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Are the Police Necessary?

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Some people think police are nice, and some people think they are nasty, but nifty or nasty, most people assume they are necessary. So when politicians, the press and civic-minded citizens talk about altering our social and political arrangements they oftentimes worry over proposed reforms of the police, but in their quest for the good life in a well-ordered society, they rarely if ever wonder whether we would best be rid of the police altogether. Well, I've been a policeman and I've known some--some nice, some not so nice--and I've got my doubts about their necessity. I'm not a policeman now; I'm a philosopher. And so, like Socrates, I suppose I'm regarded as more a nuisance than a necessity, since my job, as the public views it, is to doubt what everyone else knows and to make them uncomfortable in the process. I do this ill-mannered thing, not, I assure you, out of some perversity, but with a public-spirited heart, for there is much to be learned by questioning our common and deepest assumptions and much profit to be gained from such knowledge. Even if it would be foolhardy to abolish the police, it's not foolish to ascertain why that would be so; the understanding brought by just such an inquiry is needed if we are to know when our talk of reform makes good sense.

Since the subject is large, the space small, and my purpose polemical, my words will be intemperate and unmeasured. Without doubt, supplementation and nice qualification are needed, but first the issue at least must be raised. Unfortunately, experience has taught me that people are prone to respond badly to my doubts about the police. Policemen in particular are disinclined to give my heresy a fair hearing. Understandably so, since it's one thing to suggest that they may not be perfect and quite another to suggest that they may be unnecessary or irredeemably undesirable; even if that didn't attack their self-image, it does threaten their livelihood. And among their supporters--who clothe their local servants in the flag and all its sanctity--my misgivings must sound downright unpatriotic. Yet, even more dispassionate and disinterested audiences dismiss the whole subject as silly, something only a crackpot anarchist would treat as a topic meriting serious debate. It's wildly unrealistic, they say; we couldn't possibly be better off without the police, and even if we would, we couldn't possibly effect such a drastic change. To this second point there is, I grant, some truth, mostly that of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

We can't change what we won't try to change, and we won't try if we think we can't. And since our conception of what is possible is derived from our experience of what is actual, any proposal for fundamental changes must overcome

considerable inertia. A body politic at rest tends to remain at rest. And meanwhile, a bureaucracy in motion tends to remain in motion—gaining momentum, while losing energy, by increasing its mass. Then too, we must reckon into the calculation of forces, the equilibrating relations between the police and the powers that be. Each maintains the other and thereby maintains itself by means of our political processes, the very processes by which any elimination of either would be effected. Those interrelationships are complex, not least because the police can't become politically useful without becoming powerful enough to be an independent and potentially antagonistic political power. I shall say some more about these matters when speaking about the desirability of abolishing the police, for these difficulties in divesting ourselves of the police are in direct proportion to the dangers posed by the existence of the police. But my focus now is on the difficulties of effecting the change, and my point is that, though severe, they aren't sufficient to render academic my doubts about the desirability of the police. To assume that the change is wholly impossible is just presumptuous pessimism.

But more likely, as I have learned, the initial resistance to my doubts is just ignorance or confusion about what the police are and do. People suppose we can't get rid of the police because their function is necessary and any surrogate fulfilling the police function would in its own turn be a police. On this view, any critique of the police, no matter how deep, devastating, and justified it may be, won't sustain a proposal for abolition but only for alterations, for some reforms. What generates this line of thought is mainly one silly but stubborn semantic confusion that must be removed.

