

**PROPHECYING GLOBAL JUSTICE:  
THINKERS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION ON UNIVERSAL  
PROGRESS**

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**Abstract:** The following paper presents two different models of a just world order that take the French Revolution as their starting point: Condorcet's optimistic account of the bright but unilateral future course of history and the social model of Auguste Comte intended to unite the world's varying value systems. These two opposed approaches will be considered from the point of view of the actual debate on whether Western values should be predominant in the age of globalization. This debate is therefore linked to the questions whether different value systems should be treated equally or whether a particular one can be seen as superior to others, and thus no longer to be termed as a value system, but as a universal norm.

**Keywords:** Comte, Condorcet, universalism, values, humanity, progress, globalization

## **1. Introduction**

One of the major criticisms of globalization is that it may not only lead to an environmental catastrophe or toward a feudalization of the relationship between rich and poor countries, but that it also leads to a monolithic consumerist culture and behaviour: in an increasing number of cultures, people tend to buy the same products and to adopt the same 'Western' way of life. There may be some resistance to it, and variety still to be found, but this general trend is the prevailing one. Such concerns manifest themselves in a growing scepticism on whether this one-sided process of civilization can be seen as a genuine and legitimate universal program. What, some ask, prevents it from being rather seen as a particular culture and value system that imposes self upon other – and just as legitimate – cultures? Put in other words: What reasons, if any, can there be for any value system to be qualified as universal?

In recent years, Westerners have taken a more critical stance to what could be termed as cultural imperialism, i.e. on the issue what makes it right to impose a

particular set of values upon a culture with another value set. Even in cases where this would imply liberating large parts of the world from illiberal value systems, this attitude seems to gain ground. If taken seriously, this view clearly creates a problem for certain theories of international justice, e.g. liberal cosmopolitanism: When Rawlsians such as Thomas Pogge (1989) argue that the Original Position should be seen as a universal one, in which its participants agree on universal Principles of Justice, analogous to the ones John Rawls suggested made the cornerstone of a just society, they may be accused of imposing a typically Western conception of the political subject upon individuals who do not consider the right to political participation to be equal. Among such critics one can find Rawls himself.

It is my intention to examine two different approaches at solving this problem. What makes them unusual is their age: Both are responses to the French Revolution, political agendas based on philosophical conclusions their authors draw from this key event in furthering liberal principles on a global scale. What I hope to achieve by enunciating these projects is, first of all, to bring attention to a philosophical problematic that has been neglected within the field of global ethics. As it turns out, prior to 20<sup>th</sup>-century work within this field, there were not only solitary philosophers trying to formulate contracts in order to put an end to wars between states. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, various thinkers in France looked for the meaning of the French Revolution of 1789 as an event of universal importance and what it would imply to export it as a political and philosophical program to other nations, if not to the whole of mankind (Chabert 1994, Manuel 1962). What I find surprising, considering only two of these authors, is how diverse their programs are and, last but not least, how related they are to the questions we are nowadays brutally confronted with.

## 2. Comte's religion of humanity

### 2.1. *The problem of modernity*

In his last works, Auguste Comte (1798–1857) presents us with a universal value system with the aim of putting an end to the turmoil of modern age. It strikes the modern reader as an idea of utmost actuality when Comte writes in 1852: “The Orient and the Occident [i.e. the two largest monotheistic religions, Islam and Christianity] have to look for the systematic foundations of their intellectual and moral communion outside of any theology or metaphysics. ... For so many centuries [they] have been waiting for the universal religion to emerge” (Comte 1852:7). Comte's approach is thus to find a common denominator to both religions in a single religion which has, however, the role of transcending their retrograde and unscientific character and to step forward as a universal value system fit for the post-theological and post-metaphysical age of modernity. But what is the exact problem Comte intends to solve in this way?

