*That the social function of the police is to maintain a certain world order, or a certain regime of domination, is an open secret. What continues to be less understood, however, is the lie upon which their existence depends, the greatest anthropological lie: that without their exercise of "legitimate" violence we would be incapable of giving each other common rules of life and would kill each other at the first opportunity. To put an end to the police is first and foremost to put an end to this infantilism. This is the aim of the following manifesto, published anonymously in France during the first phase of the George Floyd uprising in the U.S.*

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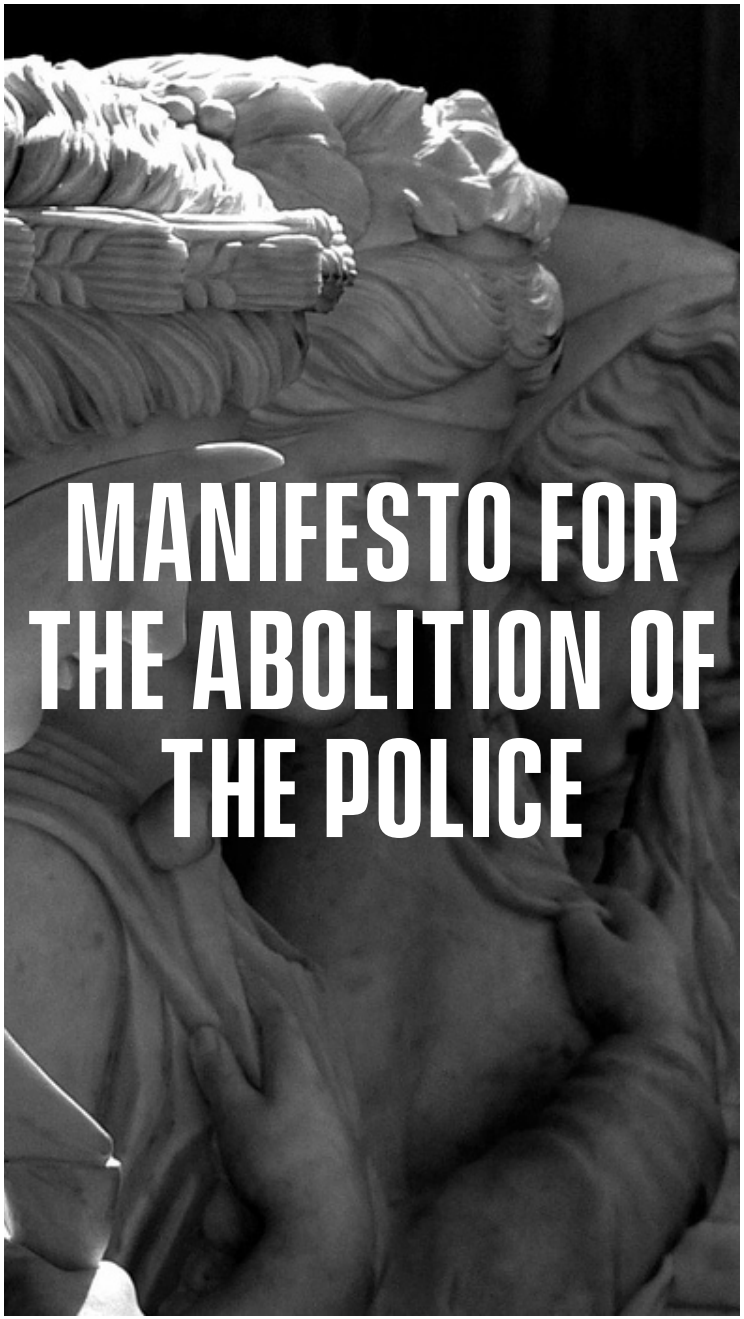

# MANIFESTO FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE POLICE

professional criterion, the limit of their mental horizon" (p.196) and with which only a small number of police officers managed to break away from the beginning, before being gradually joined by others as the prospect of German defeat became clearer. Jean-Marc Berlière also shows that the purification that followed was deeper than we tend to think today, but that it was little concerned with prioritizing responsibilities and little sensitivity to the question of police collaboration in the genocide of the Jews." For more information, in French: (René Lévy, Jean-Marc Berlière, "Le monde des polices en France XIXe-XXe siècles" / Marie Vogel et Jean-Marc Berlière, *Police, État et société en France (1930-1960)* Bruxelles, Éditions Complexe, 1996, 275 pp., ISBN 2 87027 641 9 (Collection « Le monde de… ») / Les cahiers de l'IHTP, 1997, 36, 143 pp., ISSN 0247- 0101)

21. "Reason must, however, attempt to approach such conditions all the more resolutely, if it is to bring to a conclusion its critique of both lawmaking and law-preserving violence. In a far more unnatural combination than in the death penalty, in a kind of spectral mixture, these two forms of violence are present in another institution of the modern state: the police. True, this is violence for legal ends (it includes the right of disposition), but with the simultaneous authority to decide these ends itself within wide limits (it includes the right of decree). The ignominy of such an authority—which is felt by few simply because its ordinances suffice only seldom, even for the crudest acts, but are therefore allowed to rampage all the more blindly in the most vulnerable areas and against thinkers, from whom the state is not protected by law—lies in the fact that in this authority the separation of lawmaking and law-preserving violence is suspended. If the first is required to prove its worth in victory, the second is subject to the restriction that it may not set itself new ends. Police violence is emancipated from both conditions. It is lawmaking." Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" in *Selected Writings*, Volume 1, 2004, p. 242-243.



# MANIFESTO FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE POLICE

*Anonymous*

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Set in *Bembo* & VANGUARD.

State. He believed they could manage their police far better themselves, and the sop which had been held out of payment was a delusion ; it would still come out of their own pockets. The right hon. Baronet the Secretary for the Home Department had passed a just tribute of praise on the municipal councils generally. How he reconciled such praise with the framing of such a measure as the present, he (Sir J. Walmsley) was at a loss to discover. It was the duty of the Government, before they attempted such interference, to show its necessity. He had listened in vain to the long speech of the right hon. Baronet, for any justification of such measure. He had, it was true, produced a long array of statistics to show that in those counties where there were the fewest police, crime was the rifest ; but the figures were not only disputed, but, as far as he had been able to gather from the adverse statement of his hon. Friend the Member for Bath, totally set at nought. So far as the boroughs were concerned, he had scarcely attempted to palliate the measure. At most, he had only shown that there was a deficiency of force in some of them ; but surely the shortcomings of a few was no justification for a general interference with municipal self-government." from Police (counties and boroughs) Bill. HC Deb 10 March 1856, Vol 140.

20. "The Third Republic, and it is the first merit of the work to show it, thus maintained a composite police system, source of multiple contradictions, competition and conflicts, where the gendarmerie and a very poorly developed state police force—the Sûreté générale (then, after 1934, "national")—coexisted at the national level, for a long time reduced to a political police force, before being supplemented by an embryonic judicial police force (the famous mobile brigades created in 1907). Locally, there were sometimes purely municipal police forces, often weak, and sometimes municipal police forces that were established on an ad hoc basis to respond to particular situations, with the exception of Paris, which had always been under the direct authority of the State (but without any link to the Sûreté). This rather chaotic situation would only find its epilogue with the war and the Occupation, with the Vichy regime carrying out, in this area as in others, the "modernization" of structures that many had been asserting the need for since the first pre-war period. In this sense, "Vichy extends and completes the work of the Third Republic" (p. 164), but without calling into question the existence of the Prefecture of Police of Paris (which was not integrated into the National Police until 1966, while retaining its specific organization). Jean-Marc Berlière clearly shows both how Vichy was able to satisfy the aspirations of the police and how it locked them into a trap: that of collaboration with Nazism, backed by the regime's appearance of legitimacy (and the republican past of many of its leaders) and reinforced by the latter's desire to assert its sovereignty by taking on, in place of the occupier, the dirty work that the latter was only too happy to unload on the French police. This period also reveals, for the worst, the extreme professionalism and competence of the police officers who had been hardened under the Republic, and the misdeeds of a "culture of obedience" of which "their only concern had been made the ideal

the framework of legitimate violence, otherwise it is the individual, by their excess, who is at fault and only them. This singularization is to be understood as the means par excellence to guarantee the use of legitimate violence by the police institution. The blunder is seen from the point of view of the institution as a privatization of the violence by the police officer. It is not the violence that is at stake but the professional behavior of the police officer." See Cedric Morreau de Bellaing, "La police dans l'état de droit. Les dispositifs de formation initiale et de contrôle interne de la police nationale dans la France contemporaine". Collected in the proceedings from the conference, *« Mais que fait la police" ? Le travail policier sous le regard des sciences sociales »*, Université de Montréal, Tuesday November 20th, 2012.

