When examining the causes of war, Mead suggests three basic arguments:

1. It’s caused by biology.
2. It’s caused by social systems. -- Or a combination both: when social systems frustrate instincts war results
3. War is an invention and is not a fate of biology or society.
Mead was an anthropologist who studied various primitive cultures around the world. She was especially interested in cultures that appeared to have no warfare or history of it.
People without War?

- Mead claims the Eskimo are an example of people without war.
  - She also mentions the Lechas of Sikkim

- Mead says the Eskimo fight and kill, but this occurs among individuals against one another: “The idea of warfare, of one group organizing against another group...was absent” (Course Reader [CR] 14).

- She addresses a counterargument—idea #2 (state structures promote war): “isn’t this because the Eskimo have such a low and undeveloped form of social organization?” (CR 14).

- She adds, “Doesn’t the absence of war among the Eskimo, while disproving the biological necessity of war, just go to confirm the point that it is the state of the development of society which accounts for war, and nothing else?” (CR 14).
To answer, Mead shifts gears and turns to other examples:

- She says the Andamans had virtually no social structures (class heirarchies), *but they knew war*.

- She says something similar about Australian aborigines.

- If primitive nomadic people like these aborigines fight wars, she thinks it teaches a lot about *what causes war* since war can occur *without* these things she mentions:

  “The student of social evolution will seek in vain for his obvious causes of war, struggle for lands, struggle for power of one group over another, expansion of population, need to divert the minds of a populace restive under tyranny, or even the ambition of a successful leader to enhance his own prestige. All are absent, but warfare as a practice remained...” (CR 14)
Thus, Mead thinks biology can’t account for war if some people don’t have war (Eskimos), and a developed social structure (permanent dwellings, class stratification, etc.) can’t account for war if some people without it do have war.

As she sees it, war is an invention. Cultures have different inventions (or customs) for conflict resolution, and war is one of them. She mentions various examples of conflict resolution:

- Duels
- Vendettas
- The Balinese way of “registering quarrels with the gods”
- The jury system

She suggests that individuals don’t just pick any of these—they pick an option their culture has invented (and encouraged)
For Mead, war can’t exist without inventing it, but once it’s been invented various cultures have various reasons for its ongoing existence. These are ones she mentions:

“glory. . . . prestige in the eyes of his own sex or of the opposite sex. . . . [and] manliness” (CR 15)

Mead says humans rarely give up inventions (unless a better one comes along), and she suggests it’s hard to think outside the box once customs take hold:

“Warfare is here, as part of our thought; the deeds of warriors are immortalized in the words of our poets; the toys of our children are modeled upon the weapons of the soldier; the frame of reference within which our statesmen and diplomats work always contains war.” (CR 15)
Mead offers hope with an example of a relatively new invention (a new custom) in the history of man:

- Trial by Jury
  - Instead of torturing the accused (like witches), we now have trials.

Mead says for new inventions to be made, two things are necessary:

1. Attention to flaws of old inventions (example: media against war)
2. The belief that a better invention is possible