The fundamental problem, as Comte analysed it, was the spiritual, theoretical and moral anarchy of the modern age, which had supposedly started in the late

Middle Ages and kept on growing ever since. In his eyes, the Middle Ages had been a long period of harmony, where everyone knew his position in society, and sincerely devoted himself to it: Feudal lords cared for their subjects who submissively worked for them with gratitude. All the milestones of Enlightenment had since then cleared the path for individualism and egalitarianism, e.g. the Reformation, which consisted in breaking down all authority in religious matters and declaring everyone fit for interpreting religious texts. But if all hierarchy was destroyed, there was but one principle left, i.e. the supremacy or tyranny of the number or what we call a democratic election. This had, of course, to be detrimental in various fields: There is e.g. no freedom of conscience in natural sciences, their principles are simply true or false and not a matter of popularity. The same would go for the principles of political science, Comte thought. Even though the old pre-revolutionary ones had fallen, it did not mean that politics were to be anarchical, but simply that the new principles had not yet been put forward. Thus, when these principles would have been discovered (i.e. by Comte himself) a specialized group should be entrusted with the rule of society.

The whole disintegrating process of modernity should of course be seen as a historical necessity, but its effects on Western culture had simply been too extreme; it had gone too far for the fibres of society not to tear in near future. Comte's project was to find a way in order to let industrial society be pervaded by a medieval sense of harmony, free of theoretical conflicts, moral disorientation and social upheavals, and then to encourage the whole world to adopt this model of society. But how was that supposed to work out?

## 2.2. *The four revolutions*

In the prologue to his *Catéchisme positiviste ou Sommaire exposition de la religion universelle* (*Positivist Catechism or a Summary Exposition of the Universal Religion*) Comte present his interpretation of the French Revolution and its aftermath. When the "occidental Revolution" (Comte 1852:30) would finally be completed it would have consisted of a series of four different revolutions, starting with a philosophical one "against the theological and military regime" of the monarchy, linked with the names of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Hume and Condorcet. Building its case on this new world-view, the bourgeoisie claimed more power for itself, thereby aspiring to replace the aristocracy. Yet, this second revolution would not be successful without the support of the proletariat, which was asking, just as well, for more power to itself (third revolution). "However, this sequence of revolutions would not yet embrace the most fundamental element of the real human system of government. Now, the feminine revolution has to complete the proletarian revolution, just as the latter consolidated the bourgeois revolution, which emanated to begin with from the philosophical revolution" (Comte 1852:28–29). We will simply keep on oscillating between regression and anarchy without this fourth kind of revolution taking place.

Women, Comte claims, have an instinctive disdain of modernity as it has been developing, with reason now running amok. Reason simply is not the only aspect

of what characterizes human beings. Mankind is made up of *active* beings as well, but that element is already represented in the working classes which ensure the material backbone of society. The ‘fundamental element’ that now has to guide both action and reason and keep the ‘Occidental order’ from destroying itself, is *sentiment*, which is to be found in its purest form in a woman’s heart (Comte 1852:23). Lacking the sum of these elements, the French Revolution of 1789 proved itself incapable of constructing a new world. This ultimate revolution would be a peaceful one, in which women, with their instinctive moral sentiment, would finally be able to influence men and guide them. The ideal balance between female sentiment and masculine reason would be analogous for the mind as health is for the body, and to this balance Comte gives the name ‘religion’, even though it can just as well be explained as the ideal and definitive value system for the whole of mankind. For as there can only be one health, Comte claims, there can be only one true ‘religion’ in this sense.

The Religion of Humanity was to develop all three main aspects of human existence to their height and combine them harmoniously in every human being: Truth, Beauty and Goodness; Reasoning, Activity and Sentiment; Philosophy, Poetry and Politics – no fundamental aspect of prior religions being left out. This religion has been described as Catholicism without Christianity since Comte designed various rites and formulas for it such as the Trinity of Love, Order and Progress: “Love as Principle, Order as Foundation and Progress as End” (Comte 1852:5 8). Yet, it is a fundamentally atheistic religion. It reveres a so-called Supreme Being which turns out to be the sum of the best sons of mankind, such as Mozart, Charlemagne and Milton who have weeks and days of the new positivist calendar named after themselves. Consequently, if we happen to serve mankind well enough in this life, our afterlife will then consist in having our names added to the list out of which the Supreme Being, the only legitimate object of reverence, is made.

It was this general sense of *submission* to superiors that was to be all-pervasive in society and thus to save mankind from anarchy in all fields. By discovering how much they owe to countless persons, dead or alive, people would come to understand that they have infinite obligations and will therefore make altruism the principle of most of their acts. An end would thus be put to the modern fashion of demanding individual rights to diverse things, which included, among other things, putting an end to the right to privacy. Rights were a transitory phenomenon, a remnant of the now obsolete divine rights, forming “an immobile system, incompatible with the notion of a continuous development” and for which there is therefore no place within the positivist worldview (Comte 1852:147).

