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# CONDORCET

(1743–94)

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In the discussions of ideas that constitute our daily intellectual environment there are certain words that reek of cordite and certain writers who give us a sense of peace. The term ‘secular’ is in the first category, and Condorcet in the second.

A person who speaks of secular or non-religious education or schools, or of educational ‘neutrality’, immediately lays himself or herself open to being regarded either as a supporter of the ‘independent school’, that is private, clerical, religious, ‘right-wing’ and, needless to say, reactionary, or as a champion of public, secular, positivist, ‘left-wing’ and, needless to say, anti-clerical education. Simplistic images are powerful, and ingrained mental habits so reassuring. And yet the divisions are not always where one would like them to be. I may be that one of the first people to notice the caricatural exaggeration of this Manichaeic representation of the school was in fact Condorcet, at a time when the present-day French noun denoting the principle of non-religious education did not yet exist.

Rather than bludgeon the reader with an encyclopedic account of the educational writings and thought of Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, it seemed more useful to accompany this writer, insufficiently known in spite of media excitement over the bicentenary of the French Revolution, along the path that led him to discover the secular ideal. His approach is highly instructive for us who are not all that far removed from the conflicts of his own day.<sup>2</sup>

## **An all-around man**

Condorcet was a writer, polemicist, scholar and politician,<sup>3</sup> but it would be somewhat rash to class him, strictly speaking, as an educator. Never did he have a school in his charge to test his ideas, and he left us no psychological, sociological or pedagogical analysis of the child. He showed little interest in the techniques of teaching. But to say that he was not a practicing teacher and that the whole of his work was directed primarily towards philosophy, chiefly political philosophy, could not discredit the relevance or rightness of his ideas. The depth and coherence of Condorcet’s thinking about education make him a philosopher and educator in his own right.

Condorcet achieved precocious distinction as a mathematician, entered the Academy of Sciences at the age of 26 and became its Permanent Secretary in 1776 and a member of the French Academy in 1782. When the French Revolution broke out he was one of the last authentic survivors of the spirit of the Enlightenment that had permeated Voltaire and the compilers of the *Encyclopédie*. In September 1791 he was elected to the Legislative Assembly to represent Paris and became a member of the Public Instruction Committee, which was responsible for the reform of schools.

In truth, the question of reorganizing education in France had long been exercising

people's minds. Everyone remembered the *Essai d'éducation nationale et plan d'études pour la jeunesse* (Essay on National Education) (1763) by La Chalotais, a fiery attack on the religious monopoly over education.

Condorcet, moreover, had already given considerable thought to the question. In 1790 he published in the periodical *La bibliothèque de l'homme public* four 'memoirs' on educational issues: *Nature et objet de l'instruction publique* (Nature and Purpose of State Instruction); *De l'instruction commune aux enfants* (Universal Instruction for Children); *De l'instruction commune pour les hommes* (Universal Instruction for Adults); and *Sur l'instruction relative aux professions* (Vocational Instruction). A fifth memoir, not published during his lifetime was devoted to *L'instruction relative aux sciences* (Instruction in the Sciences).<sup>4</sup>

In view of the urgent political situation, however, it was no longer the moment for purely theoretical reflection. A group of five members of the committee was asked to prepare a general plan for education. Together with Lacépède, Arbogast, Pastoret and Romme, Condorcet set to work and presented his report and draft decree (*Rapport et projet de décret sur l'organisation générale de l'instruction publique*)<sup>5</sup> in 1792, but, for political reasons, it failed to receive the attention the subject required, and discussion of the report was postponed. The idea of education that was free of charge, compulsory, non-religious and universal contained in that report was not to become reality until a century later.

Let us take a closer look at Condorcet's ideal and at the fundamental principles on which it is based.

Caught up in the revolutionary turmoil, Condorcet was faced with a problem not very different from that encountered by any educational theory or school that attempts to carry its principles to the logical conclusion.

How can the unity of the school be reconciled with the social diversity of children? How can a minimum of knowledge and moral sentiments be uniformly inculcated in all the members of a republic —identical basic knowledge for all— in a national environment that is socially and culturally diverse and is also nondenominational? How can one prevent the knowledge acquired by a few from being transformed into absolute power over the others? It was no doubt a political and a religious issue, but it was above all an educational issue. In concrete terms, the aim was nothing less than to group together peacefully in the same school children with different religious beliefs, from different backgrounds, with different languages and destined for different occupations. This was done to produce at least the minimum of universal feeling and knowledge needed to secure the unity of the republic and, beyond the republic, the unity of the human race.