I am using the word "police" in its most common sense nowadays—that is, I am referring only to organizations whose structure, function, methods, and activities are more or less like those of our contemporary metropolitan police departments. The police are not the government as a whole, nor yet the whole criminal justice system, nor every organization whose goal is enforcing the law, or keeping the peace, or maintaining order or protecting persons and property. Those goals belong to the criminal justice system as a whole, which includes prosecutors, the courts, and the penal system. The police are but a single inessential element within that system. Their primary role is to increase the system's efficiency, by increasing the likelihood that violators of the law will be apprehended to be brought to trial and punishment. In this regard, the police are no different from Treasury agents, customs inspectors, internal revenue agents, or bank examiners. What is distinctive about the police is their constant coordinated patrol of the streets of populated areas with large numbers of specially trained agents of the state who are specially empowered to seek out and investigate suspicious activities in and around public places, detain and interrogate persons abroad on the streets, and apprehend suspected violators of the law. Of course, the word "police" has a long history and a tangle of senses. Its Greek root is also preserved in our words "political" and "polity," and its

meaning is sometimes as broad as and similar to those of these other words. In some senses, the claim that every polity has a police is virtually tautological. In other common senses, the term fits any mechanism for apprehending violators of some regulation, and perhaps that is what people are thinking of when they are boggled by my doubts about the necessity and desirability of the police. The word itself isn't important here; I could instead use some phrase like "state agency or agents of street patrol protecting persons and property," but "police" is a handy abbreviation and my usage is familiar and standard.

So defined, it should be obvious that however useful the police may be, they aren't a societal necessity. Obvious or not, most polities have managed no worse than we without anything comparable to a police force. Most societies in human history couldn't possibly have afforded such an institution and would have had scant use for it if they could. Perhaps the closest parallel to it would be the private security patrols protecting the person and property of some particular individual such as a king. Meanwhile, the common man has generally had to fend for himself or rely on the bonds tying his community together. The police are a creature of modern industrial urban society with a history of less than 200 years. They are useful only in a large and dense population suffering from a high incidence of certain kinds of crime and a low level of effective communitarian sentiments with which to combat such attacks. The point about population size and density should be obvious. The point about the kind of crime may not be since people so easily forget that the only thing all crimes have in common is that they are statutory violations for which the violator is liable to punishment. Almost nothing useful can be said about crime in general except that who commits it and why and where and when and how and thus whether and how the crime can be prevented or detected or its perpetrators apprehended — all vary enormously with the kind of crime. Clearly a patrol of the streets is pointless for most kinds of offenses such as counterfeiting, smuggling, income tax evasion, stock fraud, embezzlement, and on and on. In this country, such crimes are assigned to other agencies. But even with many crimes police here are assigned, a patrol system contributes inconsiderably to our safety. With shoplifting, police are hardly more than a transport and holding system; snatching the snitch is the store's problem. Ditto with passing bad checks and unauthorized use of credit cards, for though police departments can aid in the apprehension of the criminal, the patrol system adds little to their effectiveness. So too with the mass of murders and assaults for they occur in homes or other private places between acquaintances or relations.

The rationale for the police system — or rather, the alleged purpose behind the creation and design of the first police departments in Britain — was specific and narrow: the deterrence of two then increasingly prevalent types of street crime. They wanted to stop the pickpocketing, purse snatches, stick-ups, and strongarm robberies, and to control crowds (i.e., riots by the urban poor.) Robberies and riots are rather different affairs, but then as today both are

generally lower-class crimes and both, in modern society, generally have their roots in the socio-economic conditions of industrial-urban culture. The police don't guard us from such events by removing the reasons for their occurrence; the police along with the criminal justice system at best only suppress some harmful symptoms of causative conditions. To be sure, robbery is not a political act in the way riots usually are, but most rioting and much though not all robbery are by citizens who sense themselves disenfranchised, left without reasons for playing the rules of society's game. Often their complaints, if not their acts, are justified, and to the extent that police succeed in suppressing those bad acts, they succeed as well in repressing society's urge for badly needed reforms. Certainly mugging some randomly selected citizen is unjustified even if the mugger is motivated by a personality warped by injustices he has suffered, but, right or wrong, such criminals make societies pay for their crimes just as societies make the criminals pay for theirs. In this regard the police system is both shortsighted and unjust, for insofar as the police protect us from robbery and riots, they protect the injustices that spawn those injustices. And it's no less shortsighted in spite of the additional injustice that from the outset, police have mostly protected those least likely to be harmed; traditionally partols have been thinnest where crime is thickest, in the ghettos and slums. Not that police could really protect the poor, or anyone else, from robberies, but their presence is a symbol of political power and their absence in the slums is an insult if not an injury, a reminder to the powerless of their impotence.

