



# WORLD LITERATURE II (ENG 252)

## Candide and the Enlightenment: Study Guide

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### PHILOSOPHES and THE ENLIGHTENMENT (following Peter Gay)

The eighteenth century Enlightenment was a spontaneous and unorganized "...coalition of cultural critics, religious skeptics, and political reformers from Edinburgh to Naples, Paris to Berlin, Boston to Philadelphia." The thinkers and writers of this movement were called philosophes. They had many different ideas and attitudes, and frequently quarreled with one another. However, the philosophes were "united on a vastly ambitious program...of secularism, humanity, cosmopolitanism, and freedom ... " (Gay, 3)

Enlightenment Freedoms included

"freedom from arbitrary power,
freedom of speech,
freedom of trade,
freedom to realize one's talents,
freedom of aesthetic response,
freedom...of moral man to make his own way in the world." (Gay, 3)

The philosophes were not unanimous in their ideas. Some were still Christian while others explored atheism and materialism; a few supported monarchies while others preferred the radical new ideas of democracy. (Gay, 3)

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### HAPPINESS

Happiness was the greatest goal of enlightenment thinking; this was happiness in this life, not happiness in heaven beyond. "The potentially explosive idea of happiness as a right, something to which all men were entitled and which only ignorance and external obstacles...denied them, was now for the first time in history gaining wide acceptance." (Anderson, 367)

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### VOLTAIRE 1694-1778

Voltaire was one of the chief thinkers of the Enlightenment and he lived his long life through most of it. Ayer points out that "Voltaire is a great symbol. His name continues to stand for the homage to reason which is thought to have been distinctive of

the intellectual outlook of the eighteenth century, especially in France." (Ayer, 171)

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■ OPTIMISM

Voltaire hated optimism and parodied it brilliantly in the character of Pangloss, the philosophical optimist. Pangloss's optimism is not the same as that of the cheerful optimist today who sees the glass half full while the gloomy pessimist sees it as half empty. The eighteenth century optimist was a philosopher whose notion of the universe went something like this:

God is perfect; God created the world; a perfect being would create a perfect world, therefore the world is perfect (e.g. exactly as the best possible of all created worlds must be).

Further, a perfect being would create everything that could be created, therefore everything that could exist does exist.

Further still, everything is connected to everything else because that's how God created it, from the angels above to the worms below, therefore every creature and event is connected to every other creature and event.

Consequently, this is the best of all possible worlds AND everything must be for the best (because God created it that way, natch).

Candide sums up the optimism's basic insanity when he encounters the mutilated negro in Surinam and declares that he is renouncing his optimism. Cacambo asks him what is optimism. "Alas, said Candide, it is a mania for saying things are well when one is in hell." Even worse, because optimism, in the person of Pangloss, is always explaining how events are really for the best, it encourages people to give up hope and stop trying to make life less awful for themselves and others.

Although Voltaire does not show everything in *Candide* as evil, he certainly shows the amount of evil greatly outweighing the amount of good. "The target at which it was actually directed is [Leibniz]...theory that this is the best of all possible worlds, with the corollary that there is a sufficient reason for all the evil that it contains....Voltaire also had in view the 'optimistic' lines in Pope's 'An Essay on Man':

All nature is but art unknown to thee
All chance, direction which thou canst not see:
All discord, harmony not understood:
All partial evil, universal good:
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, Whatever is is right. (Ayer, 139-40)

The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 which destroyed many thousands of lives stimulated Voltaire's loathing of optimism. The religious issue was: either God was not all benevolent or he was not all powerful. Either case created problems for traditional Christianity. (Ayer, 140, 25)

While the inexperienced Candide is an optimistic Everyman, Martin is a pure philosophic pessimist. Martin is as unaware of good as Pangloss is unaware of evil. Martin misses the point that there is some good in the world, while Candide cannot understand the presence of evil. (Mason, 60)

Candide does develop, however, and eventually passes beyond Martin's pessimism as well as Pangloss' optimism. In the end, Candide learns to stop debating philosophy and to simply live his life for better or worse. (Mason, 61)