Let us try to trace the genesis of this vision through Condorcet's writings. Three essential stages stand out as landmarks on his journey from a convinced and militant anti-clericalism<sup>6</sup> to a more serene conception of the necessary cohabitation between religious diversity and secular unity. They lead to the idea of human universality based on the ideal of knowledge and instruction for all, without which both intellectual progress and independent citizenship would be impossible.

## **The Protestant question**

Even before the Revolution Condorcet came up against the question of a secular education in connection with the educational status of children and teachers who were Protestants. Following Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes in October 1685, the children of Protestant families were sent to Catholic schools, and adult Protestants were forbidden to teach. Teachers were appointed by the congregations, which inspected them and denied the

curricula. This allowed the Roman Catholic clergy to keep education and teachers in their grip.

In such a situation the main function of the school is not so much to instruct as to maintain above all the orthodoxy of the Catholic faith where that faith is firmly established and to proselytize in regions where it encounters resistance from other faiths. La Chalotais (1701–85), in his ‘Essay on National Education’ (1763), had already denounced this explicit shift from instruction to indoctrination.

It was from La Chalotais, the fiery Procureur Général in the Breton Parlement, that Condorcet borrowed the principle that it is not the most important function of the school to deal with denominational issues: its object should be the greatest public utility. The teaching of political laws and the sciences is a matter for the state, the teaching of divine laws one for the Church. Condorcet distilled from this the essential principle that the first job of the school is to instruct. As a man of science and a mathematician he concluded that the school’s most important task must be to transmit knowledge that is useful to everyone. Hence his condemnation of what we could call, using Bernard Charlot’s expression, the ‘pedagogical mystification’<sup>7</sup> of the eighteenth-century school. That school was expected to instruct children, but instruction was impeded by the fact that the children were placed in the exclusive grip of religious congregations and the fact that the school institution was assigned the role of ideological indoctrination. Teachers were recruited for their moral profile, not for their knowledge or skill; education was neglected in favor of the catechism; knowledge was presented dogmatically; the voice of authority overrode individual critical thought; and hatred between social groups was fuelled and legitimized—as evidenced by the Callas affair and the Chevalier de la Barre affair. All these traits were violently attacked by Condorcet in his *Fragments sur l’éducation des enfants* (Fragments concerning the Education of Children), *Petits résumés sur l’histoire de l’éducation* (Notes on the History of Education) and *Sur l’instruction* (On the Subject of Instruction), which have been published by Manuela Albertone under the general title *Réflexions et notes sur l’éducation* (Thoughts and Notes on Education).<sup>8</sup>

Faced with this religious monopoly over education, Condorcet directed his attack at two levels—the political level and the school level—without drawing a clear distinction between them. During the period that he wrote several *Écrits sur les protestants* (Writings on the Protestants)<sup>9</sup> (1775-81) his line of argument was essentially political.

His enemy was the monopoly held by the religious congregations. It was thus necessary to start by breaking the hold of the Catholic clergy over school education and remove the school from the temptation of indoctrination. Teachers must be selected, curricula developed and buildings used that were independent of the Church. To each side its own preserve, its sphere of influence and its tasks. Let the school be responsible for transmission of the knowledge indispensable to the free citizen: reading, writing, arithmetic, civic duties and fundamental moral values; let the family be responsible for the affections; and let the Churches be responsible for the metaphysics of the faith. To achieve this outcome a *state school* had to be set up outside the monopoly of the Church. It was the price to be paid for a peaceful society.

In the actual schools this division of responsibilities had a theoretical consequence that was immediately perceived by Condorcet: a clear distinction had to be drawn between education in general, which included general physical, affective, intellectual and moral training, and actual instruction, which was only a part of that education. Where education in the broad sense was concerned, each person was entitled to respect for his or her metaphysical beliefs. These were already taken in hand by the family and the Church. At the very least, no one should be placed in a position of diminished civic dignity on account of his or her religious convictions. The utmost tolerance was desirable. As for instruction, the school should take in all citizens without exception and instruct them in everything that makes responsibility

possible. That is, citizens should be instructed in everything that forms and consolidates the human being as a political citizen: reading, writing, arithmetic and the functioning of institutions—without which a person had to hand over to others his or her freedom of judgement and choice, which are the fundamental moral principles recognized by all systems of ethics.

