Journal of the History of Ideas

April, 1948

Volume IX
Number 2

CONDORCET

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When, about one hundred and fifty years ago, on the 28th of March, 1794, Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritas, *ci-devant* Marquis de Condorcet, permanent secretary of the Academy of Sciences, fellow of the Royal Society, member of the French Academy, and representative of the people to the National Convention, outlawed and sought for arrest by that very French Republic whose establishment he had been one of the first to desire and to demand publicly, died in the prison at Bourg-la-Reine, an entire epoch disappeared with him.

Indeed, as Mr. Prior puts it,[1] "Condorcet occupies a special place in the history of French thought. He is the last of the *philosophes,* and the only one who took an active part in the Revolution. He did not conceive a completely original system, but he did create a synthesis of all the theories of his predecessors. We can find in his writings the ideas of Voltaire, of Rousseau, of Turgot, of Helvetius, of Condillac, molded bit by bit into a harmonious whole whose final expression is the *Esquisse,* a sort of philosophic résumé of the XVIIIth century.'"[2]

The eighteenth century, and the philosophy of the eighteenth century, with their curious and in the last analysis inconsistent and contradictory mixture of Cartesian rationalism and sensualist, nominalist empiricism,[3] are not very popular. They are reproached, and during the nineteenth century in particular they were reproached, for their exaggerated individualism, their superficial intellectualism, their naïve optimism, their misappreciation of the depths of reality, their misconception of history, and their faith in progress.

These objections are not wholly uncalled for. It is indisputable that, compared with the great metaphysical systems which preceded

[1] Cf. *Condorcet, Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain,* ed. by O. H. Prior (Paris, Boivin, 1938), Introduction, p. V. All quotations are from this edition of the *Esquisse.*

[2] Mathematician, economist, philosopher, politician—in his private life Condorcet sums up almost all the aspects of the intellectual evolution of the eighteenth century and its passage from theory to action.

[3] For the Cartesianism of the eighteenth century in general and for that of Condorcet in particular, cf. F. Bouillier, *Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne,* II, 641 sq.

and followed it, eighteenth-century philosophy may appear to lack depth and inspiration. It is equally certain that the eighteenth century was too optimistic, too confident of the power of reason. It took at its face value the old definition of man as a "reasonable animal" and was unaware of the power of the irrational elements, or rather, of the irrational basis of his nature. It underestimated the social importance and the vital rôle of what it called "prejudice," and by concentrating on the task of destroying, through the enlightenment of reason, certain outstanding "prejudices" of the time (religious and social), it underrated their strength, and above all, it failed to realize the ability of man to replace by new ones the prejudices thus destroyed. These faults are, without doubt, real. But they are much less serious, in my opinion, than the fact that the philosophy of the eighteenth century formulated a human and social ideal which remains the only hope of humanity.[4] We have seen what the abandonment of the demands of liberty, equality, and fraternity in behalf of the profound aspirations of the irrational nature of man, has cost us. . . . The disdain to which the eighteenth century has been subjected can only be explained by the fact that it was vanquished.[5] It is the victors that write history, and it is the representatives of this victory, representatives, in particular, of the Romantic reaction, and especially of the German Romantic reaction, who have largely determined our historical judgments and our very conception of history. They are also the men who have convinced us that the eighteenth century disregarded these ideas of ours.

Nothing seems more untrue to me than this assertion. It seems to me indefensible, unless we accept the Romantic conception of history. If, on the contrary, we do not share this idea, we should find that it is to the eighteenth century that we owe the discovery, or rather the rediscovery, of history, to Montesquieu,[6] to Voltaire,[7]

[4] It seems that a change has been taking place recently. Cf. the works of J. R. Carré, *Fontenelle ou le sourire de la raison* (Paris, 1932), and *La consistance de Voltaire le philosophe* (Paris, 1938); cf. equally E. Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 1932); J. S. Schapiro, *Condorcet and the rise of liberalism* (New York, 1934).

[5] Cf. E. Bréhier, *Histoire de la Philosophie*, vol. II, fasc. 3, *Le dixneuvième siècle* (Paris, 1931).

[6] It is to Montesquieu that we owe the idea that historic laws are variable and relative to the different social structures of human society.

[7] *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and *l'Essai sur les moeurs* completely renewed historiography.

to Montuclas and to Gibbon, just as we owe the rediscovery of the art of historical criticism in the seventeenth century to Spinoza, to Bayle and to Mabillon. Quite true, the men of the eighteenth century did not have the regard, the respect and the reverence for history that the Romantics had. Nor is there any doubt that they did not have the religion of scholarship, and that they often disregarded the details (and even more than the details) of the past. They felt no nostalgia for the past—like the Romantics. On the contrary, they were concerned primarily with the future. Romantic thought (and all historicism tends more or less toward Romantic thought)—"vegetative" thought, to use the apt expression of Gustav Huebener—has a strong predilection for organic, and especially botanical, categories, or rather, images. It speaks of development, of growth, of roots; it compares the institutions formed "by a natural growth" (*natürlich gewachsen*) with those "created artificially" (*künstlich gemacht*), i.e., it opposes the unconscious and instinctive action of human societies to their conscious and deleberate action, their traditions to their innovations, etc., etc.

This conception—or attitude—which envisages the historical process as something which develops of itself in an almost autonomous manner, and which sees man not as an agent, but as a product of historical evolution and of its impersonal or transpersonal forces, is not necessarily linked to reactionary political pholosophy or philosophy of history: growth is not constancy, the tree is not its root and the flower is not the bud.[8] Actually—and this is probably because vegetative growth is a slow process, and a process which in its new phase as often as not *retains* the past—the Romantic conception is almost always accompanied by a conservative or even reactionary attitude: the great value ascribed to tradition very soon results in the opposition to change, in the idealization of the past, in an archeological utopia.[9] Be this as it may, however, concerning this last point it is enough to point out that the Romantic conception of history implies the predominance of the past—of a past which realizes itself in the present and which extends itself into the future.