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■ DEISM IN *CANDIDE*

The religion of *Candide*, and of Voltaire is Deism, an eighteenth century belief that God made the universe, but then left it to run on its own, rather like a watchmaker who makes a clock and then leaves it to run on its own. Voltaire thought there were rational

grounds for believing that the universe was created and governed by "a necessary eternal supreme intelligent being....Although Voltaire did not think one could prove the existence of God, he thought the order and harmony of the universe strongly suggested that it had been created by a supreme intelligence, not by random events." (Ayer, 110)

Consequently, although the world of *Candide* is crammed with absurd and ridiculous events, the existence of Eldorado suggests that there could be something better if men were more in harmony with the nature of the world and of God. God is rather like the lord described by the Dervish who sends a ship full of goods to another country, but does not worry about the condition of the mice in the hold. But the ship is in good condition, and the voyage has a purpose, to the lord, if not to the mice.

"So, even if this world seems utterly mad, no suggestion exists that it lacks a final arbiter of order and sanity. Even the most pessimistic figure, Martin, never denies God, espousing rather a philosophy according to which the Devil seems on level terms with Him...." (Mason, 64)

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## POLITICS, SLAVERY AND REVOLUTION IN *CANDIDE*

Politically, *Candide* is ...moderate. It satirizes all the corrupt governments of the world, except Eldorado, but does not preach the overthrow of these governments. The final garden is a withdrawal from European politics, not a solution to them. Voltaire was not a revolutionary; he believed that any revolution would be worse than the system it replaced. (Mason, 67)

"...ONE OF THE CRUXES OF *Candide* lies in the hero's encounter with the negro slave [who]....has lost a hand because it was caught in the millstone and a leg because he tried to escape." He tells Candide "...It is at this price that you eat sugar in Europe.["]...The experience makes a deep impression on Candide, and for the first time he openly denounces Optimism." (Mason, 66)

However, all Candide does is cry; he makes no attempt to free the slave. Voltaire "seems to regard the problem as so large and horrifying that a practicable course of action cannot affect it...one can only weep and go on one's way, or presumably, continue to eat sugar with a guilty conscience. This conclusion is not wholly fair to the writer if one looks outside *Candide*, for Voltaire had already attacked slavery in other works." (Mason, 66)

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## ELDORADO

Eldorado is proof that it is possible to live a sane, rational, religious and prosperous life in this world. Also, Eldorado is the source of Candide's new wealth, which allows him to explore upper class life in Europe and ransom his friends as needed. Eldorado may be better than human beings are ready for; after all, Candide chooses to leave Eldorado for the love of a woman whom he ends up not loving and to seek being richer and better than others, a goal he gives up after experiencing European decadence. (Mason, 68-69)

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## *CANDIDE'S* STYLE

The style of *Candide* rushes along setting up illusions like sitting ducks and then happily shooting them down again. The sentences themselves often use this method of undercutting the value of what has just been said; for example: "The Baron was one of the most powerful lords in Westphalia, for his castle had a door and windows."

In *Candide*, most of the important characters either do not die, or, if they die, they come back to life again rather miraculously, as when Pangloss is hanged but survives, or when Cunegonde is raped and disemboweled, yet survives. Thousands die around them, but the main characters remain curiously invulnerable to the disasters they witness.

Voltaire keeps these characters at arm's length; he does not want us to care about them, but merely to watch their antics, laugh, and think about the philosophical implications of their adventures and discoveries.

Other than Candide, no one learns anything, and even he learns slowly and painfully. The Baron keeps resisting Candide's marriage to Cunegonde, no matter how many times he has saved her and how ugly she has become; Pangloss never learns anything at all, but keeps on seeing the world through his rose colored blinders. Martin never learns that some people are decent and that there is such a thing as friendship.

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## **CANDIDE -- THE STORY**

Chapter 1. The happy castle of Baron Thunder Ten Tronckh in Germany. Candide, a young man of suspicious birth and no wealth learns philosophy from Pangloss, who is an optimist and believes that this is the best of all possible worlds. Candide falls in love with Cunegonde, the Baron's daughter, and is kicked out of the castle for that love.

Chapter 2. Candide is forced to join the Bulgar army. He takes a walk and is flogged for desertion.

Chapter 3. War between the Bulgars and the Abares. Candide hides during the battle, then flees. Impoverished and starving, he begs for food. Jacques, a good Anabaptist, gives him food, shelter and a job.

