd can only be achieved on a lower level."

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

FOUCAULT WASN'T THE FIRST PHILOSOPHER TO WRITE ABOUT "POWER"

By Steven H Propp

Bertrand Arthur William Russell (1872-1970) was an influential British philosopher, logician, mathematician, and political activist. In 1950, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, in recognition of his many books such as A History of Western Philosophy, The Problems of Philosophy, The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, The Analysis of Mind, Our Knowledge of the External World, Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits, Mysticism and Logic, etc.

He wrote in the first chapter of this 1938 book, "Of the infinite desires of man, the chief are the desires for power and glory... As a rule, however, the easiest way to obtain glory is to obtain power; this is especially the case as regards the men who are active in relation to public events. The desire for glory, therefore, prompts, in the main, the same actions as are prompted by the desire for power, and the two motives may, for most practical purposes, be regarded as one... In the course of this book I shall be concerned to prove that the fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental

concept in physics..." (Pg. 11-12) He continues, "Those whose love of power is not strong are unlikely to have much influence on the course of events. The men who cause social changes are, as a rule, men who strongly desire to do so. Love of power, therefore, is a characteristic of the men who are causally important." (Pg. 14-15) He concludes, "I shall have, throughout, the twofold purpose of suggesting what I believe to be a more adequate analysis of social changes in general than that which has been taught ... and of making the present and the probable near future more intelligible than it can be to those whose imaginations are dominated by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." (Pg. 15)

He explains, "Power may be defined as the production of intended effects. It is thus a quantitative concept: given two men with similar desires, if one achieves the desires that the other achieves, and also others, he has more power than the other. But there is no exact means of comparing the power of two men of whom one can achieve one group of desires, and another another... Nevertheless, it is easy to say, roughly, that A has more power than B, if A achieves many intended effects and B only a few." (Pg. 35)

He states, "This brings us to a very necessary distinction, between traditional power and newly acquired power. Traditional power has on its side the force of habit; it does not have to justify itself at every moment... Moreover, it is almost invariably associated with religious or quasi-religious beliefs purporting to show that resistance is wicked... traditional power... is not on the lookout for traitors, and is likely to avoid much active political tyranny; on the other hand... the injustices to which holders of power are always prone have the sanction of immemorial custom..." (Pg. 38)

Of clerical power in the Middle Ages, he observes, "It was clear to ordinary men that, in a world of uncontrolled rapacity, licentiousness, and self-seeking, eminent dignitaries of the Church not infrequently lived for impersonal aims, to which they willingly subordinated their private fortune. In successive centuries men of impressive holiness---Hildebrand, St. Bernard, St. Francis---dazzled public opinion, and prevented the moral discredit that would otherwise have come from the misdeeds of others." (Pg. 71)

He points out, "the modern-minded man holds, like Nero, that the guilt should be attributed, by means of manufactured evidence, to whatever party he personally dislikes. As regards such matters as free speech, he holds... that there should be freedom for his own party, but not for any other. The result of such doctrines is to transform all power, first, into revolutionary power, and then, by inevitable gradations, into naked power. This danger is imminent..." (Pg. 119)

He notes, "Thus the economic power of private persons depends on the decision of their government to employ its armed forces, if necessary, in accordance with a set of rules as to who shall be allowed access to land; while the economic power of governments depends in part upon their armed forces, and in part upon then respect of other governments for treaties and international law." (Pg. 122)

He suggests, "A creed of sentiment of some kind is essential to social cohesion, but if it is to be a source of strength it must be genuinely and deeply felt by the great majority of the population, including a considerable percentage of those upon whom technical efficiency depends." (Pg. 154)

He proposes, "So far from desiring uniformity of propaganda, [the philosopher] will advocate that, as far as possible, everybody should hear all sides of every question. Instead of different newspapers, each devoted to the interests of one party and encouraging the dogmatism of its readers, he will advocate a single newspaper, in which all parties are represented." (Pg. 226)

He argues, "Power philosophies, when account is taken of their social consequences, are self-refuting. The belief that I am God, if no one shares it, leads to my being shut up; if others share it, it leads to war in which

I probably perish. The cult of the hero produces a nation of cowards. Belief in pragmatism, if widespread, leads to the rule of naked force, which is unpleasant; therefore, by its own criterion, belief in pragmatism is false. If social life is to satisfy social desires, it must be based upon some philosophy not derived from the love of power.” (Pg. 261)

He concludes, “This is the task of a liberal education: to give a sense of the value of things other than domination, to help to create wise citizens of a free community, and through the combination of citizenship with liberty in individual creativeness to enable men to give to human life that splendor which some few have shown that it can achieve.” (Pg. 305)

This is one of Russell’s most important books of social philosophy, and will be of interest to students of his ideas, or of contemporary political philosophy.

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