[8] The Hegelian philosophy of history, which sees in history the process of the self-development and the self-constitution of spirit, has room for a conservative interpretation as well as for a revolutionary one. Romantics too can be revolutionists, or at least rebels.

[9] Such is the idealization of the Middle Ages, for example.

It is quite otherwise with the conception of history in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. History is not an impersonal force which realizes itself in the world. On the contrary, it is the product of human action, of man's own activity. History is not something which makes us, but something which we make, which is the entirety of things which man has made, which he is making, and which he is going to—or can—make. Therefore, and this follows from this activistic attitude, the historian does not look to the past but to the future; and what he has to relate, what he finds most precious in history, is nothing else but the history of progress, that is to say, the story of the progressive liberation of the human spirit, the story of its fight against the forces—ignorance, prejudice, etc., etc.—which oppress and which have oppressed it, the story of the gradual conquest by man of his Enlightenment—*of his liberty in the truth.*

Thus considered, history will appear to us as the story of a fight, of a battle against the irrational powers which block progress, the story of an uprising against the past in behalf of the future. Moreever, the traces of that past in the present—traditions and old habits—are not to be preserved and venerated; on the contrary, they are more often to be destroyed. And it is here that history, or more exactly the historian, enters the battle: by unveiling the commonplace origins of the most sacred and revered traditions and beliefs, the historian shows us their inanity, thereby uprooting them. He clears the land and leaves the site free for a new construction—for a reasonable construction this time.

The philosophy of the eighteenth century—a meritorious feature—not only wanted to explain the world; it wanted also to transform it. It even believed that it could transform the world by explaining it, in other words, that it was necessary only to show men what was true and what was false—they would invariably tend toward the truth. But it felt that history supported this faith in the power of truth and of reason: isn't it true, as Condorcet writes, that in spite of all the obstacles which have blocked its advance, humanity, in its sum total, has achieved an almost constant ascent? Isn't it a fact that the rhythm of progress, in the not too distant past, since the invention of printing and the philosophic revolution brought about by Descartes, has been accelerated in a very perceptible manner? And is it not a fact, finally, that the success in our time of Enlightenment, cradled in the two great modern civilizations, the French and the English, seems to guarantee us against the danger of

such a relapse as was formerly incurred when the barbarism of the Middle Ages succeeded the brilliant upsurge of Greek civilization?[10]

Thus the optimism of Condorcet is a reasoned optimism, and, as a matter of fact, an empirical one. Progress is by no means inevitable and fatal. But the history of humanity shows that it is real. Is it not reasonable to admit that humanity, which has known how to conquer spiritual liberty, scientific truth, and in our own time, political liberty, will not repudiate its conquests and will not abandon the enlightening power of reason?[11]

We are not going to try to discuss at length the *Esquisse* of Condorcet or to analyze the details of the "epochs," the successive stages by which man has risen from the brute simplicity of primitive life to the enlightenment of a scientific civilization and to political liberty. It suffices to mention that Condorcet distinguishes ten epochs, and that according to him Descartes closed the eighth, which extends "from the invention of printing to the time when science and philosophy shook off the yoke of authority," that the ninth extends "from Descartes until the founding of the French Republic," and that the tenth covers "the future progress of the human mind."[12]

The position which Condorcet assigned to Descartes is very characteristic. There is no doubt that Descartes was not the only man to shake the yoke of authority: already

> Bacon had revealed the true method of studying nature, the use of the three instruments that she gave us to unravel her secrets—observation, experience and calculation . . . Yet Francis Bacon, who was to the utmost point endowed with philosophical genius, did not join to it scientific genius, and his methods of discovering the truth, of which he does not give examples, have been admired by philosophers but did not influence the development of the sciences.
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> Galileo had enriched them by useful and brilliant discoveries; he had taught by his example the means to rise to the knowledge of the laws of nature. . . . But, restricting himself exclusively to mathematical and

[10] A prophetic vision, for it is the diffusion of *"lumières"* and of democratic conceptions in the countries speaking French and English that saved the world from a relapse into barbarism.

[11] Condorcet did not foresee the rush into slavery and the rejection of thought so characteristic of present-day man.

[12] According to Condorcet, a knowledge of the nature and the laws of behavior of human reason should give us the ability to foresee, in its broader aspects, of course, and not in its details, the development of the future.

physical sciences, he was unable to impress upon human minds that motion they seemed to expect.

This honor has been reserved to Descartes, an ingenious and bold philosopher. Possessing a great genius for the sciences, he joined example to precept by giving the method of finding and recognizing the truth. . . . He wanted to extend his method to all the objects of human interest: God, man, the universe became one after the other subjects of his meditations; the very boldness of his errors has been useful to the progress of mankind. He stirred up minds the wisdom of his rivals could not awaken. He told men to shake off the yoke of authority, to recognize forthwith nothing but what their reason would acknowledge. And he has been obeyed because he overwhelmed men by his boldness, and carried them away by his enthusiasm. The human mind was not yet free, but it learned that it was formed in order to be free; since then one could foresee that [its chains] would . . . be broken before long.[13]

For Condorcet, the great minds who dominate the ninth epoch, in which "it was at last allowed to proclaim the right, so long denied, of submitting all opinions to [the judgment] of our own reason, i.e., of using, in order to grasp the truth, the only instrument that has been given to us for recognizing it,"[14] are Newton, to whom credit is due that "man has, at last and for the first time, learned one of the physical laws of the Universe . . . a discovery that even today remains as unique as the fame [of the man] who made it";[15] Locke, who "has shown that an exact and thorough analysis of ideas, which reduces them successively to ideas more immediate in their origin, or more simple in their composition, is the only means of not losing oneself in the chaos of incomplete, incoherent, undetermined notions that chance has offered us and that we have received without reflection";[16] and Rousseau, to whom we owe the principle of the natural equality of men—"a principle for which the generous Sidney paid with his blood, to which Locke attached the authority of his name which became fundamental and has been placed among those truths it is no longer allowed either to forget or to oppose."[17] Actually it is during this epoch that

[13] *Esquisse,* 143 sq.