16. "The rudimentary character of State-coercive apparatus in the *polis* has been noted by Sir Moses Finley among others. With the partial exceptions of Sparta, the Athenian navy, and tyrannies, the *polis* had no standing army. Only in the case of tyrannies were militias used for internal policing (Finley 1983: 18-20). (Tyrannies were indeed attempts to centralize the means of coercion, that is to create a State). As for police, it seems to be agreed that the ancient *polis* 'never developed a proper police system' (Badian 1970: 851); the nearest thing to it was usually a 'small number of publicly owned slaves at the disposal of different magistrates' (Finley 1983: 18)." Moshe Berent, "Greece: The Stateless Polis (11th – 4th Centuries B.C.)" in *The Early State, Its Alternatives and Analogues*, 2004, p. 367.

17. The police lieutenant general, created in 1667, is the keystone of the repressive system in the 17th and 18th centuries. The lieutenant, a true "eye of the king," has the mission to "purge the city of what can cause disorder." With almost unlimited powers, he runs the Office of Letters of Seal and State Prisons. In this capacity, he and his men intervene in the daily life of the Bastille. For more information, in French, see Philippe Poisson, "La loi du 23 avril 1941 portant organisation générale des services de police en France," Criminocorpus, *Histoire de la police*.

18. Patrick Colquhoun was a Scotsman supported with help from John Harriot and Jeremy Bentham (a major figure of English utilitarianism).

19. Excerpts from debates around the creation of a state police force in the United Kingdom in 1856: "Immediately on the passing of the Rural Police Bill, he (Mr. Packe) proposed to the sessions of which he had the honour to be chairman, that they should adopt it in the county (Leicester) of which he had the honour to be the representative, and he could say that there was not in that county an individual who had not the highest opinion of the good working of it (Police) ; and as he was anxious to see the benefits […] He was satisfied that the police, and its regulations in boroughs generally, would successfully compare with the best regulated county force. He (Sir J. Walmsley) was only sorry to see many of the county gentlemen so willing to surrender their local management into the hands of the Secretary of



*Deprivation of honor attains its extreme degree with that total deprivation of respect reserved for certain categories of human beings. In France, this affects, under various forms, prostitutes, ex-convicts, police agents and the sub-proletariat composed of colonial immigrants and natives. Categories of this kind ought not to exist.*

*Crime alone should place the individual who has committed it outside the social pale, and punishment should bring them back again inside it.*

– Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*

*The deity being their shepherd, mankind needed no political constitution.*

– Plato, *Laws*

*Yesterday I saw the cannons used to topple the ramparts, today I see the machine, the printing press, used to topple kings. What comes out of it looks like a drop of water falling from the sky: if it falls into the half-open shell, it produces a pearl; if it falls into the mouth of the viper, it produces venom.*

– Abd El-Kader, 1852

themselves in a decent manner, and the workplace transformations that are imposed on them. Few candidates, many resignations: never and nowhere were the numbers foreseen by the texts reached. For a long time, it was thought (and written) that the introduction of the STO [*Service du travail obligatoire*, the Vichy forced labor program] from which police officer status was exempt, had changed this situation. As things stand, there is no way to say this with certainty and the situation in the various cities seems to show significant regional nuances. Many of the candidates seem to have preferred to join the Road Guard, which is constantly and significantly expanding (6,000, then 8,000 men in 1944). Moreover, the need to benefit from the professional experience of former personnel often contributed to their permanence. As for the dangers presented by this new organization, they appear clearly, for example, in the confusion of tasks it established: the repressive missions entrusted to the General Intelligence, the political missions entrusted to the Judicial Police Services had to show the disastrous consequences of such a transgression. S. Kitson, author of a thesis on "The Marseille Police in their context from Popular Front to Liberation" (Sussex University, 1995) notes, however, the negative role played by the assimilation between "National Police" and "National Revolution," which gave one the image of an essentially political police and the other that of a police regime." For more information, in French: Jean-Marc Berlière, "La loi du 23 avril 1941 portant organisation générale des services de police en France," Criminocorpus, *Histoire de la police*.

15. "More than 71% of the cases of violence that have been the subject of a disciplinary council are off-duty violence, and almost all of these off-duty violence are private violence; very few of the violence committed on duty result in a disciplinary council. So over the period I studied, i.e. 7 years, only 14 grounds for violence in the workplace resulted in a disciplinary council, i.e. 4.2% of the total number of complaints. The proportion is reversed with respect to complaints filed for alleged police violence, we have 88% of the cases concerning alleged violence in service. Contrary to violence on duty, private violence does not assume in the IGS survey that it is intended to assess the legitimacy of the force, since private violence is, in its view, unjustifiable by the IGS and in no way related to the police mission. What is sanctioned in private violence is not so much the illegality of this violence as the fact that it is removed from the perimeter of the use of force that is normally assigned to the police officer. In other words, the exercise of this violence cannot be questioned from the point of view of the professionalism of the police officer. It is illegitimate. However, when it is established in spite of everything, this violence (on duty) undergoes a reformulation: it is reported in the internal reports of the I.G.S., in the disciplinary councils, as a lack of professionalism. Now the lack of professionalism allows an operation that illegitimate violence does not allow, I insist, the illegitimate violence has to do with public force while the lack of professionalism has to do with the individual and singularizes the dysfunction. If the blows were dealt in the exercise of the public force in proportionate response, then we are in

12. "His gaze fell upon the top story of the building adjoining the quarry. Like a light flicking on, the casements of a window flew open, a human figure, faint and insubstantial at that distance and height, leaned far out abruptly, and stretched both arms out even further. Who was it? A friend? A good person? Someone who cared? Someone who wanted to help? Was it just one person? Was it everyone? Was there still help? Were there objections that had been forgotten? Of course there were. Logic is no doubt unshakable, but it can't withstand a person who wants to live. Where was the judge he'd never seen? Where was the high court he'd never reached? He raised his hands and spread out all his fingers. But the hands of one man were right at K.'s throat, while the other thrust the knife into his heart and turned it there twice." Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, 1998, p.425-426.

13. "It can be formulated as a general maxim of present-day European legislation that all the natural ends of individuals must collide with legal ends if pursued with a greater or lesser degree of violence. (The contradiction between this and the right to self-defense will be resolved in what follows.) From this maxim it follows that law sees violence in the hands of individuals as a danger undermining the legal system. As a danger nullifying legal ends and the legal executive? Certainly not; for then what would be condemned would not be violence as such but only that which is directed to illegal ends. It will be argued that a system of legal ends cannot be maintained if natural ends are anywhere still pursued violently. In the first place, however, this is mere dogma." Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" in *Selected Writings*, Volume 1, 2004, p. 238-239.

14. This new structure, the change in the status of former municipal police personnel, and the significant increase in personnel that resulted from it led to the crucial problem of continuity of personnel between the police forces of the Third Republic and those of the French State. The recruitment of a new staff, made up of "healthy, upright young men with no political affiliation" that the circulars of the Ministry of the Interior committed the prefects to "directing towards this elite corps" in order to "make a very active contribution to the National Recovery," was to make it possible to rid these police forces of elements that were too compromised with the disgraced republic, generally under the pretext of their incompetence or criteria—morality, nationality, political attitude, age, size, belonging to the "Jewish race" or to disbanded societies—not in line with the rules of the new recruitment. This practice can be likened to a hidden cleansing, but in the absence of a corpus of regional studies, it is difficult today to have a precise idea of the importance of the renewal of police personnel brought about by this new organization. The only cases studied show the extreme diversity of situations depending on the cities and regions, and above all the real recruitment problems that, in spite of the advantages offered, these police forces experienced, shunned by candidates who very quickly discovered the constraints of the profession, the unpopularity of the tasks required, the financial difficulties that do not allow them to feed or house



# I

## THE POLICE KING

The purpose of policing has something vague and unreal about it. Were it real, it would demand our utmost attention, for a concept of justice and the public good is not an easy thing to think up. The existence of the police is palpable, obvious, and requires no effort to be recognized. So it seems obvious that policing is an end unto itself. It is an easy leap to make. We simply posit as an axiom that the sole condition, both necessary and sufficient, under which the police can meaningfully contribute to justice and the public good that it allegedly exists to serve is that they first be granted a large amount of power.