By making obligations the core concept of his value system instead of rights, Comte reveals the true nature of the revolution he proclaims. From a contemporary liberal and rights-based perspective, the accomplishment of each revolution turns out to be its suppression: It will be the function of the priests of the new religion to remind their parishes of moral truths such as our infinite obligations to others (accomplishment of the first revolution). The unruly bourgeois middle classes will have to be dissolved and their anarchic claims for democratic elections dismissed

(second revolution). Society will thus consist of patricians and the proletariat, in a ratio of 33 proletarians to every patrician. The outcome of the proletarian revolution will not be an egalitarian society, but a hierarchical one, where patricians care for the lower classes like loving parents for their children. They will therefore grant proletarians a subsidy for them and their families to live decently. And here again, the priests of Humanity will have to encourage them to do so and to put off the egoism that characterizes the higher classes nowadays (third revolution). As for the fourth or 'the feminine revolution', it will of course take place at home, where women can concentrate on their holy mission of saving men from their inherent corruption, without being burdened by work, being the head of family, and free from any degrading participation in public life, such as politics.

### *2.3. A model for the whole world*

What kind of world order was there supposed to follow from these changes taking place? For positivist societies to function properly, Comte estimated that they should count no more than 3 million inhabitants. This means that Ireland and Portugal would constitute the biggest countries in Europe; larger ones would naturally and peacefully disintegrate into smaller entities. "The great Occidental republic would be composed out of 60 independent republics," each of which would be led by secular, patrician rulers, and "have nothing in common but their spiritual government" (Comte 1852:323). Comte thus prophesizes a Europe unified by religious, and not a political bond and consisting of countries united by a common educational system, common habits or morals and the same festivities, in short, by a homogenous value system.

As far-flung as this vision may sound, it was apparently not intended to be of a chimerical utopian world where conflicts had evaporated from the face of the earth. However, the only conflicts that could still take place "should be based on wealth, but never on personal violence" (Comte 1852:318) and since armies had all been replaced by policemen, wars now belonged to the past. The only political unions allowed would be temporary 'triumvirates', that should never include all countries at the same time. All practical institutions, such as common measures and the currency would be in charge of the priesthood. Their pontiff, the Great Priest of Humanity, would be in the position to keep all secular powers under control, holding back tyrannical triumvirates and solving disputes on the labour market, since he would always be supported by the moral majority of mankind.

This vision of a positivist utopia Comte thought to be able to export to the rest of the world. It did not matter how developed peoples' religion was, whether they were still fetishists, polytheists or already monotheists, none of them would have to follow the thorny path the West had travelled in order to discover the one true religion. The package was already there, waiting only to be exported and implemented in every state.

It needs no long argumentation, I hope, to come to the conclusion that the remedy Comte invented was worse than the disease he had diagnosed. Nevertheless, his idea of a completely artificial, secular value system deserves some

attention, for few normative conceptions of the world have been put forward that go as far in asserting the fundamental role of values in organizing society. Where does his social model lead astray then? Nothing indicates that it is by relying on other aspects of the human personality than its reason or egoistic interests alone that it turns out to be an unacceptable solution. It is, however, by claiming these egoistic interests as illegitimate that Comte makes himself nowadays unwelcome or useless in discussions on what makes society or international relations just.

But does this make his conception of some fundamental values shared by Christianity and Islam false? I have no idea of how to identify, number or classify the values that are surely common to them as well as to other religions. If it can be claimed that Comte makes benevolence (or Love) and obedience the two core values of his Religion of Humanity and of the society that is to emanate from it, can one not just as well maintain that no proper value systems can do without them? The fundamental values on which Comte builds his system are simply too few. This renders his world-view unacceptable to liberals because it does not rely on other fundamental values as well, such as the basic rights of individuals.

In fact, many liberals do not tend to view such basic individual rights only as “the systematic foundations of [the] intellectual and moral communion” of “the Orient and the Occident” (as previously cited) for they would then only be seen as cultural artefacts. To view human rights as a specifically Christian legacy, as is not uncommon in political discourse nowadays, therefore degrades them to a specific folklore which only a limited number of people happens to consider as their cultural and religious heritage. In order to have universal validity, these rights inevitably have to be based on less disputable foundations.