[14] *Ibid.,* 159: "Chaque homme apprit, avec une sorte d'orgueil, que la nature ne l'avait pas absolument destiné à croire sur la parole d'autrui; et la superstition de l'antiquité, l'abaissement de la raison devant de délire d'une foi surnaturelle, disparurent de la société humaine comme de la philosophie."

[15] *Ibid.,* 175 sq. Besides Newton—however, much lower,—Condorcet names d'Alembert, "who discovered the principle which governs all the actions of nature."

[16] *Ibid.,* 158. [17] *Ibid.,* 152.

Political thinkers arrived at last at the knowledge of the true rights of man, deducing them from the sole truth that he is a sensible being, capable of reasoning and of acquiring moral ideas.

They have seen that to uphold these rights was the sole end of men's coming together into political societies, and that the social art should aim to guarantee their maintenance and their enjoyment, in the most complete equality, in their maximal extension. It has been realized that the means of securing the rights of every man must, in each society, be subjected to common rules. [Therefore] the power of choosing these means, of determining these rules, can belong only to the majority of the members of that society; the reason is that since each individual is unable to choose to follow his own reason without subjecting all others to it, the will of the majority is the only kind of truth that can be adopted by all without injuring equality.[18]

Each man can actually bind himself in advance to this will of the majority, which then becomes that of unanimity; but he can bind only himself; and he can bind himself even to this majority only in so far as, having recognized his individual rights, it does not infringe upon them.

Such are the rights of the majority over society, and over its members, and at the same time the limit of these rights. Such is the origin of this unanimity that makes binding for all the engagements made by the majority only; a binding that ceases to be legitimate when, owing to the change of individuals, this sanction of unanimity has itself ceased to exist. There is no doubt that there are subjects where the majority will probably decide more often than not in favor of error and against the common interest of all; but it is still for the majority to decide upon the subjects concerning which it must not rely immediately upon its own decisions; it is for it to determine whose reason it shall believe it must prefer to its own; to establish the method that they must follow for arriving more securely at the truth; and it cannot surrender the authority to state whether these decisions have or have not hurt the common rights of all.[19]

Thus we have seen disappear before these simple principles the idea of a contract between a people and its magistrates, a contract that could not be canceled but by mutual consent, or through the infidelity of one of the parties; as well as that other opinion, less servile but not less absurd, that has chained a people to the established forms of its constitution, as if the right to change them were not the first guaranty of all the others, as if human institutions, necessarily defective and able to reach a new perfection in proportion to the enlightenment of men, could be condemned to

[18] It is interesting to note that Condorcet intellectualizes the principle of individual submission to the majority: not the submission of a particular will to the general will, but of an individual judgment to the judgment of the majority.

[19] From this follows the obligation to obey a decision—or a law—which one believes to be false or bad.

remain forever in their infancy.[20] Thus it became inevitable men should renounce that cunning and false policy which, forgetting that all men hold equal rights from their very nature, sought to measure the extension of those that should be left to them, now by the dimensions of their territory, now by the temperature of the climate, by the national character, the wealth of the people, the degree of perfection of commerce and industry; and sometimes to parcel out with inequality these same rights between different classes of men, to grant them to birth, to wealth, to the professions, and to create in this way contrary interests and opposed powers in order afterwards to establish between them an equilibrium that these institutions alone have rendered necessary, and which does not even correct their dangerous influence. Thus they no longer dared to divide men into two different races, of which one is predestined to govern, the other to obey; one to lie, the other to be deceived; they have been compelled to recognize that all men have an equal right to inform themselves about their interests, to know all the truths, and that no one of the authorities established by them over themselves can have a right to conceal from them a single one.[21]

The pages just quoted well summarize Condorcet's convictions, or rather, his democratic and republican faith. Not only Condorcet's. For—as he said himself—it is precisely this faith which inspired the entire eighteenth century—a century when "there appeared . . . in Europe a class of men . . . who dedicated themselves to the pursuing of prejudices into those sanctuaries where the clergy, the schools, the governments, the old corporations had given them shelter and protection, who gloried in the destruction of popular errors more than in extending the limits of human knowledge; an indirect manner to promote their progress that has been neither the less dangerous nor the less efficacious."[22]

The love of humanity, the hatred of injustice—wherever it arose—inspired these philosophers. They thus formed, undivided by frontiers, " one phalanx, strongly bound together against all errors, all kinds of tyranny. Moved by the sentiment of universal philanthropy, they fought injustice when, alien to their country, it could not reach them; they fought it also when it was their own country which made itself guilty of it against other peoples; they rose up in Europe against the crimes by which avidity defiles the shores of America, of Africa or Asia."[23] In short, they proclaimed "a new doctrine,

[20] One recognizes Hobbes and Montesquieu.

[21] *Esquisse,* 149–151.

[22] *Ibid.,* 150.

[23] *Ibid.,* 165. The *philosophes* formed a brotherhood of "clerics" who were

which had to deal the death blow to the already tottering structure of prejudices: that of the indefinite perfectibility of mankind, the doctrine of which Turgot, Price and Priestley had been the first and the most illustrious apostles,"[24] and which Condorcet assigns to the tenth epoch in the evolution of the human spirit:—the future. Not without reason: for it is just that doctrine, the faith in progress, which best expresses man's new attitude toward history (as mentioned above): the preponderance of the future over the past, of action over inheritance, and of reason over tradition.

This attitude, revealed in two great events, the American Revolution and the French Revolution, symbolizes, or better realizes, for Condorcet the triumph of philosophy over prejudice and of liberty over despotism.