The power in question is what we commonly refer to as the legal monopoly of public force, the violence authorized by the State to shore up respect for its laws. No fixed amount of such power could ever be considered enough, especially once it has been obtained. Police understand themselves as serving not simply the laws of the nation but *justice*. As a result, they feel they are kept in a condition of impotence, never given enough power. Since the police believe they serve justice and not merely law, police believe they're out to protect the widow and the orphan—or in any case, we attribute such thoughts to them. The essential tendency of policing is totalitarian. It is precisely because the idea of justice and the public good that policing depends upon is a *fiction*, an imaginary thing divorced from reality, that it can provoke a quest for absolute power. That which has no existence can never be delimited. To believe that the State limits the police is to believe, quite simply, that the State is more real than the police, when in fact the police are the very embodiment of the State, its most palpable presence in everyday life.[1]

The word "police" is used here in the same sense that anyone living in a modern industrialized State would use it, whether this state be democratic or not. In this case, a single word designates the same reality in countries all over the world. The word has its roots in the form of policing we know, typical of capitalist countries. This is even more so in France, where it was invented under the *Ancien Régime*. Police officers, in addition to embodying the State, embody the defense of private property (against "property crimes," as one says of the charges often filed against demonstrators). They confer reality on the idea of private property, just as they do for the idea of the state. It it this defense of private property that systematically drives the police to practice ethnic discrimination. As we shall see below, racial bias among individual officers plays a far lesser role, and is not the crux of the problem. The problem with the police is not racism. The racial bias distracts from structuring factors; it is because they know this that criticisms of police activity prefer to focus on the racism of officers rather than challenging police activity in its entirety. The innocent will always prefer to see good cops and bad cops, just as in the minds of the Vichy collaborators, there were good and bad Nazis.

There would not be enough space in these lines to describe in detail the misdeeds that the police have committed and are still committing, in France and around the world. Their harm is typically inflicted in two ways: carceral repression (a modern and more learned form of colonial slavery) and common violence (aimed at destroying the individual and creating the citizen). The danger posed by the existence of the police is written off by citizens who are not their direct victims. Worse, this danger is assumed to be a necessary evil because it is associated with a good: the exercise of maintaining order and enforcing the law. The police maintain the inequalities that the Revolution of 1789 failed to destroy, and which, thanks to them, have survived to this day. By their threat of violence, the police confer reality on the notion of law. The police officer is the State's ideal form of citizenship.[2] For citizens, the cop represents the dream of a perfect form of justice. Today's imperfect democracies and republics see the institution of policing as their most obvious means of defense, and the police see these regimes as their



not contested, and in which minimum conditions of tranquillity and salubrity are guaranteed. They spend most of their time on the public highway, which is precisely where the police exercise their duties. The police and the marginalized are thus linked by a real proximity, attested by the daily life of their places of activity. On the other hand, it should be noted that this proximity is reinforced by the techniques sometimes used by the police to better control populations that they identify as a major source of public order disturbances (as a source of noise pollution in the first place). These techniques tend to expel them from certain territories, which are incompatible with the presence of certain people in a marginal position with respect to the law. One of the people we spoke to said he was particularly outraged at the systematic physical harassment of which he claimed to be the victim by two policemen who wanted him to leave the neighborhood in question: this corner of Paris was in fact the neighborhood where he lived and where he had grown up. By implementing these techniques, the police attempt to move these people away from particular territories, to regroup them, if necessary, in other places, in order to make the deviant zones visible, accessible, known. By the very nature of the populations that gather there, these places have the property of keeping at a distance those who are foreign to them: those who are neither marginalized nor police officers." Idem.

9. See *criminocorpus.org/fr/reperes/legislation/textes-juridiques-lois-decre/textes-relatifs-a-lorganisati/loi-du-23-avril-1941-portant-o/*

10. "In the past, the most varied institutions—beginning with the sib—have known the use of physical force as quite normal. Today, however, we have to say that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. Note that 'territory' is one of the characteristics of the state. Specifically, at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence." Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" in *Essays in Sociology*, 2005, p. 78.

11. "As to the third: it is a particular instance of the phenomenon which always occurs whenever thinking individuals are dominated by a collective structure—a reversal of the relation between ends and means. Everywhere, without exception, all the things that are generally considered ends are in fact, by nature, by essence, and in a most obvious way, mere means. One could cite countless examples of this from every area of life: money, power, the state, national pride, economic production, universities, etc., etc. Goodness alone is an end. Whatever belongs to the domain of facts pertains to the category of means. Collective thinking, however, cannot rise above the factual realm. It is an animal form of thinking. Its dim perception of goodness merely enables it to mistake this or that means for an absolute good." Simone Weil, *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*, 2013, p. 24.

intervene" (249); Paraphrasing Lamare's 1705 *Traité de la police* (Treatise on the Police), Foucault writes, "The police sees to living. […] Life is the object of the police: the indispensable, the useful, and the superfluous. That people survive, live, and even do better than just that, is what the police has to ensure" (250). Paraphrasing Von Justi's 1759 police treatise *Grundsätze der Policey-Wissenschaft*, Foucault writes, "The police, he says, is what enables the state to increase its power and exert its strength to the full. On the other hand, the police have to keep the citizens happy—happiness being understood as survival, life, and improved living" (251-252).

5. "The doctrine of the police defines the nature of the objects of the state's rational activity; it defines the nature of the aims it pursues, the general form of the instruments involved. […] So what the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors understand by 'the police' is very different from what we put under the term. It would be worth studying why these authors are mostly Italians and Germans, but whatever! What they understand by 'police' isn't an institution or mechanism functioning within the state, but a governmental technology peculiar to the state." Idem, p. 242, 246.

6. Paraphrasing Saint Thomas Aquinas, Foucault writes, "Man needs someone capable of opening up the way to heavenly bliss through his conformity, here on earth, to what is *honestum*." Idem, p. 244.

7. "This approach dictates a methodological reversal that is no longer interested in observing what the police do, but in revealing and understanding what happens when they use force. It thus involves taking as an object of analysis the rarity of violent interactions, in order to overcome the obstacle posed by the low frequency of these encounters. We will insist here on the double context of these encounters: the social space in which they are rooted, and the legal space in which they are transported." Fabien Jobard, "Comprendre l'habilitation à l'usage de la force policière," *Déviance et Société* 2001/3 (Vol. 25), pages 325 à 345).

8. "Interviews with people leaving prison show that the strength of the emotions provoked by the police is primarily linked to the anomie (or, to use Durkheim's terminology, which is what we are talking about here: the state of deregulation) that characterizes people who say they have been victims of violence. Wandering around the city, having trouble finding a private space of one's own to enjoy, resource precarity, the impossibility of mobility (social as well as geographical) and the consequent difficulty of escaping being locked up in the processes of being labeled by the police—all these factors determine a dual relationship with the police. The first dimension of this relationship is that these people find in the police the essential, if not unique, actors of their relationship to society, to everything outside their common world. On the one hand, these people often cannot withdraw into an enclosed and protected private space, a home in which their right to be there is



benefactors. As a result, the extinction of the police as such is simply a necessary stage in human progress towards the more efficient and strict control of its coercive force of constraint on behalf of a powerful minority. That is, if France ever decides one day to become a democracy.

The word "police" is used here in its strictest sense, without direct reference to the Anglo-Saxon notion of "policing" or the German notion of *Polizeiwissenschaft*, which more clearly illustrates the etymology of the word, and the role that police also perform as guardian of order in the city.[3] To explain the word "policing," let's say simply that it is one of the police's primary missions, and certainly their most vague. It can very well consist in using facial features to control individuals, or profiling, in working-class neighborhoods. It can be all or any one of the forms of population control recognized by the State as part of the police's role. In *Omnes et Singulatim*, Michel Foucault gives a broader definition: the police are the complex of the knowledge and instruments that allows a State to develop.[4] We will only say this: if theoreticians of the State were thinking in terms of policing when they tried to rationalize the power of the State, it was because they were above all interested in proving the existence of the State independently, relying on the rationalization of its violence. Today, in poverty-stricken neighborhoods where the State merely distributes alms without ever embodying anything other than a suffocating and inhumane bureaucracy, the police make it possible for the State to exist. Where the State is weak, the police act even more brutally than usual. The school itself is disciplinary in these neighborhoods. Seeing the inability of the legal system to confront this police action—so brutal that it tends to erode love for the State in the hearts of the fellow citizens in these neighborhoods—the politicians judge that what is needed is not a more just State, but rather, paradoxically, an even more brutal police force (like when Sarkozy promised to "clean up the streets *au karcher*," referring to "Karcher," a company known for its pressure washers). And the more this situation worsens, the more the police are defended as a banner against the violence of the revolt rumbling. Under this banner the good people are gathering, ready to swallow a whole billy club to prove their support for the police—if only they would!

But does violence really keep justice at bay? For a time only. It is true that all violence is to be feared, without turning a blind eye out of terror, neglecting its causes. And in this particular case, the cause of all violence in our political regimes can be attributed to the action or non-action of the police. The same police who make sure that the inhabitants of poor neighborhoods are kept, along with their demands, far away from the spheres of legitimate demands. These people understand the violence of the police as the State's definitive rejection. For them, the impossibility of having their demands to get out of poverty heard becomes obvious.