In his report and draft decree on the general organization of public instruction, Condorcet was perfectly explicit in his definition of the aims of the school:

To offer all individuals of the human race the means to provide for their needs and well-being, know and exercise their rights and understand and fulfil their duties; the opportunity to perfect their skill, make themselves capable of performing the social functions to which they have a right to be called and develop the full range of talents given them by nature; and in so doing to establish between citizens an authentic equality to make real the political equality recognized by the law.<sup>10</sup>

According to Condorcet, religious beliefs, though perfectly legitimate, should not cross the threshold of the school. Though it is not always easy to make a distinction between education and instruction in practice, the fact remains that religious beliefs should give way to the need for knowledge and ‘elementary’ (in the mathematical sense of an essential component) moral feelings that are essential to each citizen. To quote Milner’s expression, there exists a ‘strategic knowledge’<sup>11</sup> to which it is the school’s responsibility to give priority. As Condorcet saw it, a secular ideal presupposes an anti-clerical stance and is imbued with the ideas of citizenship and political unity.

## Political dogmatism

But he quickly came to see this militant anti-clericalism as superficial and above all as inadequate. It was not enough tonight against a religion, to drive churchmen out of the schools and replace them with the ideal of a universal knowledge that would foster social reconciliation. Catherine Kintzler has convincingly shown how Condorcet became aware of the danger that dogmatism would simply be displaced.<sup>12</sup> Incoherent illuminism is not confined to religions or their followers. The spirit of exclusiveness, though clerical *par excellence*, also blows in other quarters. Condorcet encountered it personally in the two main areas of his activity, in science with Marat and in politics with Robespierre. This battle on two fronts drove Condorcet to look more closely at his secular ideal of a universal knowledge intended for each and every individual.

The growing understanding of nature and social mathematics and the idea of unlimited progress propagated by science ushered in a new form of clericalism in politics and learned societies. The goddess Reason, the god Progress and their daughter Science were becoming the objects of a new religion and new theology. Condorcet was one of the first to spot and investigate this substitute priesthood and the intellectual danger it represented. When the Church is dispossessed of its monopoly in education, it does not necessarily follow that the ideal of universal learning will capture the school and the ideal of individual liberty, the republic. On the contrary, we tend to find, as Charles Coutel<sup>13</sup> puts it, a ‘transference of sacredness’, both in political action and in the world of science. Let us take political action first.

The new revolutionary power was sorely tempted immediately to put the school to the service of the victorious ideology. The educational plans of Babeuf, Rabaut-Saint-Étienne, Bouquier and le Pelletier-de-Saint-Fargeau tended to substitute civic indoctrination for elementary instruction and at the same time to eliminate all outside influence that might still be brought to bear on children. Instruction was of secondary importance; it was the child as a

whole that had to be taken in hand. Lawmakers, educators and politicians swore by the Spartan model; one deputy even proposed burning down the Bibliothèque Nationale as a source of inequality in knowledge. What could this movement be except a new clerical distortion, just as dogmatic and monopolistic as the clergy used to be?

If you call a school a national temple, if your teacher is a magistrate, you add to the statements made in that place by that man an authority that is foreign not only to the evidence necessary to arrive at the truth but also to the type of authority that, without impeding the progress of knowledge, may influence our provisional belief—the belief that accounts for the known superiority of the Enlightenment. I am right to believe a physical experiment on the authority of a scholar whose science and accuracy I have checked; I should be an idiot to believe it on the authority of a high priest or grand official. There is no hope for the salvation of human reason unless this same rule is applied to ethics and politics. Let us therefore hasten to prefer reasoning to eloquence and books to speakers and bring at last to the moral sciences the philosophy and method of the physical sciences.<sup>14</sup>

In his *Premier mémoire sur l'instruction publique* (First Memoir on Public Instruction) (1790),<sup>15</sup> Condorcet had already denounced this new evangelistic trend within the education system, which distorted its main purpose. Children were roped into festivities, celebrations and parades, and the cult of the Nation, the goddess Nature and the tree of Liberty replaced citizenship, science and a sense of personal responsibility. The fact of the matter was that schools had new high priests. The most scathing remark by Condorcet against this new political class—priests in disguise—was aimed at Robespierre, who was never to forgive him for it.