It is interesting to see how Condorcet estimates the rôle and the historical importance of each. The American Revolution showed the world "for the first time a great people liberated from all its chains, giving itself peacefully the constitution and laws it considered most proper for its happiness, 'republican' constitutions and laws based upon a solemn recognition of the natural rights of man." However, for historical reasons, "the Americans, satisfied with the civil and criminal laws they had received from England; not having to reform a vicious system of taxation, not having to abolish either feudal tyrannies, or hereditary distinctions, or privileged rich and powerful corporations, or a system of religious intolerance, confined themselves to establishing new authorities, to substituting them for those the British nation had exercised until then"[25]—the American Revolution was much less radical than the French, its immediate and necessary consequence.

"In France . . . the revolution had to embrace the whole economy of the society, to change all the social relations and to penetrate

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faithful to their ideas. Among these "clerics" the leader, according to Condorcet, had been first Voltaire and then Diderot.

[24] *Ibid.*, 166. Turgot had a great influence on Condorcet: Condorcet borrowed from him his economic theories. On the history of the idea of progress, cf. J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress* (New York, 1932); G. Friedmann, *La crise du progrès* (2 ed. Paris, 1947).

[25] *Ibid.*, 171. In France, on the contrary, the civil and criminal laws were in a deplorable state and the organization of justice was perverted by the venality of its administrators. Cf. *De l'influence de la Révolution d'Amérique sur l'Europe* (1786), *Oeuvres*, vol. VIII.

the ultimate links of the political chain.''[26] Moreover, the French Revolution was a real revolution, a new beginning, a reconstructing and a refounding of a political and social body. This led Condorcet to consider that "the principles upon which the constitution and the laws of France are built are purer, more precise, more profound than those which directed the Americans; they have escaped much more completely the influence of all kinds of prejudices . . . equality of rights has not been replaced [in France] by that identity of interest which is but a weak and hypocritical substitute for it, the limitation of power has taken the place of that vain balance that has been so long admired'';[27] a great nation, necessarily dispersed and divided in a large number of isolated and partial assemblies, has dared, for the first time, to have the people maintain its right of sovereignty, i.e., to obey only those laws whose mode of formation, even if entrusted to its representatives, has been rendered legitimate by its direct approval; laws of which—if they injure its rights or its interests—it could always achieve the reform by a regular act of its sovereignty.[28]

The French Revolution had to be—or succeeded in becoming—a radical revolution. It is this very radicalism which gives it a decisive importance in the history of humanity: it concludes the history of *liberation* and initiates that of *liberty*. In and by the French Revolution, humanity—or reason—acquired full possession of itself. Henceforth, man is master of himself, of his actions and of his future; of the future he will select and determine for himself by his own reflective, conscious behavior. For this reason the tenth epoch of human history, the one we are about to enter, is the epoch of the preponderance of the future, or to employ Condorcet's terms, the epoch of consciously pursued progress.

Intellectual and moral progress—Condorcet does not separate the one from the other. Indeed, with all his contemporaries he believes them inseparable, i.e., he believes that intellectual progress implies and conditions moral progress. He paints the bright vision of a humanity where the progress of the sciences, which are continually improving their methods in order to achieve a deeper

[26] *Esquisse,* 171.

[27] A good disciple of Rousseau, Condorcet does not admit the division of powers and does not share in Montesquieu's admiration for the English constitution.

[28] *Ibid.,* 172.

knowledge of reality,[29] brings about progress in industry, in agriculture, in medicine—the vision of a humanity where a generalized education and a well-planned system of taxes and social insurance will reduce the social inequality based upon the inequality of fortune . . . where men inspired with a passion for justice and truth will enlighten peoples still groping in the darkness of barbarism[30] . . . where first the slavery and then the exploitation of colonial peoples will end because men will recognize their brothers and their equals in the peoples of all colors. Then, in a humanity enjoying prosperity, peace, and happiness, "the sun will shine only upon free men on this earth, men who recognize no other master than their reason; . . . tyrants and slaves, priests and their stupid and hypocritical instruments will exist only in history and on the stage; . . . no one will bother about them but to pity their victims and their dupes, to maintain, through horror of their excesses, a state of useful vigilance, and to learn to recognize and to crush under the weight of reason the first germs of superstition and tyranny, should they ever dare to reappear."[31]

Condorcet's political activities were wholly in keeping with the philosophic principles he developed in the *Esquisse*. However, it was not only at the end of his life that he conceived and embraced these "principles": always in some way, from the very beginning of his conscious life, he felt himself inspired by an invincible passion for justice,[32] and for a long time, especially after becoming acquainted with Turgot, he believed in the enlightenment, the progress and the indefinite perfectibility of the human race, and in the

[29] It is very interesting—and proof of an unusual perspicacity—to see Condorcet recognize that the efficiency of scientific methods is not unlimited, and that science ought to renew them periodically.

[30] The colonial peoples, the Asiatic peoples, peoples of the East and of Europe.

[31] *Esquisse,* 210.

[32] Cf. "Un ermite de la forêt de Sénart," Sunday, June 22, 1777, in the *Journal de Paris*. No. 173: "On demandait à Demosthène: quelle est la première qualité de l'orateur? *C'est l'action.* Quelle est la seconde? *C'est l'action.* Et la troisième? *Encore l'action.*

"Je dirai de même si on me demande quelle est la première règle de la politique? *C'est d'être juste.* La seconde? *C'est d'être juste.* Et la troisième? *C'est encore d'être juste.*" Cf. F. Bouisson, *Condorcet* (Paris, Alcan, 1929), 53.—It was Condorcet who urged Voltaire to write his celebrated protest against the execution of the Chevalier de la Barre; in 1786 he published some *Réflexions d'un citoyen non gradué sur un procès bien connu* and saved the life of three peasants condemned—unjustly—to the wheel by the Parlement of Paris. The neglect of *justice* is the main reproach which Condorcet made against Montesquieu.

duty by which we are bound to hasten this progress—a duty, moreover, which gives us the very sweetest of satisfactions.