Granted, not all crime has political roots or is eliminable by political reform, but those for which a patrol system is competent are largely of this nature. Largely, not entirely. Every society suffers a certain degree of crime, and though we often romanticize life in earlier societies, there's evidence aplenty that the life was ruder in more ways than one and that we now suffer from a lower tolerance for disruptions and a higher expectation of civilized behavior. Still, in our times the police metier, street crimes, especially the violent sorts, are a specialty of the lower class, and in America that means primarily blacks. That our major recent riots were in black ghettos is known to all. Less widely appreciated is that, while shoplifting and joyriding are larks for middle- and upper-class kids, stick-ups and muggings are not. With auto theft, larceny, and burglary more than two-thirds of those arrested are white; but with robbery more than two-thirds of those arrested are black.

Yet though the police are often an anesthesia that lets us forget the need for a remedy, for some ills we know of no remedy and thus, so it seems, must have recourse to some suppressant agency. Our police today are primarily concerned with not one, but seven types of serious crime: the violent crimes of murder, rape, aggravated assault, and robbery, and the property crimes of burglary, larceny, and auto theft. Within and between each of these categories major differences abound, but all of these crimes, unlike many others, require little special knowledge, training, talent, equipment, or preparation, and the

opportunities are everpresent. Thus they are by far the most commonly occurring serious crimes. The thefts are an easy and exciting way to make a quick buck. Elaborate heists may make better movies and yield bigger takes, but they are insignificant in their total number and their effects on society. Police accord them disproportionate attention because they made the news, their victims are influential, and their very elaborateness makes them easier and more exciting to solve. Anyway, sheer dollar loss is no measure of the importance of a crime, except perhaps to businesses — and their employees filch far more than outsiders do. By one expert estimate, less than a sixth of the total dollar loss from all property crimes is from the kinds police attend to: robbery, burglary, larceny, and auto theft. The harm from the latter is more psychological than financial; it lies in the trauma of the victim and the pervasive fear and sense of insecurity instilled in the general populace. What is special about police-handled crimes is the direct and personal nature of the attack and the generalized anxieties to which it gives rise. That needs to be understood if the real role of the police is to be understood because, however frequent or severe the financial and physical harm of crime may be, police have precious little effect on it. Police provide, not protection, but the illusion of protection; they protect us, not from harm, but from the fear of harm.

When patrols were minimal in the ghettos, blacks suffered under a cruelly high crime rate, and though the patrols have grown, so has the crime rate there. The rate of crime mounts everywhere in spite of larger, better equipped and trained police forces. Of course, neither the actual rate of crime nor any other known statistic can tell us what crimes would have occurred if we hadn't had the police. Only a theory can tell us that, and some simple-minded theorizing does underly the assumption that things would be far worse without the police. The theory isn't wholly untrue, but its claims outrun what can be proven and run against what has been proven.

In theory, by being at or near or immediately available to the scene of actual or likely crimes, police minimize the harm of crime in four principle ways. First, by intervening in an ongoing criminal act they can intercept the harm. This doesn't apply to snagging a thief on the spot, for the harm there is no different whether apprehension is in or after the act. It does apply to interrupting an assault or property destruction. However, it's not so frequent for police to make it to a mugging where their aid would be unquestionable. Such assailants make a point of avoiding the police. Police are around for political demonstrations, barroom fights, and family quarrels where the police presence can be quite problematic. Sometimes it's an officer's incompetence, but often it's just his being a cop that exacerbates the situation. Whatever the cause, frequently altercations destined to end with minor damage become full-scale brawls with arrests or serious injuries and sometimes deaths. Likely as not, the injured party is the police intruder: one-fifth of police fatalities occur handling neighborhood and family fights. I know of no meaningful statistics about all this; I do know that

in my limited experience, the arrival of an officer was, with alarming regularity, at best a mixed blessing.