The rebel Condorcet<sup>16</sup> maintained that these new cults were the very negation of culture. The social idol supplanted the religious idol, political rhetoric ran high, but the result was the same—one dogma was merely replacing another, to the detriment of genuine civic education.

From an educational point of view, the consequences were serious. In order to foster the full socialization of young people, schools played on their gregarious instinct instead of helping them to reason critically for themselves, the only sound approach to science. Patriotic incantations and the comforting companionship of the crowd replaced education. This meant that schools no longer educated but indoctrinated, betraying their primary function, which was to impart the basic knowledge enabling all to pursue their own education.

A man who, on completing his education, does not continue to strengthen his reasoning faculties, sustain the knowledge acquired by new knowledge, correct any errors or rectify any incomplete notions he may have been taught will soon see the fruit of his early years' labor vanish: as time obliterates the traces of any first impressions that are not renewed by further studies, the mind itself, once it is no longer in the habit of applying itself, will suffer a loss of flexibility and vigour.<sup>17</sup>

## Science misapplied and the idea of progress

A similar phenomenon could be observed in the realm of science and was well described in the short essay entitled *Raisons qui m'ont empêché jusqu'ici de croire au magnétisme animal* (Reasons that Have Hitherto Prevented Me from Believing in Animal Magnetism),<sup>18</sup> directed against Mesmer, a sort of latter-day pseudo-scientific prophet. Scientists themselves are just as easily tempted as charlatans to misuse the quasi-religious power conferred on them by knowledge. Condorcet feared the emergence of a new clericulture, of the scientific variety this time, that was just as stubbornly opposed to progress and as conservative as the clergy. How would the man in the street be able to distinguish between a true scientist and a quack? How to resist the temptation of the power conferred by knowledge? The theory of progress as it emerges from the *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Sketch for

a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind) (1794) can shed new light on these two thorny issues. In order to gain a better understanding of what progress means and entails, let us start out from its opposite, obscurantism, vigorously denounced apropos of the Chaldean priests, the archetypes of that breed of scholars who jealously sought to keep their knowledge to themselves so as to maintain their intellectual and moral hold over the people. In fact, obscurantism resides not in ignorance but in the deliberate will, artfully applied, to prevent the truths gradually acquired by science and technology from being divulged to the world at large. Whether a would-be custodian of the truth or a prey to illusion, the bogus scholar harbors illusory knowledge so as better to preserve his or her power.

By contrast, when Condorcet speaks about 'progress of the human mind' he means not only qualitative and quantitative knowledge but also the spread of knowledge to everyone. In this sense, and despite their radically different metaphysical theories, Comenius and Condorcet are alike in seeking to create an education for all, a genuinely universal education for all human beings without distinction. This is the prerequisite for the intellectual and, especially, moral progress of humankind as a whole. Quantitatively, the mass of available truths is growing; qualitatively, all this knowledge is rationally combined in such a way that it is easier to propagate. The whole question is whether universal education has the practical means of ensuring its dissemination. This is a matter of political decision-making. Here again, Condorcet is not very different from Comenius in believing that education for all and the participation of everyone, together, in the advancement of knowledge are a pre-condition for improving the lot of humankind.

From this point of view, nations, individuals and peoples all share in the unity covered by the concept of 'the human mind'. It is the human mind that is capable of indefinite improvement: 'Our hopes in the future condition of the human species may be summed up in these three important points: the destruction of inequality among nations; the progress of equality within a single people; and lastly the genuine improvement of the human person.'<sup>19</sup>

As regards this improvement, we must guard against a common misconception that would distort Condorcet's thinking. This constant progression must not be seen as the realization of some immanent historical force that, though latent, has a recognizable form and a predictable purpose. Nothing could be more remote from Condorcet's theories than a deterministic representation of the course of history.

Perfectibility is a notion that in his thinking reflects a hope, an ideal, whose legitimacy is corroborated by two explicit observations made in the *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*. First, the ideal of human progress, understood concretely as the improvement of knowledge and behavior, has no internal contradictions that might undermine its logical relevance. Secondly, the history of science, technology and human relationships to these two branches of knowledge shows that there has indeed been progress over the centuries of human intellectual journeying. This latter observation leads Condorcet to believe that there are legitimate grounds for hoping that similar progress will continue to be made in the future. And since such progress has an influence on human behavior, in other words on morals in general, there is reason to believe that there will be progress in the political and human spheres as well.