Thus in 1774 he published (anonymously) a *Lettre d'un théologien à l'auteur du Dictionnaire des trois siècles* defending philosophy, tolerance and the liberty of conscience against oppression and fanaticism; then, in 1781, under the name of Dr. Schwartz, *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres*[33], and some articles on the *État des protestants en France* where he defends the freedom of belief.

Quite naturally, he slipped from pure mathematics[34] first to political economy[35] and then to politics. We could add that in politics as in political economy he remained a mathematician. His method is completely abstract: he posits a principle, determines the conditions of its application and deduces the consequences; or, inversely, he determines the problem and looks for a solution which conforms to his principles. We could say that Condorcet treated the problem of the constitution to be given to France like a problem of integration.

The principle—or axiom—which, according to Condorcet, dominates political science, and which ought to dominate and guide our action, is none other than the very definition of man, a "sensible being, able to reason and to acquire moral ideas." A good disciple of Locke (and of Voltaire),[36] Condorcet believed that "the ideas of right, justice and duty, the ideas of good and evil, are born out of our reflections upon ourselves and upon our relations with other men: determined by our very nature, they are neither arbitrary nor vague. Truths that bear upon these ideas have thus the same certainty, the same precision as those of all the speculative sciences.

[33] At Neuchâtel (Switzerland) in 1781 and at Paris in 1786. *Oeuvres,* VII, 60 sq.

[34] The mathematical works of Condorcet, *Essai sur le calcul intégral* (1765) and *Essai d'analyse* (1767–1768) were highly praised by d'Alembert and Lagrange.

[35] Political economy, as conceived during the eighteenth century, was not limited to the study of economic facts but included all the political and social sciences. A disciple of Turgot, whose physiocratic doctrines he adopted, Condorcet tried to apply mathematics, and particularly the calculus of probabilities, to the social sciences. Cf. *Essai sur l'application de l'analyse à la probabilité des décisions rendues à la pluralité des voix* (1785) and *Tableau général de la science qui a pour objet l'application du calcul aux sciences politiques et sociales* (published in the *Journal de l'instruction sociale* in 1795).

[36] In his *Lettres Philosophiques,* Voltaire explains his accord with Locke, which may account for the influence the latter had on the eighteenth century in France; furthermore, Locke as often as not is seen with the eyes of Voltaire.

If, further, we examine our own heart, we shall find that the attraction of a good action or the aversion toward doing a bad one, the remorse that follows it, are necessary consequences of our moral constitution.''[37] But since the intellectual and moral constitution of man is the *same* among all representatives of the human race, there results a fundamental equality among men as men, an equality which, of course, does not exclude all differences, particularly not the natural and social differences—men are unequally provided with natural gifts and goods in this world[38]—but which implies the inalienable possession of the same ''natural rights'' whose enjoyment cannot be denied to anyone without injustice. Also in 1787, under the mask of a *Citoyen des États-Unis,* Condorcet explained to the French that besides security and property ''equality is likewise one of the natural rights of mankind. Men are born equal and society is constituted in order to prevent the inequality of power—the only one that comes from Nature—from producing unpunished, unjust acts of violence.''[39] In 1789, under the name of Philolaüs, Condorcet proclaimed ''there is no true right, there is no true happiness but in the absolute equality of all citizens.''[40]

Obviously, this ''absolute equality'' is incompatible with the hereditary distinctions between the different classes of citizens. It is incompatible with the existence of a nobility and even with that of a monarchy. It implies a free democratic constitution for the State, since from the liberty and the equality of all citizens, derives their equal right to concur in the establishment of the laws which

[37] *Papiers personnels de Condorcet* (1798) Bibl. de l'Institut. Cf. F. Buisson, *Condorcet,* 37.

[38] Condorcet believes that doing away with hereditary privileges and making education widespread will automatically lead to a lightening of the inequalities set by fortune, this being an indispensable condition of a true democracy, which is incompatible with great wealth or with great poverty.

[39] *Lettre d'un citoyen des États-Unis à un Français sur les affaires présentes* (1788), *Oeuvres,* IX, 102 (Buisson, 31). The natural rights of man as man being the same for all men, it follows naturally that the fundamental laws of all human societies must necessarily be the same. What is good for a Frenchman is also good for an American or a Russian—it is only the conditions of their application which change with the climate, occupations, etc., not the principles. Those who insist upon differences based upon history, custom, religion, do no more than defend prejudice and block progress. The *philosophes* of the eighteenth century deduced from these premises the possibility of making laws for the human race.

[40] *Lettres d'un gentilhomme à MM. du Tiers-État,* "Première lettre," *Oeuvres,* IX, 227 (Buisson, 32).

rule the State. Indeed, prior to the Revolution, in his *Vie de Turgot* Condorcet wrote that the "republican constitution is the best of all."[41]

As a matter of fact, this conception is almost commonplace. Actually, the *philosophes*—with the exception of Voltaire—seldom had any doubts about the perfection, in itself, of a republican constitution.[42] What they doubted was the possibility of making it function in a state of some size. And experience, the lessons of history—of ancient as well as modern history, of Rome as well as of England—seemed to substantiate their pessimism.

However, for Condorcet—and not only for Condorcet—the American experiment seems to prove the opposite, to wit, that the existence of a republican régime, at least under a federated form, is possible in a large state.

Perhaps we could go even further. An absolute democracy is, no doubt, impossible. "But if we understand [by democracy] a constitution where all the citizens, divided in several assemblies, elect deputies entrusted to represent them and to carry the expression of the general will of their electors to a general assembly which then represents the nation, it is easy to see that such a constitution is fitting for large states. We can even, forming several orders of representative assemblies, apply it to the largest Empires, giving them by this means a firmness they could never attain until now, and at the same time that necessary unity of design which is impossible to achieve in a federal constitution."[43]

Furthermore, the difficulties which oppose the establishment and the existence of a republican régime will be greatly lessened if, instead of establishing an absolutely democratic republic, we were satisfied with a republic where the franchise belonged, not to all the citizens, but to the property-owners. No doubt it is contrary to natural right, *stricto sensu*, to limit civil rights in this way.[44] How-

[41] *Vie de Turgot, Oeuvres,* V, 209; *Notes sur Voltaire, Oeuvres,* IV, 393: "il n'y a qu'un esclave qui puisse dire qu'il préfère la royauté à une république bien constituée, et où jouissant sous de bonnes lois de tous les droits qu'ils tiennent de la nature, ils seraient encore à l'abri de toute oppression étrangère."

