**Marquis de Condorcet by Karen Plumb**



Condorcet’s conception of human progress is that it is linear and that the progress of knowledge, liberty, and rights for man will excel.[[1]](#endnote-1) Although there are periods of chaos or war, such as the French Revolution, they constitute a necessary stage in human progress.[[2]](#endnote-2) He thinks progress will vary in speed and is subject to law.[[3]](#endnote-3) These provisions are such that the earth continues the way it is in the universe and that the general laws of the system don’t prevent the human race of its faculties and resources.[[4]](#endnote-4) He thinks that according to the particular approach man, the individual is capable of reasoning and developing moral ideas.[[5]](#endnote-5) However, when we take into account the natural rights of ‘man’ over the course of time ‘man’ has progressed and Condorcet thinks that we became enlightened ‘people’ as humanity.[[6]](#endnote-6) According to Condorcet equality will exist after humans progress to the point where the individual of reason will prevail and the individual will be responsible for fending off inequality in order to continue to survive. [[7]](#endnote-7)

Condorcet’s observation about natural progress at the sciences and civilization was based on past history of particular societies and not of ‘humanity’ in general.[[8]](#endnote-8) Thus he took a particular approach vs. a universal approach when he discussed his belief based on the progress of societies. In Condorcet’s particular approach he believed that some societies had developed in the sciences and civilization more than other societies because he asks the question whether all societies will attain the state of civilization that the French and Anglo-Americans have already attained, indicating that they had progressed more than that of other societies at that time.[[9]](#endnote-9) His argument is convincing because the great thinkers and Scientists were European such as English (Newton), French (Voltaire, Turgot and Fourier), and Greek (Aristotle) for example. He refers to the “whole of Europe” that would soon be united in the quest for truth and freedom, alluding to the fact that other parts of the world had not achieved such a level of civilization. [[10]](#endnote-10)He singles out the French and Anglo-Americans and describes them as the nations that have attained the state of civilization which is most enlightened, or those that have progressed the most, and who were the freest from inequality. [[11]](#endnote-11)Furthermore, he compares these nations to that of African tribes who are barbarians, and ignorant savages who still need to progress past the slavery and rule of monarchs, indicating they have not attained the propensity to progress at the sciences and civilization.[[12]](#endnote-12)

The hierarchical “Historical” implication of the assumption that not all human societies had attained the propensity for progress at the sciences and civilization is that inequality exists not based upon nature but based on society and the progress that each society has attained. The assumption that some societies had developed more in the sciences and civilization meant that some societies had achieved more progress and were therefore better or further ahead than other societies. Progress is measured by knowledge and knowledge is power. However, progress has equality as the objective and freedom as the ultimate goal. Since the Europeans were the ones developing the laws such as Newton in the sciences and civilization it was thought that the Europeans were more knowledgeable than other societies, thus a hierarchical scale became the implication to the assumption. Another example is Africa which is seen as less progressed at the sciences and civilization because they encouraged slavery. We as humans create the inequality that exists based on the speed at which progress occurs in some nations over other nations. [[13]](#endnote-13) In Condorcet’s time Education and Communication throughout the world wasn’t a reality and therefore limited some of these nations from attaining the propensity to progress at the sciences and civilization.

Endnotes

1. Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind (1795),* The History Guide, Lectures on Modern European Intellectual History ([www.historyguide.org/intellect/sketch.html](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/sketch.html)) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Dictionary of the History of Ideas, *Progress in The Modern Era*, ([www.xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docID=DicHist/uvaBook/tei/DicHist3.xml;chunk.id=dv3-76;brand=default;query=”Dictionary%20of%20the%20History%20of%20Ideas”#1](http://www.xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docID=DicHist/uvaBook/tei/DicHist3.xml;chunk.id=dv3-76;brand=default;query=#1)) p. 640 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. P. 640 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind (1795),* The History Guide, Lectures on Modern European Intellectual History ([www.historyguide.org/intellect/sketch.html](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/sketch.html)) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid.

    Photograph: <http://www.google.ca/search?q=condorcet&hl=en&prmd=imvnsb&source=lnms&tbm=isch&ei=n4sLT43kLeru0gGh34TOBQ&sa=X&oi=mode_link&ct=mode&cd=2&sqi=2&ved=0CBMQ_AUoAQ&biw=1280&bih=892> [↑](#endnote-ref-13)