

Voltaire Background

Enlightenment in Europe

1650-1800 (ish)--though it didn't hit France until mid-eighteenth century

Major Highlights:

1. Shift toward scientific reason
2. Shared disgust at feudalistic society
3. Emphasis on exploration (the New World)
4. Push toward logic as a means of understanding the universe

For more information, check out this Sparknotes page: <http://www.sparknotes.com/history/european/enlightenment/summary.html>

Leibniz and the Philosophy of Optimism

Gottfried Leibniz (discovered calculus separately from Newton) used logic to form his view on the world:

- All things have a cause and effect. Logically speaking, God must have created (cause) the universe (effect).
- God is all-knowing and perfect.
- God could not create a perfect world because only God can be perfect.
- Evil is necessary in a world with free will. A world without free will would be worse than a world without evil (God knew this).
- Thus, this is the best of all possible worlds.

This theory irked Voltaire, especially when followers of Leibniz diluted his philosophy to something like this:

"In this world, everything is absolutely for the best!"

This will be the view of Pangloss, tutor in the Baron's castle.

For Voltaire, a man who had witnessed a lot of pain and suffering (alleged sexual abuse, war, social injustice), this theory was absurd.

Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*

1. Following are the major ideas in *Essay on Man*:
2. a God of infinite wisdom exists;
3. He created a world that is the best of all possible ones;
4. the plenum, or all-embracing whole of the universe, is real and hierarchical;
5. authentic good is that of the whole, not of isolated parts;
6. self-love and social love both motivate humans' conduct; virtue is attainable;
7. "One truth is clear, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT." Partial evil, according to Pope, contributes to the universal good.
"God sends not ill, if rightly understood."

According to this principle, vices, themselves to be deplored, may lead to virtues. For example, motivated by envy, a person may develop courage and wish to emulate the accomplishments of another; and the avaricious person may attain the virtue of prudence. One can easily understand why, from the beginning, many felt that Pope had depended on Leibniz.

Read more at: <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/c/candide/critical-essays/alexander-popes-essay-on-man>

The Seven Years War

- Involved all the major European players (mainly Great Britain/Prussia vs. France)
- Fighting took place on many fronts, including North America (French and Indian War)
- British side wins; begins decline of French power
- Estimates of roughly 1 million casualties

This is the current war when Voltaire is writing this book. The "Abares" are French and the "Bulgars" are Prussian.

The Lisbon Earthquake

- 1755 on All Saints Day (religious holiday)
- Estimated 50,000 people killed
- "Optimists" were comforting victims by spreading the good news that all their suffering was for the best.
- Voltaire poked fun at them with jokes like these:
- Survivors can get their inheritances early!
- Masons will get rich rebuilding!
- Animals will grow fat eating corpses of the victims!

Candide will arrive in Lisbon right after the earthquake and witness the carnage.

The Inquisition

- In different countries, but Voltaire focuses on Portugal.
- Hundreds of years of religious persecution and forced conversions
- Auto de fe = "act of faith" = public penance, e.g. burning alive
- Grand Inquisitor = highest ranking authority in this process

Candide and Pangloss experience an auto de fe in Portugal after the earthquake. They also meet the Grand Inquisitor who (not-so-shockingly) is a hypocrite.

Characters

- Candide = Can-DEED, means white, innocent, and naïve
 - simple, honest, unsophisticated common-sense approach
 - "his soul was too pure to depart from the truth"
- Pangloss = means all-tongue, represents Leibniz and Optimism
 - satirical portrayal of Leibniz as academic philosopher out of touch with reality
 - expert who purports to understand everything, but has no reason or common sense
- Cunegonde = COON-a-GAWN-da, Germanic name
 - Baron's beautiful daughter, whom Candide loves
- The Baron = in chapter 1 this is Cunegonde's father; from chapter 4 on it is her brother
 - Vain, pompous man
 - Representation of Frederick the Great
- Jacques (or James) the Anabaptist = Christian who believes in baptism at the time of one's confession of faith (NOT "anti-baptist")
- Cacombo = Cuh-COM-bo, becomes Candide's confidant
- Pacquette = Pah-KET, French name
- Martin = calls himself Manichaeon
 - heretical belief which explains existence of evil in the universe through theory that the physical world (including human body, but not soul) was created by an evil power, not by the good God
 - Called "philosopher", but is different than the official "philosopher, Pangloss
- The Turk = reveals the secret of his happiness: work

Candide

Historical Background

In 1480, the Spanish crown established the Inquisition, a tribunal that assessed the orthodoxy of converts to Catholicism and punished those who did not adhere closely enough to Catholic precepts. Soon after the Inquisition was established, royal decrees forced Jews and Muslims to leave Spain; some Jews and Muslims chose to convert to Catholicism rather than accept expulsion. The Inquisition closely watched these *conversos*, persecuting them if they took actions inconsistent with Catholic orthodoxy.

This atmosphere of religious persecution hangs heavily over *Candide*. The religious climate in Voltaire's France was probably shaped most directly by the Wars of Religion between French Calvinist Protestants (Huguenots) and French Roman Catholics that engulfed the country in the late 16th century. Though the 1598 Edict of Nantes offered Huguenots a measure of peace and equality under Catholic rule, the Edict was revoked in 1685, leading to the programmatic destruction of Protestant churches and attempts to convert Protestants to Catholicism by coercion. Protestants undertook a mass diaspora from France, and relations between Protestant countries and France became strained.

In 1755, just a few years before *Candide* was originally published, an earthquake destroyed the Portuguese city of Lisbon. This event forms the backdrop for chapters 5 and 6 and can reasonably be assumed to have formed a powerful obstacle to Voltaire's acceptance of divine providence in his own philosophical outlook. If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, how could he allow (or cause) such an event to occur? Voltaire examines this question throughout *Candide*.