### 3. Condorcet and the indefinite progress of the human mind

#### 3.1. What is progress?

Even though Comte had seen the French Revolution as a necessary event for the advent of modern times, his whole philosophical system was meant to prevent anything resembling the political chaos unleashed in 1789. The marquis of Condorcet (1743–1794) was a direct victim of the revolutionary terror under Robespierre, nevertheless his faith in its role for the whole of mankind went undiminished. In his last work, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (A Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind, 1795) he writes: “The principles of the French Constitution are accepted already by every enlightened person. [They are] now too widespread and too firmly professed for the efforts of tyrants and priests to prevent their gradually penetrating the huts of the enslaved” (Condorcet 1970:205).<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, these principles will either be adopted in accordance with a peaceful, political decision or have to be imposed against governments that resist them through

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<sup>1</sup> This English translation made by Keith Michael Baker used to be available under [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3671/is\\_200407/ai\\_n9432600](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3671/is_200407/ai_n9432600).

violent means.<sup>2</sup> But why does Condorcet show this violent radicalism and utter lack of tolerance towards illiberal societies?

Just as Comte would later insist on the unequivocal nature of knowledge and ‘religion’, Condorcet belonged to the 18<sup>th</sup> century sensualist movement that claimed all true knowledge to have its roots in sensations and ideas corresponding to them.<sup>3</sup> It was nothing but a natural process for man to be increasingly able to connect more effectively the ideas he had of his sensations in order to develop his knowledge of nature. Even though it is just as normal for errors to occur in this cognitive process as for real knowledge to be accumulated, progress could be termed the natural state of man, whether it manifested itself in the accumulation of knowledge or in man’s growing capacity to put order into his ideas and derive from them rules of behaviour. In the end, every erroneous conception of reality, such as false ideas of causal processes, would have to retreat for the conception which had proven to be right.

Once it is put into a social context, this descriptive theory becomes a normative one, for interests that rely on false ideas of reality have to be fought against, as there can be no higher interest than the indefinite progress of the human mind. While reading Condorcet’s *Esquisse* one might easily interpret him as claiming every evil which has befallen mankind to be due to various conspiracies of priests. While it remains true that his *Esquisse* is full of spite against that caste, the problem he analyzes in this context is, however, a more fundamental one. It concerns the monopoly on knowledge and, thus, on the ability to exercise one’s reason and develop one’s own moral capacities instead of depending on an external intellectual and moral authority.

In the first societies, Condorcet argues, some people were entrusted with the power to predict who probably themselves believed in their own explanations (or were “dupes of their own errors”). It was not due to some inherent corruption of human nature but in order to defend their interests, i.e. their superior position within society, that they “stopped teaching what they thought to be true, but what was useful to them” (Condorcet 1970:41).

As a general rule, monopoly on knowledge has negative effects, whereas its democratic spread has positive consequences. The difference in access need not be essentially bad or good: By some cunning of history, Condorcet maintains, the

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<sup>2</sup> The whole passage goes as follows: “In considering different nations, we shall see in each one the particular obstacles opposing this revolution or the conditions favoring it. We shall identify those nations in which it will be brought about peacefully by the perhaps belated wisdom of their governments, and those in which it will be rendered more violent by the resistance of governments that will inevitably be swept up in its terrible and rapid upheavals” (Condorcet 1970:206).

<sup>3</sup> Strange as it may seem, Comte never tired of proclaiming Condorcet as his main inspiration and predecessor. Like him, Condorcet “aimed out of necessity at a total and direct reorganization,” but unfortunately, he says, his tradition was too incomplete and unknown, compared to destructive thinkers at the same time, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, to be able to achieve anything in his lifetime. Both considered themselves to be post-metaphysical and secular philosophers, and their philosophical views to be scientific in one sense or another. They also shared some less fundamental ideas, such as a fierce anti-colonialism (Pickering 1993).

religious fanatics known under the term of ‘crusaders’ discovered the fact that religion neither inspires virtue nor vices; they learned only to despise religious fanaticism of every colour. Nevertheless, for Truth to prevail in its struggle with Error, society now had to be desacralised and clerical institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church to be abolished. For Condorcet, there is only one intellectual program that should be applied all over the world: the Enlightenment that originally took place in Europe, starting with Gutenberg’s printing technique, Luther’s privatisation of religion, Francis Bacon’s scientific methods, Galilei’s mathematical method and Descartes’ philosophy which rejects any kind of external authority in all domains of human understanding. The next stage would then consist in formulating a universal sign language for “distinct and clear ideas,” understandable to everyone, thus preventing any further monopoly on scientific knowledge.

