

# Influence of the enlightenment

[History](#)



The "Century of Light," otherwise known as the Enlightenment brought forth a strong emphasis on Reason and Knowledge. One product of the Enlightenment is the ideas and thoughts of Condorcet. Condorcet's Sketch for a Historical Picture of The Progress of the Human Mind is brought on by his strong belief in the Perfectibility of Humanity. In rational order there are certain principals and laws that the cosmos works under, in rational order there is no change. But Condorcet says that change is progress, and through progress, Humanity can be improved. According to Condorcet, the perfection of Mankind is attainable and for that reason he is impelled to reach it.

According to Condorcet and the beliefs of the Enlightenment, Reason, is innate in everyone. It is just a matter of using Education to bring it out to consciousness. Condorcet firmly believes that with proper education, a man can "judge his own and other men's actions according to his own lights". (The Tenth Stage, Pg. 182) With reason, a man will also be able to recognize his rights and the power he has with them. He wants that a man will "not be in a state of blind dependence" (The Tenth Stage, Pg. 182).

But one must keep in mind that it is not the goal of education to create a smart-aleck so to speak, but a human being that is capable of Autonomy. And even then, not Autonomy of thought but rather Autonomy of Judgment: "How one should act". When a man reaches this state, he is enlightened. He is then a responsible and respectable citizen of society and thus, perfect. To Condorcet, it is simply a matter of proper education that is necessary for such outcomes.

Equality is another ideal that Condorcet mentions. Believing in the improvement of society, he questions the beginning of prejudices and divisions within the society, "are these part of civilization itself, or are they due to the present imperfections of the social art?" (The Tenth Stage, Pg. 174) Condorcet believes that we can progress beyond these imperfections and not only have equality among men, but extend this equality with, "the complete annihilation... between the sexes" (The Tenth Stage, Pg. 193). According to Condorcet, we must reach for equality until mankind is able "to understand his rights and to exercise them in accordance with his conscience and his creed" (The Tenth Stage, Pg. 174). With this equality Condorcet foresees a society in which pain and misery will not be the norm, but rather the exception to humanity.

But to be enlightened is not the sole goal of Europe, for how can a perfect society be reached if so many others are still struggling to find the "light"? This is why Condorcet tells us in his publication, that it is the job of those that are enlightened to shed light to the others. Foreign countries are referred to as "obstacles [impeding] this revolution" (the Tenth Stage, Pg. 175). Therefore, the final step in reaching perfection would be to colonize and educate the 'savages' so that Perfection of Mankind may be finally reached.

Colonization is imperative in the eyes of Condorcet, but not for any personal or financial gain. Because the Europeans have 'found the light' it seems irrelevant for the other countries of the world to go through trial and error to reach this same level of enlightenment. Instead, colonization should take place and the 'savages' should be transformed from the 'conquered' into

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those in 'tutelage'. In this way, the perfection of Humanity is speeded forward towards completion.