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*Auguste Comte's Positivism and the Persistence of Metaphysics*

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Auguste Comte's work contrasts positivism with metaphysics and suggests that the former will replace the latter as both the dominant epistemological regime and the dominant political form. His well known law of the three states stipulates that cultures evolve from theology, through a metaphysical stage, towards positivity, and he dated the arrival of the latter to the middle of the nineteenth century. The two methods of positivism, objective and subjective are usually thought to be opposed to one another. Here it is suggested that the earlier objective positivism of Comte had already incorporated subjective elements. This article suggests that Comte's terms still retain some interest if the concept of the metaphysical phase is seen to have developed into to a stable formation in its own right, and the positive polity remains an unrealised ideal formation. It examines some of the specificities of the Comtean notion of metaphysics and metaphysical domains, including the metaphysical self, metaphysical sciences such as political economy, and metaphysical government. It is suggested that Comte's concept of the metaphysical state is a major contribution to social philosophy alongside his notion of positivism.