

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE CONCEPT OF THE STATE AS POWER.¹

THERE is at the present time among those interested in political philosophy a very considerable dissatisfaction with what may be called the traditional conception of the state, that is, the conception of it as primarily a power. It cannot be said that as yet this dissatisfaction has focussed itself into a definitely new construction, nor does it appear that different thinkers have come at their difficulties by the same route. In fact, the contrary is true. Sometimes it has been by way of the legal theory of corporations and their relation to the state, sometimes by way of the sociological view of law and its relation to the community; sometimes the theory of state power has seemed objectionable on account of its practical or ethical consequences. This situation is due to the fact that the traditional notion of the state is out of accord with present political conditions; in a word, we have here a case in which political evolution has outstripped the theoretical statement of political relations. It is the purpose of this paper to show that this is the case. This can be done by showing the salient historical conditions which led political theorists to conceive the state as power and by re-examining the conception in the light of certain modern political conditions and tendencies. In this way it will appear that the state was defined as a power because of facts which were doubtless of sufficient importance in their day to justify the definition but which have largely passed away.

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