### 3.2. *Why progress should be universal*

It still has to be answered, why Condorcet puts so much stress on general access to knowledge that he considers wars with this objective to be legitimate. The reason he delivers in the tenth and last chapter of his *Esquisse* where he makes the following statement: “In reviewing the history of societies, one of the principal causes of the destruction of liberty is a great gap between the rights the law *recognizes* as belonging to citizens and the rights they *actually* enjoy, between the equality established by political institutions and that existing among individuals.” In other words, history simply shows that inequality between different groups within society leads to oppression. This does not only apply to material inequality or to legal discrimination, but also to the ‘inequality of instruction’ or of access to knowledge.

There is no need for equality to be absolute, for inequality has “*natural and necessary causes* which it would be *absurd and dangerous to try to destroy*; and one could not even attempt to eliminate their *effects* without opening up more potent sources of inequality and committing more direct and disastrous violations of human rights” (Condorcet 1970:211). However, equality should be aimed at, as long as it does not have such undesired effects.

Condorcet mentions various measures that could be taken to reduce economic inequality which primarily aim at establishing a welfare system and giving the incentive necessary for new entrepreneurs to come forth, thus “making industrial progress and commercial activity less dependent on the existence of great capitalists” (Condorcet 1970:214). Besides neutralizing all social differentiations based on class language, Condorcet believes that through an equal right to instruction, it would be possible to teach in only a few years all pupils to make use of their reason. This course would enable them i.e.

... to know, defend, and exercise one's rights; to learn one's duties, in order to fulfil them well; to judge one's actions and those of others according to one's own lights and be denied none of the higher and more refined sentiments that honor human nature; to avoid blind dependence on those to whom one is



*obliged to entrust one's affairs or the exercise of one's rights, and to have the capacity to choose them and supervise them; to be no longer the dupe of those popular errors that torment one's life with superstitious fears and chimerical hopes; to defend oneself from prejudices by the force of reason alone; and finally, to escape the seductions of charlatanism that would ensnare one's wealth, health, and freedom of opinion and conscience, under the pretext of promising enrichment, healing, or salvation* (Condorcet 1970:214).

Next to this historical argument, the whole argumentation rests upon another controversial assumption: Through empirical research from a utilitarian perspective “we will know precisely the extent of the individual's rights, and of the rights the social state gives to all in relation to each” (Condorcet 1970:223). As in the case of universal language, Condorcet may be criticized for having a naïve faith in scientific progress. However, he has been proven right in his optimism that e.g. increased education has “accelerate[d] the progress of those sciences in which advances depend on observations repeated in greater number and extended over a larger area” such as “mineralogy, botany, zoology, and meteorology” (Condorcet 1970:220).

On other issues, Condorcet is very much in line with modern ideas: Following diminished inequality, it should become more evident that the inequality of the sexes, e.g. regarding the right to education, rested on a unjustifiable prejudices, having the ‘abuse of force’ as its sole origin. The sociological causes for crime, such as ‘legislation, institutions, and prejudices’ will become evident as well, pointing towards a new, optimistic conception of man, whose ‘betterment’ (Fr. *perfectibilité*) proves itself to be ‘indefinite’: From the physical point of view, we do not know how long he can live and what diseases plaguing him can be cured. Empirical research will just as well have to show how much (if at all) instruction can improve his ‘intellectual and moral faculties’, since no concluding truths on man’s nature had been reached so far.

### 3.3. Global justice

The future of mankind is thus an open one, with no clear and final model of a global order to be striven for. Yet, Condorcet gives some hints of how he wants international relations to develop. It seems that he thought that by giving boys and girls the same education, people would grow milder personalities than their ancestors used to have, and be free from pride, hypocrisy and religious terror. As a consequence, this would then lead to a major shift in international politics: “The most enlightened peoples ... will gradually learn to see war as the deadliest scourge and the greatest of crimes. ... the moment is surely approaching when we shall stop appearing to [people of another colour] only as corruptors and tyrants and become their useful instruments or generous liberators” (Condorcet 1970:206).