[42] For Montesquieu himself, the republican constitution is the most perfect. Alas, being based on the principle of political virtue, that is, on love for the city, a republic is inconceivable in a state of some dimensions.

[43] *Notes sur Voltaire, Oeuvres,* IV, 393; *Essai sur la Constitution et les fonctions des Assemblées provinciales, Oeuvres,* VIII, 127.

[44] *Essai sur la constitution et les fonctions des Assemblées provinciales, Oeuvres,*

ever, the experience of history teaches that it is the proletariat of the cities, and especially of large cities, which has always been the support of the military domination of the Caesars and of tyranny. Here again the American experiment comes to hand, and Condorcet, in the name of a *Citizen of New Haven,* provides the French with this warning: "If you give equal votes to all the citizens, poor and rich, the influence of the rich will then be greater than in a less numerous assembly where the voters, possessing modest means without being poor, will counter-balance it more easily."[45] Actually, in the last analysis, the restriction of the right to vote to landowners, provided that the tax be sufficiently low, will be to the benefit of the non-owners themselves. For it is precisely the people in the middle class, not too poor and not too rich, who have the greatest interest in having a well-governed state.

This emphasis on property, this mistrust of the city masses, are basic to the thinking of the time.[46] They are in no way characteristic of Condorcet. Quite the contrary, he fully appreciated the 14th of July; he believed that by taking the Bastille the Parisians had shown their political maturity and their love of liberty. By the same deed, the far-off, abstract ideal of a Republic now became a concrete possibility. From that time on, it was reasonable to work for its establishment,[47] giving to France, at the very outset, a radically democratic constitution.

We shall make no attempt to describe in detail Condorcet's political activities or the rôle he played in the development of the Revolution. A few words, a few deeds, in so far as they help to explain his thought, will suffice.[48]

VIII, 127. "On entend par droit de cité le droit que donne la nature à tout homme qui habite un pays de contribuer à la formation des règles auxquelles les habitants doivent s'assujetir."

[45] *Lettres d'un bourgeois de New Haven à un citoyen de Virginie, Oeuvres,* IX, 12. Cf. L. Cahen, *Condorcet et la révolution française* (Paris, 1904), 138.

[46] Jeffersonian democracy is a democracy of property owners; for the physiocrats, on the other hand, the landowner is the basis of the City because the City depends upon the land for its very existence. The proletariat, the indigent do not contribute to the life of the city. Furthermore, they will always be ready to sell their voices to the highest bidder—a factor which cannot be separated from historical experience. In short, a man who depends upon another man for his subsistence does not have the independence needed to exercise the right to vote—i.e., the right of sovereignty. Cf. D. Mornet, *Les origines intellectuelles de la révolution française* (Paris, 1938).

[47] Cf. L. Cahen, *op. cit.,* 138 sq.

[48] Cf. L. Cahen, *Condorcet et la révolution française* (Paris, 1904); Allengry,

Condorcet did not belong to the National Assembly—his ideas seemed too advanced for his electors—and had little appreciation for the work of that body. He forcefully criticized its timorous and thoroughly anti-democratic spirit,[49] the slowness with which it proceeded to elaborate a Declaration of Rights and the Declaration itself,[50] the monarchical constitution and the high qualifications for the electorship it gave to France. However, in the face of the growing anarchy, of the dissolution of the State, of the activities of the reaction which was raising its head higher and higher, Condorcet decided to take up the defense of the Constituent Assembly and called upon the patriot to support it. For if the Assembly were to lose the confidence of the people, everything would be lost: in the face of disorder, not the Republic—France, alas, is not ready for democracy, she is monarchist and not republican—despotism would be reinstalled. Therefore a few days before the flight to Varennes, Condorcet together with Siéyès had an address distributed which, after listing the dangers threatening liberty, proposed that the patriots announce they would freely submit to the constitution.

The address, poorly received by the left as well as the right, was unsuccessful. Besides, the flight of the king, made public on the 21st of June, 1791, completely upset the situation. The throne was vacant. For almost a month France lived without a monarch. Condorcet believed that this was an unhoped for, unique opportunity to put an end to the monarchy and to transform the state of fact into a state of law. The king, Condorcet announced,[51] has broken

Condorcet, guide de la révolution (Paris, 1904), and H. Sée, "Condorcet, ses idées et son rôle politique," *Revue de synthèse historique* (1905).

[49] With Siéyès, Condorcet violently reproached it for wanting to prohibit all revision of the constitution for ten years. This is its unforgivable sin: no one can, no one has the right to limit the future in any way.

[50] Like his friend Jefferson, Condorcet believed that the *Declaration of Rights* is more important even than the Constitution for which it is not a preface but the indispensable foundation. He also insisted that the Declaration be characteristically affirmative: a declaration of obvious truths, it is valid in and by itself, by the fact of its being *proclaimed*. It is not a decree or a law, not an expression of will, but one of reason. At the outset, by affirming: we hold these truths to be self-evident, the Declaration defines the positive content of human reason: to enjoy the rights which it states.