The second alleged advantage of a patrol is its capacity to thwart intended or attempted crimes by frightening a miscreant away from his mark. Alas, most of the relevant crimes occur where police cannot and should not go uninvited. As for the rest, generally the attendance of police only alters where and when a crime gets committed, not whether some crime is going to be committed at all. Police may momentarily flood some small sector and depress the rate of certain crimes there, but meanwhile crime in the city as a whole is usually unaffected. And a ubiquitous police patrol of an entire city would be a monstrous and unimaginable affair whose expense in dollars alone would swamp any benefit it could render.

The third way the police might defend us is by recovering stolen goods and by arresting and incarcerating culprits, thereby keeping them from further crimes for as long as they remain confined. But look at the facts here. Less than 40 percent of the total value of stolen property is recovered. That wouldn't be discouraging were it not that over 80 percent of that recovered value is in automobiles, the vast majority of which were abandoned after joyriding or deployment in another crime. Less than 10 percent of the value of other stolen goods is recovered, and a disproportionate part of that is from the big haul crimes, not the common theft. Moreover, bear in mind that at most half and perhaps closer to only one quarter of all crimes committed are ever even reported to the police, so divide that 10 percent accordingly. That same fact tells against the arrest rate, which for property crimes is less than 20 percent of reported incidents and thus only 5 percent to 10 percent of actual property crimes. And further bear in mind, first, that a crime is considered cleared if at least one offender is apprehended no matter how many were involved, and secondly that less than 80 percent of those arrested are formally charged and over 15 percent of those charged are not convicted of anything, and of those convicted many serve no time. Violent crime is different. It totals less than 15 percent of major criminal incidents. It also has a considerably higher arrest rate, partly because the assailant confronts and is thus generally identifiable by his victim, but more because half of violent crime is aggravated assaults and murders, in the vast majority of which the assailant is an acquaintance or relation of the victim. You know who he is and where he lives and can pick him up at your leisure. Robberies tend not to be such intimate encounters, so the arrest rate is only 30 percent of reported occurrences and thus around 8 percent to 15 percent of actual incidents.

These numbers are small enough to start with, but the real question is what percentage of these percentages is due to the peculiarities of a patrol system. The answer isn't known, but it's worth noting that in some departments, unless a patrolman catches a culprit in the act—hardly a quotidian affair—the patrolman does little more than accept the initial report of the occurrence of a criminal

act; the detective division does the investigation and directs the process of apprehension. Another imponderable is the extent to which police performance is improvable. However, the slightest knowledge of crime should still all optimism. A full-scale investigation of every or most crimes is prohibitively expensive and anyway it's pointless. Most thefts would baffle a supersleuth, not by their fiendish cleverness but by their brutal simplicity. Discovering usable fingerprints or an adequate facial identification is a rarity, and the other so-called clues usually evidence nothing more than the fact that a crime has been committed. Still, police frequently know who did what—they know it in the sense that you may know that if your spouse is nagging you, your in-laws have been at it again. That's not called knowledge in a court of law. Face it, the mass of crimes can't end in convictions without an end to our civil liberties, not just the niceties of Miranda-type rules, but all limits on searches, seizures and arrests, coerced information, and much more besides. Not that that would suffice: 40 percent of assault cases culminate in acquittal or dismissal typically because a family won't cooperate to keep their wife-beating breadwinner in jail. (And why should they? Answering that question might lead to a rethinking of the criminal justice system as a method of managing conflict. Which might be nice, but my aims are more modest here.)