European colonialism in Africa and Asia was “initially inspired by the superiority of our knowledge and the benefits of our commerce.” Thus, it was inequality of knowledge between different peoples that was to blame for “our commercial monopolies, our betrayals, our bloodthirsty contempt for people of another colour or creed, the insolence of our usurpations, and the extravagant

proselytizing or the intrigues of our priests destroying the sentiment of respect and goodwill.” If it is plausible enough that the “principles of the French Constitution” have the European Enlightenment as their source and that enlightened nations make better use of their reason than other nations, then it is reasonable to infer that enlightened persons have the moral duty to allow everyone to have their share of Enlightenment, instead of using it to their own advantage.<sup>4</sup> Thus, when the moment arrives in which Europeans put an end to their colonial ambitions, they will be “too enlightened regarding their own rights to disregard those of other peoples.”

How is one to understand this expression? On an individual level, Europeans would still have an important role to play in their old colonies from which both sides would profit: By replacing the government favourites who enriched themselves there, “industrious persons travelling to these beneficent climates in search of the prosperity that has eluded them in their own country [will spread] to Africa and Asia the principles and practices of European liberty, knowledge, and reason.” As a consequence of this developmental aid, religious missions will consequently fade away for “individuals disseminating among these nations the truths useful to their happiness and enlightening them as to their interests and their rights” (Condorcet 1970:207–208).

Regarding how European states are to behave in accordance with the tenets of Enlightenment, Condorcet apparently proposes free trade between nations as equal business partners; European states should “respect the independence [of the peoples] they have hitherto violated so arrogantly.” He also advocates for some specific economic measures to be taken, “dictated in equal measure by philanthropy and European interests properly understood”: Monopoly rights that ‘exclusive trading companies’ possess should universally be abolished and by establishing sugar cultivation in Africa, an end would be put to the shameful trade of slavery to America.

How is one then to understand Condorcet’s permissive stance on the use of violence in order to liberate states from their illiberal policy? Does he not proclaim the end of all wars and even go as far as to claim that “peoples will know that they cannot become conquerors without losing their own liberty; that permanent confederations are the sole means of maintaining their independence; that they must seek security, not power”? If radical pacifism has a meaning, are these statements not typical of it? Indeed, they are, but they are put forward as arguments for reducing inequality on a global scale and for describing how the world would look like once that objective had been reached. Even though Condorcet warns against strict equality within society, the first of “our hopes for the future condition of the human species” he names is “the destruction of inequality among nations” (Condorcet 1970:204). (The other two points have already been mentioned here: “the progress of equality within each people and the real betterment of human-

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<sup>4</sup> Just as Comte’s Religion of Humanity, the discoveries of Enlightenment have already been made. This also applies to ideas: with the adequate instruction, savages should be able to learn about laicism. It goes without saying, that such a course would do them more good than harm.

kind.”) As far as material equality among peoples is concerned, his only remark is that “each finds that its own advantage consists in offering foreigners a more equal share of the goods it owes to nature and its industry.”<sup>5</sup>

From the whole argumentation it should however be clear that nothing justifies an unequal distribution of instruction in liberal principles and the social benefits resulting from them. “There are nations under the yoke of sacred despots ... who have been crying out for liberators for so many centuries [and] who seem to be waiting only to receive from us the means to become civilized, only to find brothers among Europeans and to become their friends and disciples.” We had already encountered one of the two main arguments for using violence as a means for spreading the principle of democratic access to knowledge against the will of any local authority, e.g. religious: a major discrepancy in the state of knowledge gives more power to the more knowledgeable party, which leads to the other’s oppression; sometimes, violence is a necessary means to put an end to such a state and preferable to its continuation. Here we find another argument: that violence is exactly what people living in illiberal societies want and are waiting for when nothing else can change the situation they live in. The important question which Condorcet seems to leave unanswered is whether Europeans should respect the independence of only those peoples who have adopted liberal principles or other ones as well.