[51] Cf. "Avis aux Français sur la Royauté," No. 1 of *Républicain*, July, 1791 (Buisson, 74 sq.); *De La République ou un roi est-il nécessaire à la conservation de la liberté? Oeuvres*, XVI, 245 sq., 259.

the contract which bound him to the nation, has violated the oath he made to be faithful to the Constitution; indeed, he has committed treason in trying to leave France and attach himself to her enemies. He has practically abdicated. He has released the French from all their obligations toward him (and toward the monarchical constitution). France is, therefore, free to engage in a republican régime, that is, a régime under which the *executive power is answerable to the nation.* This is perfectly feasible: has it not been proven that the nation could very well get along without the king? —at the same time it conforms "to reason and to human dignity," while heredity and irresponsibility of power are an outrage to the people and to their rights. All the arguments used to defend the monarchy are fallacious. Thus it is said, for example, that one needs a king as a defense against tyranny: but a free people will know how to defend itself. At any rate, France is too large: there is "no need to fear that the idol of the capital could ever become the tyrant of the nation." As to the organization of power, the ministers should be elected by the people and should be answerable before the Assembly: in this way, there would be no need to fear the omnipotence of the Assembly; at the same time, by electing the ministers for a long enough period, ten years for example, by stipulating that they can be replaced only at intervals of two years (each newly-elected Assembly shall express a vote for each minister) the stability and authority of the government will be assured. But if that system is not acceptable, another can be found. It is not difficult. . . .[52]

France did not accept the advice of Condorcet. France was and remained monarchist. The king was reëstablished on his throne in the month of July. It was, for Condorcet, a deception—and a lesson he would not forget.

Elected to the Legislative Assembly in September, 1791, he announced his absolute fidelity to the Constitution. Doubtless, it was not perfect; and the Constituent Assembly was wrong in deciding for the future and in forbidding revision for ten years. But it was accepted by France; it was *the law,* the expression of the general will of the nation;[53] it must, therefore, be obeyed, and no

[52] Cf. L. Cahen, *op. cit.,* 253–259; F. Allengry, *op. cit.,* 94 sq.

[53] It was the deep conviction of Condorcet that we do not have the right to rise up against the nation; the will of the nation—even when it is wrong—is law. He therefore bitterly reproached the Montagnards for their *coup d'état* against the Convention.

one can refuse to acknowledge this obligation. Actually, it is not entirely bad; it guarantees the rights of the citizen and it makes possible the undertaking of an indispensable enterprise, without which democracy cannot survive, the organizing of public instruction. It is by establishing schools, by instructing the people that we can spread light and overcome prejudice. By the same means the accession of the Republic can be assured.

The problem of education is at the center of the preoccupations of the eighteenth century. The *philosophes* believe in the blessings and in the power of instruction. "To instruct a nation," writes Diderot, "is to civilize it . . . ignorance is the part of the slave and of the savage."[54] "It is an impiety for us to abandon to enforced ignorance a brother of ours," says Mirabeau to the Margrave of Baden, explaining that "the general and universal instruction of his people is the first and the principal duty of a good prince," and that it is in the interest of the State itself to spread instruction. Indeed, civil equality implies the instruction of the people; it is then a duty for the State and a duty for the citizen and even for "every human creature . . . who brings with him his right to instruction in receiving life." Furthermore, access to instruction should be open to everyone, "to all the children of the nation," as Diderot put it, and not only to the rich.[55]

Condorcet does not innovate—his rôle was not to invent new ideas but to put in order, to synthesize, to systematize and to push the conceptions of his time to their logical conclusions—when in his five *Mémoires sur l'instruction publique*, published by him in 1790 in the *Bibliothèque de l'homme public*,[56] as well as in his *Rapport et projet de décret sur l'organisation générale de l'instruction publique, présentées à l'Assemblée Nationale*[57] in 1792, he proclaims that "public instruction is a duty of society to its citizens,"[58] "a

[54] Diderot, *Projet d'une Université, Oeuvres,* III, 429–30. Cf. F. de la Fontainerie, *French Liberalism and Education in the XVIII Century* (New York, 1934).

[55] Cf. L. Cahen, *op. cit.,* 326 sq.

[56] *Bibliothèque de l'homme public, Analyse raisonée des principaux ouvrages français et étrangers sur la politique en général, la législation, les finances, la police, l'agriculture et le commerce en particulier et sur le droit naturel et public . . .* (À Paris, chez Buisson, libraire, . . . 1790). Edited by Condorcet and "M. de Peysonnel, ancien consul général de France à Smyrne et M. Le Chapelier, député de l'Assemblée Nationale," this *Bibliothèque* includes 28 volumes.

[57] The 20th and 21st of April, 1792.

[58] *Sur l'instruction publique,* "Premier mémoire," *Oeuvres,* VII, 169. Cf. *ibid.,* 170: "l'inégalité d'instruction est une des principales sources de la tyrannie."

duty of justice prescribed by the common interest of society and the whole of mankind,'' and that its goal is to assure each citizen ''the possibility of perfecting his industry, of making himself capable of assuming the public functions to which he has the right to be called, of developing all the range of talents he has received from nature, and thus of establishing among the citizens an actual equality and of making real the political equality recognized by the law.''[59]

The link between the right to equality and the right to instruction is recognized by Condorcet *expressis verbis*—in his *Projet de Déclaration des Droits naturels civils et politiques des hommes* of 1793. The right to instruction is placed immediately after the ''natural rights'' which, for him, are: ''liberty, equality, security, property, social guarantee and resistance to oppression'':[60] the ''children of the nation'' should be considered equal in respect to instruction, they must have the same opportunity of receiving it. This does not mean that they ought all to receive an absolutely identical instruction. A certain minimum is indispensable to the citizen and must therefore be made compulsory. But it is neither necessary nor is it even possible to give everyone a secondary instruction, or *a fortiori* a high degree of scientific instruction. This latter can by its very nature be given but to a select few, endowed with outstanding abilities; but this inevitable differentiation does not infringe upon the fundamental demand for equality, provided the selection is made rather late and that its basis be a superior degree of ability and not the social and material position of the children (or of their parents); in other words, provided that any child intellectually endowed may manage to acquire the highest degree of instruction regardless of the situation of his parents. It follows that education in all its degrees must necessarily be absolutely free.