The fourth alleged benefit of the police is their capacity to deter all persons from law breaking by increasing the likelihood of arrest and subsequently penalty. When police are said to be necessary, this is the reason usually given. People seem to think that without our chaperones all hell would break loose, chaos would be upon us as half the citizenry rampages through the streets robbing and pillaging whilst the other half cowers behind bolted doors. Do I exaggerate? But just what is the supposition here? Various possibilities are worth exploring, but let's fix on one plausible scenario. Suppose the criminal justice system remained intact minus police patrols but retaining a detective service comparable to the FBI to investigate crimes of certain kinds and apprehend the perpetrators. Also, businesses and other organizations would maintain their security systems. And perhaps more neighborhoods would develop a self-patrolling system as some already have. In this situation, how many more people would be inclined to commit serious crimes than are now so inclined? Let's be overgenerous and say that the deterrent threat has been halved—that is, while the severity of punishment stayed roughly the same the likelihood of capture and conviction is cut in half. Would you personally be tempted to try a crime or two? If not, why assume your neighbor is now straining at the bit? I think it obvious that by and large people don't select their misdeeds on the basis of any such nice calculation. The ways in which beliefs and fears of possible punishment determines people's behavior is too complex a matter to be done justice here, but it's true that the threat of punishment can't explain why some people commit crimes and most people don't when they all face the same threat. And when the chances of capture, both actual and generally assumed, are as slight as

they presently are, dividing by two isn't a key factor in preventing crime; the other variables affecting motivation and opportunity are far more crucial. The other factors are a various lot — everything from alienation and embitterment by the political and economic system to guns as common as rain, from drug laws that create demands satisfied only by burglaries and larcenies to cars that can be unlocked by a cripple with a coat hanger.

Though these latter matters are occasionally discussed and on fewer occasions acted upon, we mainly fixate on the police in our so-called war on crime. Well if it's a war, it's a guerrilla with a maddeningly diffuse enemy. What's to be done? Comb the streets, barricade homes, curfew at dusk, identification cards for everyone! More troops, better training, greater firepower, a freer hand! Sound familiar? The mistake is not so much that police are mis-conceived (by themselves and by the public) as a para-military force, as that we don't learn from the model.

Why we fix on the police is a tangled tale if only because our relations with the police are shot through with ambivalence. We treat the cop on the corner as though he were a talisman, yet even our faith in magic wavers: witness the discrepancy between actual and reported crimes. Apparently the appeal of the police, the devotions and dependence they evoke come from something more primitive than magic. Our instincts demand, not real security (for that presupposes some conception of the causes of harm), but a sense of security, a sense satisfiable only in quite special ways. A patrolman's presence allays anxieties as a mother's presence does; we want them however helpless and unreciprocating, however stuffed and trussed the surrogate security may be.

Of course people want more than this from the police. So police do more than kid around with seven kinds of crime; they have come to enforce an odd lot of laws and perform diverse social services. Paradoxically this accumulation of subsidiary benefits is precisely the problem with the police system. The processes of accretion of police functions are thoroughly natural, almost inevitable, and certainly shortsighted for the product is an inherently dangerous and self-defeating institution. Again, the police began as a simple organization of foot patrol intended to thwart street crime. But once you've got that mass of men out there, you've got to find something for the troops to do since they surely aren't going to fill a forty-hour week playing cops and robbers. (A typical patrolman spends only a third or a quarter of his time enforcing criminal laws protecting people and property.) And once you give them the mobility provided by patrol cars and the coordination provided by two-way radio communication on top of their intimate knowledge of the city and its citizens gleaned from constant patrol of the streets, their virtual monopoly on the legal use of force, the authority of the state, and the assortment of legal and de facto powers of their total institution — then they are or seem ready to do most anything the state or the public demands of them. And inevitably those demands will be made. For a variety of reasons every government is continuously tempted

to increase its power and the extent of its interference in people's lives, but whether well-intentioned or not, any extension of state activity is by its nature problematic. And the very existence of the police promotes and corrupts these tendencies by encouraging the growth of state power and warping it in the process. However genuine some alleged social or political problem may be, once the state considers it a problem for which some so-called solution using the police is available, the state will be tempted to avail itself of that solution if only because it has the edge by being easy and inexpensive. Imagine the cost of 2 or 10 agencies with a mobile force comparable to the police each with a separate set of duties (e.g., traffic control, noise abatement and, so forth). Then too, the police activities can often be expanded and managed with a discreet executive directive bypassing the red tape, publicity, and scrutiny by the political process other solutions would face. One upshot is that all sorts of things the state shouldn't and wouldn't do because it couldn't do, it now often does or is capable of and thus threatens doing. A prime example is the harassment of homosexuals: only a patrol system could cause so much hardship with so little expense and less justification.