Condorcet can be rightly accused of imagining such transitions as being far too simple. Against the common critique that there are many people in the world who do not share his admiration for the tradition of European Enlightenment his only claim was that “the great religions of the East” had now fallen into discredit and were seen by the population there “as mere political inventions”. Of course, this argument is quite cheap. However, if the problem in question is whether Condorcet is guilty of propagating cultural imperialism, the answer depends on how tolerant he would be to peoples who learn about liberalism, but decide to stick to their traditional illiberal traditions. If he then respects their independence, he cannot be accused of such kind of imperialism. On the contrary, if an enlightened liberal decides not to teach such a people liberal principles but is in a position to do so, e.g. because she sees these principles only as a particular value system that has no redeeming effects on people’s lives or their position in the world, is she then any less guilty of cultural imperialism, by judging this people not to have any right to make an informed decision on whether to become liberal or not?

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<sup>5</sup> Even though the expression ‘more equal’ does not imply strict equality, I take this to mean that, in accordance with liberal cosmopolitanism, Condorcet suggests that in an international Original Position, i.e. with individuals representing different peoples in order to represent their general interests as peoples, all or most participants would agree on principles of distributive justice, since there would be no hope of lasting peace without such an agreement. However, this is about all Condorcet has to say on this issue except from claiming that “institutions better devised than the projects for perpetual peace that have occupied the leisure and consoled the spirit of some philosophers will accelerate the progress of this brotherhood among nations” (Condorcet 1970: 229–30).

#### 4. Conclusion

To counter liberal cosmopolitanism (such as Pogge's idea of a universal Original Position), Rawls formulated a type of society that deserved respect from liberals despite being not liberal itself. Such societies count as decent and acceptable to liberal peoples if they meet basic qualifications such as respecting human rights, recognizing their subjects as "rational and having a capacity for moral learning" and involving them into political decisions. Being hierarchical societies, however, subjects are divided into different groups instead of counting as equal citizens. These groups can even be in an unequal position within the system of political decision-making, but as long as they are systematically consulted, their criticism conscientiously responded to, every citizen is represented by some group, none of these groups has to suffer from persecutions and women have the same rights as men – "where is the problem?" Rawls (2001:76–78) asks. When such societies are tolerant and respectful of other kinds of societies and follow a pacifist foreign policy, why then try to convert them to the liberal model? There is, according to Rawls, nothing liberal about showing them intolerance, and if the liberal model of society is so much more superior to other models, let this model simply prove itself, and it will then gain more followers.

From what we have read, Comte would think it necessary to look for common elements between liberal and hierarchical societies and in the process leave only room for hierarchical governments. It is more than doubtful whether his vision of society meets Rawls' criteria for counting as decent since human rights are considered as obsolete talk and the High Priest of Humanity need not consult every social group before making his political decisions.

Probably, the reason why Condorcet did not think of the possibility that people might reject the tenets of the liberal revolution was quite simple: The only circumstances under which a decent hierarchical people might be able to take an informed decision on whether to keep its political structure and culture intact or adopt a new one, would have to allow this decision to be made in accordance with its subjects' reason and interests. That, however, would already entail that they had accepted the principles of liberalism and made them their own. Whatever their outcome, for Condorcet, decisions have to be based on a system of basic and equal individual rights to count as legitimate.

Going back to the original question, whether the cultural aspect of globalization, i.e. the export of supposedly Western values to other parts of the world, can be justified at all, we now seem to be able to deduce from Condorcet a criterion for answering it: Ideally, people should, in one way or another, be able to choose to adopt or reject such values themselves. On the one hand, their choice would have to be an informed and rational one and, on the other hand, the political system used for taking such a decision would have to rest on the respect for every subject's equal basic rights. This right would thus entail the power to transcend the values already ascribed to a people in order to be able to adopt new ones. I leave the fundamental question unanswered – what are the best means for presenting

such a right to people politically or culturally lacking it. What can however be answered is that, contrary to Rawls' claim, a decent hierarchical society would have a major problem if its own subjects, granted this right, would then contest its political structure. As for the question whether such a right is mainly a Western one, this may historically be true, but I cannot rule out that it could be used against a Western political system, e.g. if it develops in the direction of Comte's industrial Middle Ages. But, surely, if globalization has any merits, such a right would be one of them.

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