The plan for the organization of the public educational system as elaborated by Condorcet,[61] an extraordinarily modern and bold

[59] *Rapport, Oeuvres,* VII, 449–451.

[60] Art. 23: "L'instruction est le besoin de tous et la société la doit également à tous ses membres." *Oeuvres,* XII, 417–22. Cf. Buisson, 109.

[61] Condorcet envisaged five degrees of public instruction: 1. Primary school, compulsory for all. 2. Secondary school, destined for children whose families can dispense somewhat longer with their work. 3. The institutes, which would give a complete education, where teachers for the primary and secondary schools would be trained. (The institute corresponds to American Teachers' colleges and normal schools.) 4. The *Lycée,* where all the sciences are taught in all their extent. It is

plan,[62] part of which has yet to be realized, is based entirely on the one hand on the conceptions of right and of duty—the right of the individual, the duty of society—which we have just sketched, and on the other, on those of selection and of progress: selection of talent throughout the nation in order to make it benefit the progress of science, which implies progress in general. It is in the school that the future is designed, a future which presented itself to Condorcet under the aspect of a republican, democratic, equalitarian society, entirely devoted to progress, i.e., turned towards the future.

It is this same preoccupation with the future, the desire to leave it open, which inspired the constitutional projects of Condorcet, convinced of the necessity of endowing the Republic, and that as quickly as possible, with permanent institutions which would insure its stability, in other words, of elaborating and promulgating a new and definitive Constitution, and at the same time, convinced of the impossibility of establishing it once and for all, like a sacred text. The past does not dominate the present and the present does not command the future. No one has the right to legislate for the future. Thus the project of a constitution—the constitution called Girondist, worked out by Condorcet in collaboration with Thomas Paine[63]—which he presented to the Convention the 15th of February, 1793, makes allowance for revision every twenty years.

Condorcet was very proud of his work. "To give to a country of 27,000 square leagues, inhabited by 25,000,000 men, a constitu-

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here that scientists and professors would be trained. (The *Lycées* correspond to American Graduate Faculties and to the French *École Normale Supérieure.*) Finally, 5. The National Society of Sciences and Arts, an institution for research or an Academy where science can progress and where at the same time young future academicians would be trained.

[62] Condorcet anticipated modern, i.e., above all scientific education, designed to develop the intelligence and the critical sense of the students rather than to inculcate them with ready-made knowledge and facts. Nothing would be imposed as dogma—not even the *Declaration of Rights.* No religious instruction would be given in the public schools, religion being a personal affair of the citizen with which the State should not be concerned. Moral education would be left to the family, except for civic education, which would try to develop in children a sense of duty toward the country and toward humanity, a sense of equality, the feeling of fraternity and the exactions of justice.

[63] Thomas Paine had a great influence on Condorcet. The influence of the example of American ideals on France has been studied by Gilbert Chinard in many works. Cf. *Jefferson et les idéologues* (Paris, 1925); *Trois amitiés françaises de Jefferson* (Paris, 1927), etc., etc.

tion which, founded solely upon the principles of reason and of justice, secures to the citizen the full possession of his rights; to combine the parts of this constitution in such a way that the individual's necessity of obedience to laws and of submission to the general will, allows the subsistence, in their full extent of the sovereignty of the people as well as of the equality of the citizen and the exercise of natural freedom, such is," he said, "the problem that we had to solve."[64]

Alas, his Constitution, so perfect, with its right of referendum and of generalized and practically unlimited popular initiative, with its equilibrium of legislative, executive and judiciary powers, surreptitiously introduced into the State under the pretext of safeguarding popular sovereignty (the people were to elect the ministers directly—ministers whom the Legislative Assembly could not overthrow without deferring then to the judgment of a national jury) was obviously quite impracticable, and would have transformed all France into a permanent debating club. It is not very astonishing that the Convention rejected it. It is not surprising that the Montagnard constitution was preferred.[65] On the other hand, it was inevitable that in the face of the *coup d'état* by the Montagne, Condorcet offered vehement protest,[66] a protest by which —no doubt he knew it—he signed his own death warrant.

From that time on only flight could save him, and it was while fleeing, hidden and threatened with death, that he wrote his admirable *Esquisse,* at the same time a testament and a profession of faith—of a faith faithful to itself—of a philosophical faith in reason and progress.[67]

[64] *Exposé des motifs, Oeuvres,* XII, 335; cf. L. Cahen, *op. cit.,* 471.

[65] The Montagnard constitution was, as a matter of fact, hardly more practicable. Indeed, it was never applied, the Convention having decided that "the government of the Republic is and remains revolutionary."

[66] Cf. *Lettre à la Convention Nationale:* "Quand la Convention Nationale n'est pas libre, *ses lois n'obligent pas les citoyens.*"

[67] By a just turn of events, the 13th Germinal of the year III of the Republic, Daunou "proposed and obtained the unanimous adoption of the project of a decree authorising the Convention to acquire 3600 copies of the posthumous work of Condorcet," observing, "that Condorcet wrote this work in such forgetfulness of himself and of his own misfortunes that nothing in it reminds us of the disastrous conditions under which he wrote. He speaks about the Revolution with nothing but enthusiasm. We see that he considered his own proscription only as one of those personal mishaps nearly inevitable in the midst of a great movement productive of

The *Esquisse* is a window opening into the future. After all, could it be anything else? Is it not by the vision of the future, by prevision, *pronoia,* that human intelligence is to be characterized? Is it not the fact that it determines the future and determines itself by means of the future, that characterizes human action? In the person of Condorcet, writing his *Esquisse,* the philosophy of the eighteenth century confirmed once more that it is in and by the primacy of the future over the present that man, a reasoning being, affirms and realizes his liberty.

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general happiness." (Cf. Buisson, *Condorcet,* 19.) Daunou was right: Condorcet's personal misfortunes and even the misfortunes of the Revolution did not shake his own faith and convictions. He died, as he lived, as a philosopher.