The mere existence of police permits and inspires the state to do what it shouldn't do at all, and, what is more, makes the state prone to do whatever it does in the wrong way. For if existing mechanisms are used to solve a problem, the solution will be tailored, not to fit the problem, but to fit the mechanism — and the natural way of designing a solution employing the police is to make some activity a criminal offense. Almost any state regulation of homosexuality is a howling injustice, but even with matters such as marijuana possession, prostitution, drunkenness, gambling, vagrancy, and offensive language or conduct where some state regulation *might* be reasonable, criminalization is either unjust or inefficient and usually both. Furthermore, even when the simple-minded solution of criminalization is abjured, the police are still likely to be inappropriate agents because their central role and thus also their self-image and the image and actuality they present in all their peripheral roles is that of apprehenders of criminals. Where it's not tragic, it's utterly comic that our way of containing family conflicts is by sending in gun-toting troops to sort out the most intimate and intricate interpersonal relations. So too, it's unwise as it is economically understandable that we locate and control teenage runaways and the emotionally disturbed by making them subject to police arrest. We are not going to humanize the formidable and impersonal agents of the law by having them handle our human problems; we are only going to transform our personal affairs into depersonalized state affairs.

I have mentioned only some out of a large and jumbled mass of police activities each with its own peculiar dangers and disadvantages. In some cases the activity is inherently and palpably wrong; in others, taken case by case, the advantages to using the police may outweigh the disadvantages of doing nothing or something else. But taken together, they form an omnibus institution with

generalized powers and perils to match. The sheer concentration of power is itself a danger, because any is abusable and misusable and becomes more so as power becomes concentrated. Unfortunately, such axioms, however ancient and oft-told, too little move men to a proper state of apprehension when power is accumulated gradually, because our conception of what constitutes a misuse or abuse of state power alters apace as we accommodate ourselves to each new incursion into our lives. We rightly think that the terrors of the totalitarian police states are pretty awful and again rightly think that our system is essentially different, but we forget that we are not immune and let ourselves be liable to such a state in the future, and we forget that the mass of citizens in situations we now view with horror have come to accept their condition just as we now so placidly accept conditions that would have seemed intolerable tyranny to most English and Americans 150 years ago, many of whom ferociously opposed the creation of the most minimal police force precisely because they feared such power and resented its use. Then too, here as elsewhere most citizens suffer little direct harassment; the diet of injuries and indignities at the hands of the police is reserved for disfavored classes of citizens. But, here as elsewhere, even the well-advantaged can get an occasional taste of such fare. I and three friends once spent the night in the pokey solely because our mere presence at night in a black neighborhood in Buffalo was deemed undesirable by a couple of patrolmen. And all of us, no matter how innocent we may be, have come to feel intimidated and ill at ease in the public places of our free country whenever Officer Friendly stops grinning and directs a steely gaze at us or his prowl car tails us too long. Officer Friendly senses the discomfort he causes in his fellow citizens and is made surly by it, thereby increasing our discomfort and thereby his surliness. He feels maligned and resentful; he doesn't understand how good citizens can dislike and distrust their knights in blue and him personally, and he thinks it unfair. But you should see — and he should consider — how friendly Friendly feels toward his fellow Friendlies in the internal affairs division of his own department.

This self-perpetuating spiraling of mutual fear and distrust is activated by the very power we ourselves hand the police; police misbehavior may quicken the pace but it's more an effect than a cause. Malfeasance and misfeasance by individual officers and departments are more than plentiful, though not, as I can attest, absolutely inevitable. In my own former department, stupidity, laziness, insensitivity, impatience, moral cowardness, and simple incompetence were prevalent enough — approximating the norm for any human institution but genuine wickedness, serious incidents of venality or cruelty were hardly more common than in your local P.T.A. However, the absence of banditry in some departments provides little hope unless what accounts for the banditry in others is something reformable, something we know how to set right. Alas, the history of police reform is a dreary and disheartening tale. Not surprisingly, for the civilized use of police power can be ensured only by uncorrupted countervailing centers of