It is therefore a hypothesis in the strict sense. Condorcet never says that progress is necessary; he merely asks for it to be accepted as a possibility and he bases it entirely on the fundamental idea of human perfectibility. This is contrary both to the anthropology of antiquity, which assigns human beings a definitive place in a finite cosmos, and to Christian metaphysics, which holds that they are essentially stable in nature and divine in origin. The idea of perfectibility suggests only that the human mind is open to an indeterminate future. It may go either backwards or forwards, but in either case it cannot be confined.

To Condorcet's mind, therefore, the idea of progress is more a program than a law of

history. It will be achieved only if human beings become aware of it and decide to make it a reality. The representation of progress and confidence in their own perfectibility is what induces human beings to seek constant self-improvement. It is understandable that Condorcet was so distrustful of dogmatism, especially when it took the form of the most extravagant scientism.

If, then, progress is indefinite, who can claim to be the custodian of a definitive theory of the universe? Marat's would-be *Découvertes sur le feu, l'électricité et la lumière* (Discoveries about Fire, Electricity and Light) (1779) are as arbitrary as Mesmer's *Le mémoire sur la découverte du magnétisme animal* (Memoir on the Discovery of Animal Magnetism) is confusing.

These two illustrations of lapses into dogma showed Condorcet that the principle alone of anti-clericalism did not provide a sufficiently sound basis for a genuinely public education system. One can be religious without having a clerical turn of mind; one can be clerical without being religious; above all, one can misdirect science and all that goes under the name of science towards the most hare-brained illusions. How to guard against such a temptation?

## The human mind and instruction

A deeper analysis of Condorcet's thinking on the difficult question of secularity is to be found in the *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, his last work, written in difficult circumstances while he was in hiding. Outlawed by the Convention for a brochure in which he had denounced Robespierre's monarchist leanings, *Aux citoyens français sur le projet de nouvelle constitution* (To the French Citizens on the Draft for a New Constitution) (1793), he found refuge in the home of a Madame Vernet, where he wrote his *Avis d'un proscrit à sa fille* (Advice from an Outlaw to his Daughter), 'one of the finest books on morals that can be read',<sup>20</sup> and the *Sketch*, which remains his most famous work. Recapitulating the history of the human mind through its scientific and political achievements, he retraces its vicissitudes through progress and decadence, setbacks and triumphs, in nine chapters, before finally announcing the advent of what he calls the 'tenth epoch'. In this final chapter he considers the future progress of the human mind as it can be inferred from the present and on the basis of laws that can be seen to have regulated change in the past. This leads him to draw a distinction between two major ways of considering societies. The distinction he draws is not based directly on either economics or politics but first and foremost on the manner in which knowledge is seen to be distributed among the individuals making up a given society and, on the basis of that specific case, how science is seen to be imparted to humankind in general. The opposite of 'secular' (*laïque*) is not the religious adjective 'clerical', but the more general term 'clerk', which in the etymological sense means one who belongs to the right lot or allotment (*klerikos, clericus*), to the chosen few, as distinct from the ordinary people, the uninitiated, who have to be guided because they are ignorant (*laicos, laicus*). There are thus, he asserts, two conceptual approaches to humankind, two philosophies of our relationship to knowledge and freedom.

The first is a 'clerical' approach, which marked the history of ideas up until Descartes and the birth of the idea of the modern republic and which differentiates between two social groups that are distinct from each other in their relationship to knowledge and power, are mutually exclusive and socially immobile: on the one hand the 'clergy', the guides who know and whose mission is therefore to provide moral leadership and guidance to the others on the basis of the truth they alone possess; on the other the 'laymen', that is to say the mass of those who have not received the beneficial enlightenment of knowledge and have no option but to defer to those who have received it. The former are the spiritual shepherds of humankind,

while the latter must obey unquestioningly. Indeed, what questions could they ask, since by definition they are denied any means of knowing?