This reduced definition is here adopted with the simple and practical aim of avoiding the kind of paradoxical definition that results when the police are thought of as an instrument of the State; this explains the paradoxical reaction of politicians, cited above.[5]

## II

### FROM VICHY TO SARKOZY

The abolition of the police must therefore be considered as a feat to be accomplished starting with its current structure in France. To envision such a thing, we can turn to someone who, in this field, has unwittingly begun to realize part of this vision: Nicolas Sarkozy. He summarizes his strategy in a press conference where he targets the police prefecture of Toulouse:

> *The prevention work you do is very useful, but you are not social workers. Organizing a rugby game for local youth is good, but that's not the primary mission of the police. The primary mission of the police is to investigate, arrest, and fight crime.*

By carefully monitoring the physical violence inflicted on the livestock, one can perhaps plead in the stable against the abusive and profiteering shepherds and then send them away. But I don't believe it. Pleading for the abolition of the police to a citizen who has only ever addressed this problem from a very remote and safe distance some-





1. "For however paradoxical this may appear at first sight, even conduct involving the exercise of a right can nevertheless, under certain circumstances, be described as violent. More specifically, such conduct, when active, may be called violent if it exercises a right in order to overthrow the legal system that has conferred it; when passive, it is nevertheless to be so described if it constitutes extortion in the sense explained above. In the great criminal this violence confronts the law with the threat of declaring a new law, a threat that even today, despite its impotence, in important instances horrifies the public as it did in primeval times. The State, however, fears this violence simply for its lawmaking character." Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" in *Selected Writings*, Volume 1, 2004, 240-241.

2. Commenting on Turquet's utopia (in *La monarchie aristodémocratique*, Book III, p. 208), Foucault writes, "The "police" appears as an administration heading the state, together with the judiciary, the army, and the exchequer. True. Yet in fact, it embraces everything else. Turquet says so: "It branches out into all of the people's conditions, everything they do or undertake. Its field comprises justice, finance, and the army." The police includes everything. But from an extremely particular point of view. Men and things are envisioned as to their relationships: men's coexistence on a territory; their relationships as to property; what they produce; what is exchanged on the market. It also considers how they live, the diseases and accidents that can befall them. What the police sees to is a live, active, productive man. Turquet employs a remarkable expression: "The police's true object is man." Michel Foucault, "*Omnes et Singulatim*: Towards a Criticism of Political Reason" in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 1981, p. 247-248.

3. "The German *Polizeiwissenschaft*; let's not forget that this was the title under which the science of administration was taught in Germany." Idem, p. 249.

4. "Just to look at nascent state rationality, just to see what its first policing project was, makes it clear that, right from the start, the state is both individualising and totalitarian" (254); "Liberation can only come from attacking, not just one of these two effects, but political rationality's very roots" (ibid); "As a form of rational intervention wielding political power over men, the role of the police is to supply them with a little extra life; and by so doing, supply the state with a little extra strength. This is done by controlling 'communication', i.e., the common activities of individuals (work, production, exchange, accommodation)" (248); "Royal power had asserted itself against feudalism thanks to the support of an armed force and by developing a judicial system and establishing a tax system. These were the ways in which royal power was traditionally wielded. Now, 'the police' is the term covering the whole new field in which centralised political and administrative power can

*The Non-Limited is the original material of existing things; further, the source from which existing things derive their existence is also that to which they return at their destruction, according to necessity; for they give justice and make reparation to one another for their injustice, according to the arrangement of Time.*

The police were born out of the chaos of totalitarian violence, and they will return there, one day or another.

We must believe in the possibility and the necessity of a future without police, where the youth in uniform will shred their tunic and, repenting, will rejoin order and sing in unison with the uproar. Otherwise, we are left to place our faith in bloodbaths, and the citizens who take cover under the rotten tree of the police institution, thinking themselves protected from the storm, will surely be the least sheltered from the lightning when it strikes. The abolition of the police is a new idea in France and throughout the world. The end of the police is not any more complex of an undertaking than was their recent beginning. In the first place, it is necessary to gradually give real employment to individuals from the ranks of the police. First of all, reduce hiring, then drastically reduce police salaries and lay off, for a time, a large part of the workforce. One effective measure might be the deprivation of voting rights for police officers. Under certain conditions, this would make the job less attractive.

It is important to be able to give meaning back to the lives of these individuals who have joined the police because they failed at school. This can be done through a major training policy and valorization at the time of hiring. It is important to give meaning and honor back to these individuals, not because it could cost us personally one day not to do so, but because it costs us as much every day when the harm suffered is endured by one of our own.



times gives the illusion of actually talking to livestock. Always the same unanimous answers: "And replace them with what? You can't cancel crime"—"It would be chaos without the police!"—"That doesn't happen to law-abiding citizens"—"That depends on the color of your skin"—"We need guard dogs!"—etc. This complicity between the citizen and the police should be studied in detail, not only in the phenomena of informants and snitching, but also in the ethnography of the tradition of bearing arms and the respect accorded to those who carry them.[6]

Nicolas Sarkozy exploited to his advantage the subtleties of police psychology and the duplicity of citizens that plays out in their desire for protection. But the strategy developed by Sarkozy to do away with community policing is revelatory for criticizing the police as a means whose ends can be constantly redefined by the State. These ends are never clearly defined in the citizen's mind. But what always speaks to the livestock is the number. Number is the religion and mysticism of livestock. Numbers and calculation are a magical art for those citizens who sink into animal thought, the collective thought of the big Platonic animal. This herd wants to practice arithmetic without knowing geometry. It does not know how to turn the left cheek, it only knows how to bend the spine for fear of being hit. But strength is in numbers—it is necessary to talk numbers to convince the herd.

With these numbers we must point out the inefficiency of the means and eventually abolish the police. Any form of debate on the simple geometry of the problem, despite deserving greater attention, never really convinces the herd. For the modern individual who has refused to listen to their conscience and who possesses a middle-class mentality, numbers, and only numbers, allow them to objectively grasp any problem, or at least that is what they believe. By the way, the available statistics on the fight against crime support the argument for abolishing the police. In truth, though, this is a rhetorical artifice, and not an effort to take citizens out of the animal mentality, which would require them, each individually, to make these calculations themselves.

In Sarkozy's speech, numbers are the goal and the solve rate is not high enough, which is paradoxical. The more police officers there are,

the more crimes are reported; if the solve rate is deemed too low, it means that they are not good at their job. And what is this job? Producing numbers. And on the basis of this bad result, Sarkozy at once deduces the uselessness of community policing and retires it in the same breath. It is remarkable that this same strategy was used by the English utilitarians to support the adoption of a "state police" in Parliament. It is also remarkable that Sarkozy does not cite the numbers equally (13% of cases solved, in this example alone, or 87% unsolved, as we can deduce). Looking at a crime rate is really believing that all crimes are equal, in the sense that no crime should ever go unpunished. It is to this end, in the eyes of the citizen, that a police force is introduced in the city. Nowadays, the police have acquired a union consciousness. I wouldn't quite say a class consciousness. The numbers strategy is now negotiated by the police unions, which act as a lubricant for the hierarchical machinery. This obscure functioning, where the unions are very powerful and give electoral cues, is close to the structure of a mafia in uniform. While the mafia seeks to increase its number of sales, the police seek to increase their number of solved cases. The police have strong ties to politicians and are protected by the state justice system, as is the mafia sometimes as well.

But are all crimes really equal? How much longer must we believe that, fundamentally, the theft of an iPhone resembles (on a small scale) the embezzlement of several million euros by a boss or an elected official, and that it is therefore reasonable to kill over the former crime and judge the others crimes with leniency? Are all the crimes the police deal with indiscriminately worth the same effort to solve? Why isn't crime decreasing, despite the unprecedented deployment of police forces in France, but rather constantly increasing? Isn't this the clearest argument for the inefficiency of the police institution? If the police can already kill with impunity today, then what more could they do tomorrow with more resources?

My goal, then, dear reader, humbly admitted, is to convince you that the French national police are a growing danger to you personally and to your rights, and a major and growing obstacle to the advent of a democratic system in France. If you simply take up the issue of race or



ogy plays a big role in this strategy. It broadens the means available to the police to achieve their repressive goal set by the State.

## XI

### THE QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER THE POLICE ARE A DANGER TO SOCIETY, BUT HOW TO GET RID OF THEM

Fear of the police does not deter crime. An example: what citizen would want to live in a city where the only objection the inhabitants have to the practice of rape or cannibalism are the legal sanctions they incur after having raped and eaten someone? It is false to believe that progress in pacifying human society is achieved through fear of punishment, instead of disgust with the crime in question.

