



THE SCIENCE OF RIGHT

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realization of this purpose may always remain but a pious wish, yet we do certainly not deceive ourselves in adopting the maxim of action that will guide us in working incessantly for it; for it is a duty to do this. To suppose that the moral law within us is itself deceptive, would be sufficient to excite the horrible wish rather to be deprived of all reason than to live under such deception, and even to see oneself, according to such principles, degraded like the lower animals to the level of the mechanical play of nature.

It may be said that the universal and lasting establishment of peace constitutes not merely a part, but the whole final purpose and end of the science of right as viewed within the limits of reason. The state of peace is the only condition of the mine and thine that is secured and guaranteed by laws in the relationship of men living in numbers contiguous to each other, and who are thus combined in a constitution whose rule is derived not from the mere experience of those who have found it the best as a normal guide for others, but which must be taken by the reason a priori from the ideal of a juridical union of men under public laws generally. For all particular examples or instances, being able only to furnish illustration but not proof, are deceptive, and at all events require a metaphysic to establish them by its necessary principles. And this is conceded indirectly even by those who turn metaphysics into ridicule, when they say, as they often do: "The best constitution is that in which not men but laws exercise the power." For what can be more metaphysically sublime in its own way than this very idea of theirs, which according to their own assertion has, notwithstanding, the most objective reality? This may be easily shown by reference to actual instances. And it is this very idea, which alone can be carried out practically, if it is not forced on in a revolutionary and sudden way by violent overthrow of the existing defective constitution; for this would produce for the time the momentary annihilation of the whole juridical state of society. But if the idea is carried forward by gradual reform and in accordance with fixed principles, it may lead by a continuous approximation to the highest political good, and to perpetual peace.