In the dark ages, the tyranny of force was compounded by the tyranny of enlightenment, albeit feeble and faltering, yet concentrated solely in the hands of a few classes. Priests, juriconsults, men who had the secret of trading transactions, and even doctors, trained in a small number of schools, were no less the masters of the universe than the armed warriors whose hereditary despotism was itself based on their superiority, before gunpowder was invented, as being the only ones to be trained in the art of wielding weapons.<sup>21</sup>

This ‘clerical’ conception of human relationships to power and, especially, knowledge—a conception of which the attitude of the religious clergy is but one historical manifestation—was countered by the second approach: Condorcet’s idea, shared with Descartes and the tradition of the Enlightenment, that anyone at all who is prepared to make the effort has the ability to comprehend the world sufficiently well to be able to guide himself (or herself) in his private and public life. We must all take our fate into our own hands. Our own critical reasoning must be our only guide, and our own conscience our only spiritual adviser. It is for us to make our own decisions, since we are equipped to do so. As Alain Pons says: ‘Two absolute certainties underlie the “Sketch”: the first is that humans are by nature indefinitely perfectible beings, and the second is that history shows that they have indeed perfected themselves over the centuries, which warrants the belief that they will continue to do so in the future.’<sup>22</sup>

There is a third certainty worth emphasizing. Condorcet believes that all human beings are endowed with sufficient ‘reason’ to progress on the path to knowledge and to guide themselves in life. Little does it matter whether it is what Descartes calls ‘good sense’ or what Rousseau calls ‘conscience’. It is this faculty that constitutes human dignity and makes it possible to think of human beings not as dependent, submissive ‘subjects’ of a monarchy but as independent, responsible ‘citizens’ of a republic.<sup>23</sup>

But if human beings possess the ability to understand in order to be their own guide and be responsible for their own acts, the exercise of such an ability still has to be aroused and its substance nurtured. It is here that Condorcet’s educational position is at its most forceful.

In order to prevent anyone else from taking decisions for me about something that is best left to my own judgement, the first thing to do is to form that judgement. This will be done through instruction. The priority function of the school, therefore, is to give everyone, without any exception whatsoever and not just to a chosen few as before, the basic essential knowledge that will make it possible subsequently to dispense with a ‘clergy’ of any kind. It is not that everyone can become a Newton or that everyone has exactly the same knowledge at his or her disposal, which would be a caricature of equality, but everyone can and must have access to elementary knowledge that will develop the only legitimate *kleros*—his or her own critical reasoning power.

Society thus has another duty—to provide all individuals with the means of acquiring the knowledge of their intelligence and the time they are able to spend on educating themselves put within their reach. The probable result is that the scales will be weighted in favor of those who have more natural talent and those with private means, giving them freedom to spend longer on their studies; but if this kind of inequality does not subject any individual to another, and if it affords support for the weak without imposing a master on them, it is neither an evil nor an injustice; indeed, a love of equality that is afraid of swelling the ranks of the enlightened and adding to their knowledge would be a most sorry thing.<sup>24</sup>

For, as Catherine Kintzler rightly says, ‘it is not the knowledge of the knowledgeable that oppresses the ignorant, it is the ignorance of the ignorant’.<sup>25</sup>

The pedagogical impact of this both humanistic and classical ideal is unequivocal. Condorcet impugns neither the Church, nor the faith, nor religious education; he merely

asserts that there is a common core of instruction—radical in the sense that it is fundamental to the human person—that everyone must be given, not only for political reasons of national unity but, above all, as a simple humanitarian duty. All must receive instruction, all are destined to become free, and there is no freedom possible without instruction.

## Educational institutions as a liberating force

What are the essential institutional features of such instruction? Condorcet sets them out and elaborates on them in a plan that is possibly the most comprehensive and reasoned piece of writing of its kind during the revolutionary period, at a time when there was no dearth of pronouncements on various aspects of education and instruction. This was his *Rapport et projet de décret sur l'organisation générale de l'instruction publique* (Report and Draft Decree on the General Organization of Public Education) (1792).<sup>26</sup>

Drawing a distinction from the outset between 'instruction', which consists in transmitting fundamental moral tools and sciences, and 'education', understood as the inculcation of social and religious beliefs, Condorcet confers full powers on the republic to expand the former and if need be make it compulsory. But whereas instruction must become public, education, for its part, must remain private. Religious worship is not admissible in public instruction, it is true, but this clearly implies that the state must allow individual beliefs absolute freedom in private. The secular ideal is actually a liberating force for the Church.<sup>27</sup> The militant anti-clericalism of his early days was by now a thing of the past, and Condorcet was to take up the cause of Protestants and Jews threatened with prosecution and also of Christians and atheists harassed as 'The Terror' drew nigh.