Of course, when applying punishment, severity has a deterrent effect when it includes an element of cruelty up to a certain limit, beyond which severity can turn the citizen against the State and its cruelty. "Punishment only takes place where the hardship is accompanied at some time or another, even after it is over, and in retrospect, by a feeling of justice," writes Simone Weil in *The Need for Roots* (*L'Enracinement*). But if there is suffering without any sense of justice, as is the case in France, there is a risk for the State of revealing its naked power, which is then only force and violence, as Pascal describes it. The stronger the State is, the more subtle this cruelty is in order to go beyond this limit. Advances in violence are shaped by their concealment. The Nazis were the first to reflect on the concealment of horrors such as those now being perpetuated by France, and France is the initiator of another diabolical idea: revisionism. The concentration camps were not built on the site of the Reichstag building in Berlin itself. The greatest violence is always enacted out of sight of everyone, in the darkest dungeon, and if not, everyone turns their head anyway so as not to see it. Would the police have been abolished long ago if they took from the rich what they steal from the poor?

The police must be abolished through non-violence, otherwise they will inevitably be abolished through violence, the very violence by which they live. For as Anaximander says:

does not change this. The police have killed and are still killing. And when they don't kill, they mutilate, torture, humiliate and enslave. If we tolerate that the police have weapons, it is always only as long as they don't use them. This is indeed a very small part of police work. And while in our times there has been a decline in murders committed by the police in capitalist countries, there has, at the same time, been a technological improvement in the sub-lethal means of carrying out violence. Similarly, the cruelty of punishment seems to be fading as punishment evolves. It is a double illusion to believe that the police kill less and injure more because they are becoming more humane, or that the standardization of punishments (which have mostly become prison sentences) implies the disappearance of torture.

In our times, the language of journalism speaks of a blunder, equivalent to the technical malfunction of a bug or glitch, when the sub-lethal means fail. Seeing the murder of a citizen as a workplace accident—a mishandling of the violence used by a violence technician (the police officer who slips up)—and not a tragedy—this is the real blunder. The technical root of this term "blunder" sheds light on the motivations of those who use it to euphemistically refer to murder or torture. From the capitalist point of view, the use of excessive violence (leading one to shoot on a crowd of strikers, for example) adds to labor costs and presents the risk of destabilizing the means of production through the desire for revolt generated by martyrs. Excessive violence delegitimizes and weakens the State. Mutilation, surveillance, prison experience, terror, etc. are more effective (and sub-lethal) methods of making the individual docile and thus achieving the true goal—the means serve the ends. In this way, we see that emancipation and the progress of human values can follow the same trajectory and direction as contrary values and think there is a correlation. It would be wrong to think that the advances made in placing restrictions on police officers from using lethal forms of repression over the years is something established by virtue of a relation of power of the population over the police and their leaders when it seems, on the contrary, as in chess, to be the next move of the opponent in the game, who has only lost a knight or a bishop. Technol-



police violence without considering the underlying problem, then you will inevitably end up, in the long run, supporting one form of the police or another. You will never think more deeply about the causes. You will say, "At the end of the day there are good cops and bad cops." You will never include yourself in the equation. Never take into account the fact that, if some individuals are degrading their honor by wearing a uniform that dehumanizes them so much, they do so in the first place for you…a "citizen" like themselves! When you judge them to be good policemen, what you are really saying is that humans are bad, and it is for that reason that human possibilities must be reduced in order not to act badly. But because we don't want to harm others for our own good, according to the Kantian maxim, we also don't want others to inflict harm in our name. The solution then is simple: abolish the nationwide police force that was created in France in 1941[7], and extract from the state this tumor that is the police.[8] I should add that at no time is it a question of proposing to reform the police or to flank them with new and more powerful forms of control and supervision. After all, beyond the danger to individuals, the police represent a danger to the State itself, whatever its regime.

## III

### "Is police violence really happening?"

It is true that many people think it would be dangerous for the police and the state to have total power. It is a frightening thought, and this fear of a police state is not just in our heads. This fear was felt in France under Vichy and still remains.

The people we talk to about abolishing the police just want "more justice, protection and punishment of crime," as though it were a limitless thing. If there are a thousand less crimes this year than last year, if citations and drug raids have increased, they are happy. But they want it to continue indefinitely, in the same direction. Never will they conceive that the police might have too many members, too many weapons, and too many means. Were they to say it about the police, they would not say it about the end (the State and its justice), which they

fail to discern, and for which the police are the means. For them, the police are not a means, but an end in themselves. Increasing the solve rate and the means of the police becomes the only criterion by which the good and the bad are defined in all things. Politicians will use this argument to show citizens that the police are acting in their interest. If the rate is too low, it means that there are not enough means or that they are not efficient enough, etc. Exactly as if the police officer were a doctor and the crimes were diseases. Like diseases, crimes would be infinitely diverse and emerge endlessly to contaminate individuals (think of the term "crime epidemic" and consider the overrepresentation of this lexical parallel).

The anti-terrorist police also come to mind as a form of medical specialization, close to psychiatry, with their deradicalization centers. It should be noted that the doctor, too, is for the State a "health officer." Their medicine is criminal justice. This justice has only one objective: to maintain order and enforce the law. Some of the other remedies of the police officer include: incarceration (slavery), capital execution (murder), police interrogation (torture), etc. The cop, seen as a doctor, cures society of its criminal illnesses, diagnoses these diseases, and so on. If we very well may think that medicine can survive without a state to give it its legitimacy, we cannot think the same of the police. What would a police officer be in the absence of a State? The doctor will still treat, but what will the police do then?!

"If one's criterion of goodness is not goodness itself, one loses the very notion of what is good," says Simone Weil, whose *On the Abolition of All Political Parties* guides our present study. From the moment that police growth constitutes a criterion of the good, the idea of the police inevitably exerts a collective pressure on human thought. This pressure includes, among other things: the over-representation of the police in the mass media, political and public expression in support of the police, but even more cruelly, the desire for justice and protection of citizens. We will not wholly question the ends by advocating naive anarchism, but we will call into question the police as a means to achieve these ends.

If the ends of the State are truth, justice and public utility for the



## X

### THE POLICE OFFICER AS VIOLENCE WORKER

The police compensate to greater or lesser degrees for the lack of reality of the idea of the State in the minds of citizens. They send a clear message to citizens: *the State exists*. Depending on whether citizens believe, more or less, in this affirmation, the State more or less needs the police. The police respond to a single objective, whatever the citizen's problem: to demonstrate not the existence of a solution, on the part of the State, but simply the existence of the State in any situation. The citizen plays a large role in determining what is considered a problem for the State and what police response should be provided by the State as a solution to each of these problems. To understand this, it is necessary to bear in mind that the police are the unilateral response of the State to problems as diverse and complex as: poverty, rape, late-night disturbances, drug and prescription addiction, prostitution, tax evasion, traffic control, peaceful demonstrations, murder, neighborhood quarrels, theft, terrorism, epidemics, etc. Each of these problems should be addressed in order to propose a solution that does not include the police, if such solutions exist. Solutions do exist, but they will not come from the police, because, as has been said, the sole purpose of the police is to affirm the existence of the State and not to accomplish something in order to solve a problem. Violence is always the only expertise the police have. In advocating for the abolition of the police, therefore, it is also necessary to advocate for the ineffectiveness of police and prison "solutions" to these problems.

The differences in political regimes between countries that all have a police suggest that the police's monopoly is not over the means of carrying out violence, *but over the legality of using violence*. If the police have the right of life or death over anyone, then it has nothing to do with justice. For this right belongs to no one and could only be legitimized on a repugnant legal basis. If a country abolishes the death penalty (the question of justice in the attribution of sentences deserves to be discussed), does it abolish the right of the police to use potentially deadly force? It seems not. The abolition of the death penalty

is clear that all these characteristics are present in every State that has a police, except the last characteristic, owing quite simply to the growing importance of spying techniques (which turn unwitting individuals in cyberspace or telecommunications into the best police snitches).

Walter Benjamin notes that the notion of right or law has its origin in aristocratic power. By granting oneself rights (by virtue of royal power), one simultaneously also grants rights to those who do not have them (one does not exclude them from the realm of law, one deprives them of certain rights, they become vassals, beggars, brigands). Every right is violent or, as Benjamin distinguishes it, implies active or passive violence—but the violence is always real. According to this definition, the lawful State would in fact be the State which has the least control over its police (apart from legitimizing its violence). This control would therefore be exercised by the law representing the voice of the citizens and applied by the State to itself, within the framework of citizen control of police.