power, which in turn require, not just well-intentioned isolated individuals (many a mayor would dearly love to be able to control his town's police force, as would many a police chief), but a community sufficiently healthy to have little use for a police department. The police themselves can rarely serve as a corrective of any major social, political or economic ills; in general they will only be infected by whatever ails the community and will multiply the effects. That's the lesson of our vicious war on vice. So too, if you want to combat clandestine political terrorism, your boys in blue will be barely more than targets, but if you want to control the political process and suppress all legitimate dissent, then nothing could be finer than your local finest. Are there any instances in which police were essential, let alone responsible, for ridding a community of political corruption? Yet places where the police are essential for the maintenance of corruption are almost as numerous as places with widespread corruption.

Still, sometimes the police remain uncompromised by the amount and nature of their duties and the conditions under which they fulfill them. So let's take the police at their loveliest, the ones we have come to rely on for all sorts of things: to quiet the party next door, remove cats from trees and drunkards from our paths, help old ladies (little or not) across the street, check basements and backyards for strange noises, succor stranded motorists, and on and on. We have come to accept all this as a matter of course; it's our due and the policeman's duty, for he's our all-purpose public servant, our boy scout in blue. Surely nothing sinister lurks here. Comic at times, perhaps, as when, to mention some instances I know, a mother pleads for police assistance in compelling her teenage son to shed his long hair or another anxious mother seeks to use an officer's authority to make her elder son cease wearing the younger son's pants: too tight for him, she said. We graciously declined these demands, but we did answer calls to clear driveways blocked by a car only to discover that the complainant was using us without ever attempting a simple request of his neighbor.

With such events is the patrolman's calendar filled. And if he does his job, as he often does, politely and efficiently, he will be doing more of the same and similar things tomorrow. He is blameless and pure in all of this, but he is doing what people can and should do and in other communities have done for themselves and for each other in their capacity as friend or relative or neighbor or simply fellow member of a community. This whole pattern of public demands on the police is symptomatic of a general malaise, a breakdown of human relations, and particularly the loss of a shared sense of community engendered by industrial urban life. Our situation is well known, and the prevalence of samaritan sentiments in other societies need not be exaggerated for us to realize how anomalous our lives have become. And while police and our use of them are a consequence, not a cause of conditions undermining the establishment and maintenance of cooperative social relationships, they help perpetuate and aggravate our situation. For the desired sense of mutuality develops out of a shared sense of interdependence, and while we are no less interdependent now than before,

our dependencies are now far more on or through bureaucratic structures; they are not directly personal. Compared with the arrangements of pre-industrial societies, our institutions are generally a far more efficient and no more unjust means of achieving our various purposes, but the efficiency is bought at the cost of impersonality. What distinguishes the police is that they are a utility service doing whatever is left undone by our other specialized institutions. The services they render (like the crimes they fight) do not require a large organization or special skills or equipment. The tasks are within the competence of ordinary people helping themselves and each other, and they are well-suited to the development of a sense of community. True, a policeman's authority is often a help (and often a hindrance), but the resort to impersonal authority is just the problem; by allowing it into even the interstices of the network of other institutions, we insure our own impotence and isolation.

As things stand, the very existence of the police is a prime deterrent to any concentrated attempt to combat the dissolution of effective communitarian organizations and sentiments. For as individuals, we confront our daily problems in an ad hoc fashion, dealing with each as it comes along in what seems the simplest way. And for so many of our typical troubles the police do provide a convenient and efficient solution. They are on hand and handy, and so we use them, and we raise a stink whenever they refuse our ever so reasonable requests for assistance. So alternative mechanisms for resolving our difficulties go undeveloped and unmaintained. Instead we harden our habits of thought and action, making ourselves feel increasingly helpless in a world we make increasingly alien. Little wonder we then feel needful of the police. Perhaps the final irony is that by stifling our sense of personal interdependence and thereby the identification of self with the community, the police exacerbate the very condition causing the crimes they are incapable of protecting us from.

Part II

Historical Perspectives