By the time *Candide* was written, the Enlightenment was well under way. One of the most important texts of this period, Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, attempted to explain natural processes with observable evidence—a contrast to preceding ideas about the natural world, which mostly relied upon unobservable supernatural phenomena. Natural philosophy was not the only sphere in which religious beliefs and practices were questioned, however; some philosophers and ethicists rejected faith-based arguments concerning morality and ethical principles.

Gottfried Leibniz, however, was not one of these philosophers. In his *Théodicée*, Leibniz attempts to reconcile the existence of evil with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent God. The existence of evil within the universe, often referred to as “the problem of evil,” is perhaps most elegantly stated in a quotation often attributed to the Greek philosopher Epicurus:

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

The polytheist religions of the Greeks and Romans provide a convenient explanation for the evil in the world: evil gods, or the evil caused by combat between the gods. The gods were not supposed to be perfect, so there was no reason to expect their creation and effect on human life to be perfect either. The Greek and Roman gods acted similarly to humans; they fought, had love affairs, and tended to be capricious. They certainly were not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnibenevolent.

Unlike these earlier polytheist religions, however, Judaism and Christianity posit that a single, all-powerful God created the universe and that this God is perfect in every way. Leibniz's philosophical outlook, usually referred to as “optimism,” stipulates that the universe, as it exists, is in its optimal state—God, who created it, could not have created a better one. If evil exists, it exists because evil is required for the universe's existence. In *Candide*, Pangloss (transparently a stand-in for Leibniz) espouses optimism, often referring to this world as “the best of all possible worlds.” Voltaire repeatedly attacks this philosophy, citing terrible natural disasters and horrific human behavior in an attempt to show that the universe does contain unnecessary flaws and therefore is not optimal. Voltaire implies that if he can imagine a better arrangement for the world, surely God could have. A perfect God should have made an optimal world. While Leibniz attempts to explain how the world, even with its noticeable flaws, must in some sense be the best world possible, Voltaire counters with an unvoiced plea: surely God could have done better, and surely such an intelligent thinker as Leibniz should know better than to try to justify the incredible levels of violence and devastation in the world.

Genre and Literary Devices

Candide falls squarely into the literary genre known as satire. Often, the satirist's aim is to expose some negative aspect or aspects of society in an attempt to shame society into changing itself. There are two major categories of satire: Horatian and Juvenalian. Horatian satire is playful and lighthearted, and criticizes its target or targets without the intent to offend. By contrast, Juvenalian satire is directed toward what the author deems to be genuine evils in society, and as a result it is much more abrasive in tone. *Candide* is an example of Juvenalian satire; it addresses what Voltaire deems to be pressing social evils rather than minor vices or follies, and it does so with an unmistakably harsh tone.

The brutal experiences of Cunegonde while she is separated from Candide, the senselessness of the religious persecution the characters observe and endure, and the scale of the battles Voltaire describes are intended to shock readers. The situations in which

Voltaire places his characters as realistic, but Voltaire often exaggerates events for comedic effect. This allows the reader to look on the catastrophes with a bit of dark humor. Simple humor could keep the reader engaged in the story, but satire engages the reader with humor while constantly reminding one of the manifold sources of pain and horror in life.

One device used extensively in *Candide* is dialogue. In the classical sense of the word, a dialogue is a conversation in which two characters discuss a central idea or problem. Classical dialogues often feature a sage or teacher, like Socrates in Plato's dialogues, whose arguments shape the opinions of one or more students. In *Candide*, discussions between Candide and Pangloss sometimes tend this way, although with the satirical twist that the sage's "wisdom" is absurd rather than convincing.

This is just one of the many ways that Voltaire uses irony in his story. Most definitions of irony identify three types: situational, verbal, and dramatic.

- Situational irony is a reversal of an expected course of events. For much of the book, Candide searches for Cunegonde so that he can marry her. However, upon finally finding her he discovers that she has grown ugly and he no longer wishes to marry her.
- Verbal irony is speaking one thing but meaning something else; sarcasm is a form of verbal irony.
- Dramatic irony is created when the audience has more correct knowledge of the characters' situation(s) than do the characters themselves; this allows the audience to identify mistakes on the part of the characters while they are in the process of making these mistakes.

Hyperbole is a device Voltaire uses to create many of his satirical and ironic situations. Voltaire takes the theological, ethical, and political problems found in reality and exaggerates aspects of each to an absurd degree, creating humor. Without these excessive elements of the story, the irony would be much more subtle, and the pain and sorrow much more likely to engender sympathy and disgust rather than a wry smirk from Voltaire's readers. In short, *Candide* would be a very different book.

What to Look for When Annotating *Candide*

A. Types of satire

1. Horatian Satire:

- satire that is pleasant and amusing – "ha ha" funny
- "Waldberghofftrarb-dikdorff"
- Pangloss' "sufficient reason" under the bushes

2. Juvenalian Satire:

- biting satire – holding up human follies (foolishness) for ridicule
- Examples: war, rape, religion, Optimism, corruption in the church

B. Motif

An element that is repeated in a work of literature

Example: the Garden

1. Allusion to "earthly paradise" at beginning of Ch. 2
2. "underbrush" and "woods they called a park" – Pangloss and Paquette at the castle

C. Objects of Satire

1. Religious persecution
2. Hypocrisy in the church
3. Human greed
4. Idle philosophy
5. War
6. Nobility
7. Paris
8. Male ego
9. Women and their materialism