It is quite unrealistic and naive to believe that with the police there could be a form of democratic exercise of power that is not totalitarian, as it is to believe that there could be, existing at the same time as the State, another institution that stands up to it—a counter-power, in short, that could delegitimize its violence. The existence of a supreme court in the United States demonstrates the futility of such an institution. Justice cannot have as its mission to be entirely independent of power, otherwise it would have a power as great as the State or even greater (and would in fact be the State or the state religion).

The State will always exercise violence in the name of the citizen. Unless we are talking about militias, the same is not true of the citizens themselves. They do not always take action in the name of the State. If the police state is the one in which the state controls its police the most, to use it on citizens for the sole purpose of its own conservation and the growth of its force (the same purpose as that of the police), then in this case the police do not have an autonomy of their own that fundamentally distinguishes them from the State.



good of the citizens, then it is possible to abolish the police by proposing concrete means to achieve these aims within the state framework without the use of violence. If violence is a solution to the problems that citizens and the State face, it is because the problem is not being addressed at all or because mediation has been abandoned as a solution. And yet the police, as everyone knows, even for the purpose of a simple traffic check, have weapons and can use violence if they deem it necessary. Those who think they are law-abiding citizens are always ignorant about the ends to which the police respond by means of violence, and the very nature of this violence. They think it is to ensure the application of the penal code, the respect of order, etc.

But the nature of the violence used by the police is always kept out of sight, like a secret. The eyes torn out of demonstrators bear witness to this, almost like that mythical allegory about the soothsayer Tiresias, who was struck blind after seeing Athena naked. As in the legend, the moment that the demonstrators finally saw through the police's armor, they too lost their sight, but gained insight, and strength. They flouted the chastity of the police by contemplating their true nature, like Tiresias contemplating the nubile body of the warrior goddess. It is no longer the goddess with the shield, protector of the righteous, that Tiresias sees bathing in a spring but, after all, a young virgin. The woman or the man behind the police uniform is also presumed to be a virgin in the eyes of justice, innocent of all crime. In reality, the many blinded, mutilated and dead have proven them to be guilty. The naked violence of the State, like the body of Athena, must remain invisible to citizens in order to preserve its chastity in the fable; this is also Pascal's lesson on force in the *Pensées*. And this was the case when that violence was reserved for the inhabitants of the poorest neighborhoods. In the fable, "Athena then put her hands over his eyes and blinded him" (Apollodorus III, 6, 7). But in exchange, Tiresias received the gift of understanding birds. The demonstrators who lost an eye to the police did not receive this gift of speech. But perhaps they did receive the gift of sight, albeit with their one remaining eye: to see the true side of the police, and if they do not speak the language of the birds, they at least speak my abolitionist language and will hopefully be able to under-

stand it. At least I hope so.

They did see that the ends of the State are growth and the maintenance of its strength (which is always the case, under all political regimes). They did see that the police and the violence they use are a practical and effective means of obtaining not only the citizens' obedience to the State, but also their desire to maintain this violence within the legal framework, likewise guaranteed by the State (too many *casseurs*, or "breakers," too much damage to street furniture, too many blunders).

The term "police reform" is employed timidly. What is the point of reforming violence, why not simply deprive its user of it? The violence of the police is, in fact, the only violence that can be effectively combatted, because (along with the mafia) of all the organizations that use violence it is the one that is best organized. Domestic violence, on the contrary, can never be fought head-on, except in science fiction, and certainly not by the police.

## IV

### BUT WHAT DO POLICE DO?

The harm perpetrated by the police is obvious. The issue is that there is also a good that outweighs the bad, and this good supposedly explains the necessary utility of the police and a natural attachment to them. But it is much more accurate to ask: is it not rather pure evil? An animal evil? If a French police officer participates in the deportation of a child to Dachau, whether that officer believes that their crime has been cleared because they were simply following the orders they receive, as a police agent of a State—regardless of whether they judge that State lawful or not, democratic or not—this act is legitimate in the eyes of the functionary. It is, above all, the expression of a great majority, against which it would be more painful for them to resist than to submit to. Their crime is no less heinous. It is not their obedience or their justification of the legitimacy of the orders they receive (*those* are just means), but only their act which is atrocious and, indeed, *real*.

"Only what is just can be legitimate. In no circumstances can crime



its constitution either. This would be to forget that the State and the police feed off of each other's growing strength. Only the elimination of one or the other would weaken the remaining one of the two. No political party, once it had gained power, would seek to abolish any of that power's force by eliminating the police. The words "police" and "State" would then simply be labels placed on different legal systems (a bit like "unofficial" and "official"). In conclusion, the "police state" is not a concept, it is a journalistic slogan derived from bourgeois philosophy. One simply notices more police in the "police state" than in the "lawful state," but no difference at all in the structure of the State. There would just be less of what one usually considers to be granted to the State by law, and more of what one does not usually consider to be granted to it. Enforcement of the law by "law enforcement officers" is more real than the written law itself. What ultimately justifies the law is always that individuals take it upon themselves to enforce it. Actions speak louder than words. Thus, the maxim "everyone is supposed to know the law" would have no more reality than "the world belongs to those who get up early," if the police did not take it upon themselves to *give it* its reality, not as a simple legal vision of the world, but as a profane reality.

The idea that the State would limit the power of the police therefore presupposes that the State would have an interest in limiting its own power. As Benjamin points out, it does have an interest in not letting people think that its power is based solely on violence, which delegitimizes it. But by limiting the police, the state would in effect limit its field of action, its point of direct contact with the citizen. Limiting its power would thus amount to limiting the power it has acquired over the citizen, by one means or another, and thus amount to weakening the State. Why would the State pursue an interest contrary to its own preservation by eliminating the police? A clear answer to this question is not provided by the typical distinction between the lawful state and the police state, where a police state would mean that the police officer enjoys a form of legal impunity, that the police have great discretionary power, that the police support a political power and not the State, and, lastly, that the citizens are extensions of the police. It

the individual for its own ends. It simply authorizes the use of violence, from an extra-legal point of view, where there are no other legal means for the State to achieve its ends. Violence is therefore a lawmaker, in Benjamin's words, as much as it is a law enforcer. In the same way, the law is always a "violence-maker" when it takes the form of law. Legal jurisdiction always creates or implies a violent price to be paid by the one who breaks the law. The police officer makes the presence of the State real for the citizen, especially in times of peace. The confusion between State and police then becomes obvious. If the State pursues its project of autonomous power, so do the police. Would these two projects, initially dependent on each other in a reciprocal way, therefore undergo a reversal of their reciprocal subordination in the framework of a police state?

If we say that, in the framework of a police state, the State no longer gives its legitimacy to the police, it is actually the same as saying that the police are autonomous and no longer recognize the State. This confusion stems from the confusion between the power of the State and the power of the leaders of the political parties. We talk about the fact that there would be no legal framework in a State that makes decisions arbitrarily and makes violence reign. In reality, this or that party in power would implement such policy, not the institutions themselves (a "political instrumentalization of the police," as the journalists say). All in all, there is not enough force in the State to enforce its laws, and so, *there is no State at all*. Otherwise, we would be talking about the fact that the police have become something autonomous from the State, deriving their own legitimacy from themselves and no longer from the State.

Thus the idea of the police state is meaningless. The idea of the lawful State and the police state among journalists are just two different ways of looking at the same reciprocal relationship. If one judges the motives of the leaders of the political party in power to be in the interest of the police, then it is said to be the police state. Alternately, one might judge the motives of the leaders of the political party in power to not be in favor of the police, but at the same time, this does not mean they are necessarily in favor of the law of the State or



and mendacity ever be legitimate," Simone Weil reminds us. Violence against the uniform will always be just, because the uniform is the lie and the crime that conceals from someone their own humanity and thus makes them inhuman. Therefore ACAB, etc. are slogans that contain an element of truth. What is needed is to show how and why the police do not protect citizens. On the contrary, the police put them in mortal danger, without their knowledge, with the paradoxical effect of constantly increasing in citizens the desire for more police (or, as it sounds rolling off their tongues: "more justice, more security, less crime").

The definition that the word "police" will cover for the remainder of the text is thus taken in direct reference to the law of April 23rd, 1941 on the general organization of police services in France.[9] The French national police was created by a Vichy decree on August 14th, 1941, signed by Pétain, which transformed the police prefectures—until then still somewhat autonomous—into a centralized state institution.

It is now necessary to distinguish the essential characters of the national police in order to judge it according to the criteria of the good. The criteria of the good are: truth, justice and public utility. According to these criteria, three essential characteristics of the police can be distinguished.