In his report Condorcet coherently draws the logical consequences from his philosophical theory of the individual and the citizen. Since instruction is the price to be paid for freedom it must be compulsory and free of charge so that it is accessible to all: to the poor as well as to the rich, to the less gifted as well as to the more gifted, to women as well as to men.

Instruction must be universal, in other words it must be extended to include all citizens. It must be shared out as evenly as possible, subject to necessarily limited expenditure, the geographical distribution of the population and the amount of time children can spend on it. At its various levels it must encompass the entire system of human knowledge and make it possible for individuals at any age in life to store up what they have learnt or acquire new knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

What precise measures does the report propose? Let us sum up the main points. Condorcet proposes five levels of public instruction:

- The first level, called 'elementary' because it would be for the teaching of the 'elements' of all knowledge (reading, writing, arithmetic, morals, economics and natural science), would be compulsory for all four years.
- The next would be the secondary school, of three years' duration, teaching grammar, history and geography, one foreign language, the mechanical arts, law and mathematics. It would be 'intended for children whose families can do without their labor for a longer period of time'. The teaching at this and the first level would be non-specialized.
- Then would come institutes, which would be responsible for 'substituting reasoning for eloquence and books for speech, and for bringing philosophy and the physical science methodology into the moral sciences'. The teaching at this level would be more specialized. Pupils would choose their own course of study (at least two courses a year) from among four classes: mathematics and physics, moral and political sciences, science as applied to the arts, and literature and fine arts.

- The fourth level would be the *lycée*, the equivalent of our universities, with the same classes as the institutes and ‘where all the sciences are taught in full. It is there that scholars-teachers receive their further training’. Education at this and the first three levels was to be entirely free of charge.
- The last level would consist of the National Society of Science and the Arts, a research institute responsible for supervising the formal education system as a whole and for appointing teachers. Its role would be one of scientific and pedagogical research.<sup>29</sup>

The basic idea underlying this report is that although knowledge does confer power such power cannot become absolute without exposure to risk. Although not everyone can know everything, at least each person can be sufficiently educated not to be taken in by others. Condorcet’s secular ideal comes down to this:

Education, however egalitarian, is bound to increase the superiority of those who by nature are better organized. But equality of rights will be preserved if this superiority does not entail any real dependence and if each individual is sufficiently educated to exercise, of her or his own accord and without having to submit blindly to another’s judgement, the rights guaranteed to her or him by law. The superiority of a few, far from being a bad thing for those who have not been so well-favored, will thus contribute to the good of everyone, and human skills and knowledge will become the common heritage of society.<sup>30</sup>

It is for the state to transmit the knowledge that is vital to everyone; as for the rest, individual freedom is equally necessary to the scholar and to the ordinary citizen. It is that freedom that conditions the progress of science, understood, as we have seen, as the ‘ever-perfectible human mind’.<sup>31</sup>

One last word on the fate of this report, which foreshadowed Condorcet’s own fate. His plan, regarded as unadventurous and over-liberal, fell into oblivion as soon as it had been submitted to the National Assembly on behalf of the Public Instruction Committee on 20 and 21 April 1792. As for Condorcet, who received warning that the house of the devoted Madame Vernet was about to be searched, he left his hiding-place and made his way to Fontenay-aux-Roses, where his friend Suard declined to take him in as he had hoped. He was arrested at an inn in Clamart and gave his identity as Pierre Simon, no doubt to avoid trouble for his relatives. On the day after his imprisonment (28 March 1794) the prison warden found him dead. Suicide? Exhaustion? Murder? He was subsequently identified only by his silver watch and his copy of Horace, which never left his side. His final resting-place is unknown.

