



On Perpetual Peace

Immanuel Kant

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Immanuel Kant's On Perpetual Peace, published in 1795, is a landmark document exploring the ancient question of how human societies can create conditions which foster peace among nations. Kant concedes that such a state of peace is not a natural condition, but he offers the often tentative hope that if certain international principles are adopted a progress towards such a peace is certainly possible, at least among a federation of free states. The essay lays down specific principles and explores in some detail the eternal conflict between morality and political expediency, arguing that the two are not as diametrically opposed as many would maintain: "If it is our duty to realize a condition of public right and if, at the same time, there are grounds for hope we can achieve that, although only by an endless progress which takes us closer to it, then perpetual peace, which follows what have so far been falsely called peace treaties (which are really truces suspending hostilities) is not an empty idea, but a task which is gradually resolving itself and is always coming nearer to its goal (because the time it takes to make equal advances will, one hopes, grow shorter and shorter)." This new translation by Ian Johnston is a fresh and faithful rendition of Kant's text. It also provides supplementary footnotes to assist the reader with contemporary references and potential ambiguities in the argument.



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