First, the police prove the reality of the power of the State. They literally embody it. Second, the police legitimize the monopoly on violence that the State grants itself, as pointed out by Max Weber.[10] This legitimacy is imaginary and depends on the legitimacy that an individual grants the State. Crime, torture, rape, humiliation and lies, justifying a legal monopoly of violence, are things that cannot be based on truth. These things are not just. The use of weapons and violence must have neither monopoly nor legitimacy. In a word, justice is not the police. The police are at once above and below justice.

Third, the primary purpose, and in the final analysis, the only purpose of the police is their own conservation: a build-up of their means to use force and to monitor individuals, without limits.[11] For these three characteristics, all state police are totalitarian, in embryonic form and in spirit. That they are or not depends only on whether the aim

pursued by the State is favorable to them, not on if the State has them under its control. Because ultimately, the handcuffs that the police officer puts on a suspect's hands are always the first real and genuine direct contact between reality and the State. To tell the truth, this is the only contact. Therein lies the whole plot of Kafka's *The Trial*, where the initially fantastic nature of the story turns out to be, in the end, just a news headline from our time: the story of an individual put to death by the police.[12] All the other contacts that the State thinks it is maintaining with reality are imaginary, or rather symbolic: taxes, subsidies, state aid, public services, etc. These contacts are not real because they do not have a direct hold on the citizen's body, but have as their object money, national service, the public good, etc. The use of force by the State is not a convention or even a clearly defined law. It is a reality above all else, a physical, material reality to the highest degree.

Arming one part of the population against another, even for the common good of both parties, always creates an imbalance in law. This imbalance consists in giving more credence to the word of the police officer than to the word of the citizen. This is an undeniable reality both at the level of public opinion and directly in the exercise of justice. If an individual suffers violence from the police, it is the police again who will carry out the investigation against themselves. This two-tier justice system is a dangerous obstacle that cannot be overcome by any legal reform within the current judicial framework dogma.[13] There does not yet exist a legal system that gives the same credibility to the words of a defendant as to those of the police officer who arrested them. Although it is possible to contradict the police on the facts, the findings of which are left to the police institution, only the police account of the facts can be questioned, but this has no evidential value and is always to the disadvantage of the accused, who would then endure an abuse of authority. The police officer is always free of suspicion, like the virgin Athena. Self-defense is their credo. The proposal, pure and simple, to abolish the police is deduced from the impossibility of democratic control[14] resulting from this distinction in the law between citizen and police officer, which no control committee will ever be able to neutralize.[15]



following when they give themself over to this cause. If this cause is so just that it is necessary, as a last resort, to use violence to protect their life, those who fight must first be profoundly convinced of this justness, then fight in their own name without hiding in the collective: they must step away from the collective. If they kill in the name of justice, it will alway be in reference, whether they realize it or not, to divine justice. For only the divine reign over death.

To renounce being held responsible for one's own violence is to already no longer be human. Just as to renounce one's own violence is to become human. It necessarily follows that those inhuman beings who consider all the wretched of the world as their prey, begin to see the criminals they pursue as inhuman. If it is violence that I judge to be "inhuman," it is the use of violence for particular private purposes that the police officer judges to be inhuman, criminal and liable to the use of their own violence, which is legitimate, in order to deal with it.

## IX

### THERE IS NO POLICE STATE, BUT ONLY STATES WITH OR WITHOUT POLICE

It is logical that the State, sooner or later, ends up deriving its sole legitimacy from the one presence alone that embodies it totally in reality: the police.

The police officer is in a sense, under their uniform, a total embodiment of the State, since they do not have any freedom, from the point of view of that State, which does not derive all its legitimacy from that of the State. Can it be said that the State has extended its power to the point of controlling, without any real limitation, the very use of violence, which is a natural faculty and a moral characteristic? Walter Benjamin rightly observes that with the police, the State has an extra-legal means of enforcing the law. Violence corresponds to the moment when this extra-legality, in the application of the law, is exposed. The police are then only a means for the State to extend its law, by any and all means, where it does not yet apply. The State, it is logical to admit, cannot penetrate so far as to control the use of violence in

an effective confusion in the mind of the citizen, who comes to believe that an institution that was created under the "totalitarian kingship" of the *Ancien Régime* is now somehow fundamentally focused on the safety of *citizens*. Here, according to the Gendarmerie general, public safety and maintaining order are two concepts which he, as a specialist, can legitimately define as part of the job of the police. But what do these concepts mean for the non-specialist citizen? Who informs them of the doctrine for these concepts? It is therefore necessary to wholly criticize all the language of the police, to refuse to use it ourselves in any way other than to criticize it in thought or in action.

There is concrete and empirical evidence that this language *hides reality*, because otherwise they would use ordinary language to describe an action. The police do not have such a unique expertise that they need their own language (as is the case for scientists). Surgeons do not perform a surgical operation without being able to specify, in French and in accepted anatomical terminology, what they are operating on and what tasks they are performing. Nor do they use a special "surgery lingo" (like police jargon) that assigns all the organs other names known only to surgeons. By contrast, in the case of police, for example, *interpellation*, or "questioning," means many different things, depending on the situation, for the police or for citizens. But in reality it simply means more or less verbal or physical violence. With more violence, they call it a "heavy questioning" (rather than a beating). But what does interpellation really mean in their language? It is certainly not the same as the operation is for the surgeon. Either the surgeon is thinking about a specific operation, or they are vaguely thinking about the act of surgery in itself. What does the police officer think about when they think about interpellation? Road checks, identity checks, arresting a bad guy, putting them in handcuffs?

By showing that the words and the concepts used by the police to describe their activities are false and empty, it will be shown, just as easily, that the job of a police officer is false and empty.

Once again, no citizen in the name of their own human dignity should stoop to hiding their violence behind a uniform, a rank, an order or a State, however just the ideal may be that they think they are



## V
## "LONG STORY SHORT"

First, we will show that the police are an institution whose origins are not rooted in democracy. The Western origin of a group of individuals constituted as police can be traced back to the Greek cities.[16] Citizens ensured their personal protection during public events by means of slaves and conducted their own criminal investigations. This ancient police force composed of slaves—who were like human shields, since no slave could have laid a hand on a citizen (thus a master) without fear of being killed on the spot—will assume its modern form during the reign of Louis XIV in 1667 with the first forms of state police.[17]

In 1797, an English merchant convinced the East India Company to establish a police force to protect its goods and warehouses.[18] But this idea does not reach the United Kingdom until in 1829 (the "hue and cry" manhunt was abolished two years earlier).[19] The declaration of rights (the English Bill of Rights 1689) authorized each subject of the kingdom to possess arms, and it was the duty of each subject to take up arms to defend the king and peace. The very word and idea of police was seen by the English as a nauseating and dangerous import of continental European culture, judging by the definition of the word in 1911 in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*: "disliked as a symbol of foreign oppression" (Napoleon having modernized the police in the service of the *Ancien Régime*, creating the world's first police in uniform).

The police then went from the idea of protecting a handful of French aristocrats and bourgeois to that of an ever-increasing number of English industrialists. From their integration into the liberal and democratic Anglo-Saxon capitalist model, the police grew enormously during the industrial revolution. By introducing the police from continental totalitarian nation-states into their midst, with regard to their usefulness, the Anglo-Saxon democratic states effectively let the wolf into the sheepfold. The uniform is only there to hide and disguise the presence of totalitarian defilement. The police no longer simply pursue the goal of protecting the private interests of a handful of the population against the vast majority (the aristocratic or tyrannical model),

but also the protection of all against all (the democratic or totalitarian model). The police, in this sense, make it possible to synthesize two opposing ideas: originally, the tyranny of a few individuals; now, the tyranny of the majority. That is to say, the protection of citizens from the danger that they represent to each other, and the protection available to them depending on the color of their skin, their availability for work, or their respect or not for private property or morality. This is the contribution of Anglo-Saxon democracy to the role of the police.

Simone Weil tells us: "Democracy, majority rule, are not good in themselves. They are merely a means toward goodness." The police are to the State what fangs are to the snake, and the justice of that State, a pocket of poison in the snake's mouth. It is always through the fangs that the venom is injected into the bite, but the poison is a remedy when it is not injected through the bite and cures the venom itself.

Although this word, *police*, of French culture, originates in the monarchy and develops in the French Revolution[20], its export to the Anglo-Saxon liberal democracies will give it a new meaning. From birth in an authoritarian monarchical regime to childhood in the liberal democracies, the police embody two opposing ideas: the first, authoritarian inequality, because with the police States possess a monopoly on legitimate violence against citizens that is not reciprocal and compatible with democratic and legalistic thought; the second, the democratic equality of a public security system that protects and serves all citizens on equal footing with the State and embodies justice (making police work a civil service and police officers truly in the service of everyone).