And yet tribute was paid to him by Marie-Joseph Chénier through the important decree of 18 December 1794: ‘Primary studies constitute the first level of education: they will provide instruction in the knowledge strictly necessary to all citizens. The persons responsible for teaching in such schools are called *instituteurs*.’<sup>32</sup> Thus the republic rendered homage to the ‘last of the philosophers, without whom it would never have existed.’<sup>33</sup>

#### Notes

1. Bernard Jolibert (*France*). Lecturer on the educational sciences and the history of educational thought at the Université de la Réunion. Author of: *L’enfance au XVIIe siècle* [Childhood in the Seventeenth Century]; *Raison et éducation: L’idée de raison dans l’histoire de la pensée éducative* [Reason and Education: the Concept of Reason in the History of Educational Thought]; and *L’éducation contemporaine* [Modern Education]. Founder of the ‘Philosophy of Education’ series (Paris, Klincksieck). He has translated and published St. Augustine’s *De Magistro*, as well as Comenius’ *The Great Didactic* and Erasmus’ *De Pueris*.
2. See in this connection the review *L’enseignement philosophique devoted to ‘L’idée de République’*. (Paris), Vol. 39, No. 3, January–February 1989.
3. E. and R. Badinter, *Condorcet, un intellectuel en politique*, Paris, Fayard, 1988.
4. These five memoirs were published by Edilig and edited by C. Coutel and C. Kintzler (1989). The first memoir, the most general and most philosophical of them, was published by Klincksieck (1989) in Paris.

5. In *L'instruction publique en France pendant la Révolution*, p. 105–51, Paris, Klincksieck, 1990.
6. Condorcet, *Réflexions et notes sur l'éducation*, p. 106 et seq., Naples, Bibliopolis, 1983.
7. B. Charlot, *La mystification pédagogique*, Paris, Payot, 1980.
8. Condorcet, *Réflexions et notes sur l'éducation*, from Condorcet's papers kept in the Library of the Institut de France in Paris (MS-848;885), Naples, Bibliopolis, 1983.
9. Condorcet, *Œuvres*, Vol. V, p. 393–573, Paris, Arago.
10. Condorcet, 'Rapport et projet de décret sur l'organisation générale de l'instruction publique', *L'instruction publique en France pendant la Révolution*, p. 105–51, Paris, Klincksieck.
11. J. C. Milner, *De l'école*, Paris, Seuil, 1984.
12. C. Kintzler, *Condorcet, l'instruction publique et la naissance du citoyen*, Paris, SFIED, 1984.
13. *Analyses et réflexions sur Condorcet*, Paris, Ellipses, 1989. See also C. Coutel, 'Laïcité de Condorcet', *L'enseignement philosophique*, July–August 1989.
14. Condorcet, 'Rapport et projet de décret . . .', op. cit., p. 119, note 1.
15. Condorcet, *Premier mémoire sur l'instruction publique*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1989.
16. E. and R. Badinter, op. cit.
17. Condorcet, *Premier mémoire sur l'instruction publique*, op. cit., p. 47.
18. 'Condorcet', in R. Darnton, *La \_n des Lumières*, p. 199 et seq., Paris, Perrin, 1984.
19. Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, transl. J. Barraclough, New York, Noonday, 1955.
20. 'Condorcet', *Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction publique*, p. 347, Paris, Hachette, 1911.
21. Condorcet, *Premier mémoire sur l'instruction publique*, op. cit., p. 38.
22. Introduction to Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, op. cit.
23. See also A. Koyré, 'Condorcet', *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique*, p. 103–26, Paris, Gallimard, 1971.
24. Condorcet, *Premier mémoire sur l'instruction publique*, op. cit., p. 39.
25. C. Kintzler, 'Condorcet Savoirs, liberté, lois', *L'enseignement philosophique* (Paris), Vol. 38, No. 1, September–October 1987, special issue on the Enlightenment.
26. *L'instruction publique en France pendant la Révolution*, op. cit.
27. E. Borne points out that this ideal stems partly from the actual Gospel render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. *L'enseignement philosophique* (Paris), Vol. 39, No. 3, January–February 1989, p. 61 et seq.
28. Condorcet, *Rapport et projet de décret . . .*, op. cit., p. 107.
29. See the interesting comparison between Talleyrand's and Condorcet's drafts, in *Cahiers de Fontenay*, No. 5, December 1976. Catherine Fricheau's article was taken up by M. Crampe-Casnabet in *Condorcet, lecteur des Lumières*, p. 128, Paris, PUF, 1985.
30. Condorcet, *Premier mémoire sur l'instruction publique*, op. cit., p. 37.
31. Condorcet, Fragment sur l'Atlantide, p. 320, Paris, Flammarion, 1988.
32. *L'instruction publique en France pendant la Révolution*, op. cit., p. 10.
33. J. Michelet, *Les femmes de la Révolution*, Paris, 1854, quoted by E. and R. Badinter, op. cit., p. 621. Paris, Fayard, 1988.