According to Walter Benjamin, the police are a spectral institution because they are liminal, situated on the border between law-making and law-breaking, chaos and peace.[21] To enforce the laws, they act outside of what is authorized to the ordinary citizen and have means that are forbidden to them.

The police develop their autonomous parasitic form of life under all political regimes. The growing autonomy, paradoxically allowed by the exclusive and centralized control exercised by the State over the police institution in France, makes the legality of this institution of monarchical origin within a truly democratic regime doubtful.



hero. This illusion also seeks to fill another void, that of the police not knowing what their job is. They are only able to give vague and imprecise definitions in a language that, even if it is used by everyone, has no reality other than in their mouths. The words of this language—"maintaining order," "fighting crime," "preventing violence," "anti-terrorism measures"—are hollow and descriptive. They are nothing other than police jargon's own reference to itself. This is for one simple reason: this is not a profession in the ordinary sense of the word (American academics who study the police speak of "tainted profession," i.e., a "dirty/disreputable profession"). If we ask the State to specify the occupations and duties of the police, we can read at leisure the reports of the National Assembly's investigatory commission, which show us the vagueness of the situation we are in:

> *The national gendarmerie also experienced a new situation [in reference to the Yellow Vests], as General Richard Lizurey testified during his hearing: "Six months ago, I would have told you that the departmental Gendarmes are there to ensure public security and not to maintain order. Likewise, I would have told you that it is not the job of volunteer Gendarmes, who are young people recruited on short contracts of one to six years—in our country, they stay an average of two and a half years—to maintain order, any more than reservists. In reality, in the current situation, everyone is involved in maintaining order, because they all might be the first to arrive at the scene of a public disturbance. They have to take the first steps and protect themselves, which means they need to have at their disposal certain kinds of equipment.*

## VIII
## "POLICE JARGON"

To fully realize the scam we are witnessing, we must consider the fact that, for citizens raised on a steady diet of police jargon, it seems like the police do what they say they do. It corresponds to what the State, which sets their objectives, tells the police to do. But all this is expressed in the language of the police and never in the language of the citizen. This language is never translated into French. This has created

## VI

### THE INHUMAN CONDITION

If there is one inhuman condition that is considered today not only with respect but also with love and admiration, it is the condition of a police officer. This inhuman living condition, which allows violence in all its forms, from torture to murder, is new. Although people were killed in the past to protect the reigning order, the act itself was the sole responsibility of the warrior. They alone derived honor and reward from it, even if they carried out these crimes in the name of a leader or an ideal.

Perhaps the purpose of this glory was to disguise, as it were, this murderer by trade, since there was not yet a uniform, and to give them a place in a society that recognized them only too well for what they were. Society feared them all the more because it needed to coexist peacefully with them. Hence the glory and honors, which could give an appearance of social life and legitimacy to this antisocial and dangerous form of life that was the life of the warrior. The warrior was recognizable by a life devoted to murder. The uniform was the first factor that led to the gradual extinction of the warrior lifeform. It has always been preferable to ensure one's strength through the support of the strength of others. The warrior is the one who tethered their own personal force to that of a collective. To be clear, the warrior's condition was based on claiming personal acts of violence in the name of a cause, but always in one's own name. In this way, Heracles, Hector, Achilles, etc., are heroes.

Today's police officer is not a new warrior. They do not belong to any tradition of nobility of arms, nor are they a cowboy. They are simply a citizen in uniform. They have no glorious name, not even a face, sometimes a number. Under this uniform, police officers can be violent without attributing the cause of that violence to themselves. Incredibly, there is no one to claim this violence apart from abstract ideas: legitimate violence, public safety, civil protection, national defense, etc. If they act in the name of the State, it is by tacit agreement. It is the hierarchical order transmitted orally in the field that assures



to no longer be responsible for their own violence: this is the inhuman condition. The only thing that is not responsible for its own violence is nature. If one says "without the police there would be total chaos," it is like saying "if the lion doesn't kill the antelope, there would be chaos." There would be chaos, indeed, in the eyes of nature, but not in the eyes of society, of which the police, unlike the lion, are a part. Society should not, in order to defend the existing social order, be conceived in terms of power relations modeled on the natural order and its inherent violence which is, in a way, chaos itself.

If the person who wears this uniform thinks that they will always have the moral strength to resist any unjust orders that make them an instrument of the State's violence, they are mistaken. In 1941, there were not many of them, and while some, though few, disobeyed, none fought oppression. Nor can the police officer ever be a true popular hero (this vision of the police officer is, in France, barely ten years old with the recent attacks) because what they accomplish, they never accomplish in their own name. Otherwise, they would be outside the mission set for them by the State. A police officer who thinks that their acts of bravery in the field of honor will be remembered as something other than the mission entrusted to them by the State, accomplished to the very end, and who thinks that they will gain any kind of personal glory from it, is very much mistaken.

Even if they act off-duty in civilian clothes, what will be seen first in the good police officer is professional deformation. They are made to believe that they can be a hero in place of the warrior they will never be. This is skillfully staged. The police officer thinks they choose justice when what they really choose is the justice of the State. A gap always ensues between reality and ambition, and this gap is a matrix of illusions, because it falls to the officer to try to fill it in.

What makes someone a hero is the spontaneity of the act, and an obedience to personal morality that transcends the perilous conditions of the situation; it is never obedience to some order or reality or anything other than it being humanly impossible to remain without acting.

If the police officer does not act, they are at fault, and can be blamed later. Their act is never free and gratuitous like that of the ordinary

them that their violence is never their own, but only that which their uniform allows them to do.

What allows the police officer to kill seventeen-year-old French children in the name of abstract ideas today is the anonymity afforded by the uniform, as well as a complicit judicial system—to say nothing of the pressure applied by police unions on these matters.

This violence could not be based on any law. It is based on a tacit agreement between the citizen and their police. Citizens are aware of this agreement, but they see it is a matter of individual destiny: "Follow the law and you have nothing to fear, you can always prove your innocence, you must obey, etc."

And yet at no time does it ever occur to the individual that they incur a risk resulting not from their hypothetical destiny but from the randomness of police patrol traffic in their neighborhood. For those facing this risk, we see clearly that the phrase "police violence" does not point the finger directly at any specific act. And this is why this term is always easily criticized. It is empty of meaning, like all the words that issue from police language. Precise acts correspond to this word. What is really inhuman is the condition of the individual who performs them in detail with their free will, yet without the slightest moral responsibility. This is in contrast to the warrior, who seeks to make their crimes and acts of violence known and visible, the better to make themself feared, and to increase the reputation of their warlord, whether or not the warlord is a witness to the act. The police officer seems to seek the inverse: to be ever more more violent, yet without being seen by anyone other than their lord the State; to keep their crimes invisible to all. The situation of police officers is inhuman, and it is in order to sacralize in them what has been soiled in their souls from their contact with the uniform and murders that this situation must be abolished.

This condition is similar to that of prostitution, as the police are well aware. The exercise of violence by the police officer and the exercise of prostitution by the individual are two distinct forms of relationship with others which nevertheless have in common the transformation of oneself into an object. In both, the individual in front of us becomes a



means to an end. The police officer receives this mark of dishonor from the bourgeoisie who pays them their salary. What is unfortunate is that only the class of the oppressed, which is also the class to which many police officers belong, can see this mark of infamy, this defilement. Just as only Christ made the effort to understand the prostitute, only Christ could understand the soul of a cop. Good people look away, out of respect for the uniform—but it is out of *disgust* that they refuse to see the police officer as a brother or sister, disgust for the harm and dishonor they do to others and to themselves.

## VII

### THE TUNIC OF NESSUS

The uniform is the totality of the police officer's power and the annihilation of all personal violence permitted by the condition of the warrior.

If warriors like Ajax reaped praise for their acts of murderous bravery, police officers (if these acts are filmed or identified) reap hatred for acts that, in their language, are deemed "blunders" or "officer-involved violence."

Like Heracles, who received the bloody tunic of the centaur Nessus and, upon putting it on, died with his skin consumed down to the bone by the burning of the poison, only the bones of the warrior remain. The uniform of the police officer is the poisoned tunic of Nessus because it kills those who accept to bear it, by dehumanizing them. In the same way, it killed those behind the Nazi uniform, thereby allowing those rare French resistance fighters to find the courage and moral strength to attack the Nazis—who were nevertheless still human beings—and kill them in the name of humanity. This consideration of the inhuman condition of the Nazis can be understood in retrospect, looking back upon their acts, and because they were defeated. Because the comparison is anachronistic, it seems outrageous. But it applies indiscriminately to the police.

Less than a human, less than a warrior, and even less than a soldier, those who accept to put on the police uniform accept at the same time