Chapter 4. Candide meets Pangloss who is ill with syphilis and tells Candide that Cunegonde was raped and disemboweled and she and her family are dead. Jacques pays to cure Pangloss and hires him as his bookkeeper. Jacques, Candide and Pangloss sail for Lisbon, Portugal.

Chapter 5. Jacques falls overboard during a storm. Pangloss prevents Candide from trying to save Jacques, "by proving that the bay of Lisbon had been formed expressly for this Anabaptist to drown in." The ship sinks and Pangloss and Candide make it to shore in Lisbon in time for the earthquake. Pangloss explains his philosophy of "it's all for the best" to an officer of the Inquisition.

Chapter 6. Pangloss and Candide are arrested by the Inquisition. Pangloss is hanged and Candide is flogged at an Auto Da Fe which is supposed to prevent future earthquakes.

Chapter 7. The Old Woman helps Candide and leads him to Cunegonde, who survived being raped and disemboweled.

Chapter 8. Cunegonde tells Candide her story and how she now is shared by a Jew, Don Issachar and the Grand Inquisitor. Cunegonde had attended the Auto Da Fe, saw Candide flogged, and arranged for his rescue.

Chapter 9. Don Issachar shows up and Candide kills him. Then the Grand Inquisitor shows up and Candide kills him too. Candide has to flee Portugal.

Chapter 10. Candide, Cunegonde and the Old Woman flee to Cadiz and board a ship for South America.

Chapters 11-12. The Old Woman tells her story.

Chapter 13. They land in Buenos Aires and the Governor proposes marriage to Cunegonde. Police arrive from Portugal to arrest Candide.

Chapter 14. Candide and Cacambo, his servant, flee to Paraguay. The Jesuit Commander is Cunegonde's brother, the Baron of Thunder Ten Tronckh.

Chapter 15. When Candide mentions he wants to marry Cunegonde, the Baron hits Candide with the flat of his sword. Candide kills the Baron. Candide wears the Jesuit robe and flees to the frontier with Cacambo.

Chapter 16. Candide and Cacambo encounter native girls and their monkey lovers.

Chapter 17. Candide and Cacambo arrive at Eldorado where the pebbles on the ground are diamonds and rubies and the dirt is gold.

Chapter 18. The Old Man explains the history and religion of Eldorado. They are Deists who thank God continually for all their blessings. After a while Candide wants to leave to find Cunegonde and points out "If we stay here, we shall be just like everybody else, whereas if we go back...we shall be " rich and able to live as we please. He convinces Cacambo and they arrange to leave Eldorado with 100 treasure laden sheep.

Chapter 19. They arrive in Surinam with only 2 treasure laden sheep. Candide meets a mutilated negro who explains that his sorry condition is the price of eating sugar in Europe. Candide weeps and gives up his optimism. Candide sends Cacambo with

millions worth of diamonds to fetch Cunegonde and meet him in Venice. Candide offers to buy passage for the unhappiest man and Martin wins the misery contest.

Chapter 20. Candide and Martin sail for France. Martin is a total pessimist--he thinks God has abandoned the world to some evil spirit, except for Eldorado. Candide says there's still some good in the world. "That may be, said Martin, but I don't know it."

Chapter 21. Candide and Martin discuss the corrupt behavior of people in France.

"Do you believe, asked Candide, that men have always massacred one another as they do today? That they have always been liars, traitors, ingrates, thieves, weaklings, sneaks, cowards, backbiters, gluttons, drunkards, misers, climbers, killers, calumniators, sensualists, fanatics, hypocrites, and fools?

"Do you believe, said Martin, that hawks have always eaten pigeons when they could get them?"

"Of course, said Candide."

"Well, said Martin, if hawks have always had the same character, why do you suppose that men have changed?" and so on....

Chapter 22. In France, Candide is taken for more of his wealth by a courtesan and an abbe.

Chapter 23. Candide and Martin pass by England and see an admiral shot for not killing enough enemies.

Chapter 24. In Venice, Candide meets Paquette (Pangloss' mistress at Thunder Ten Tronckh castle who gave him syphilis) and Giroflee, her monk lover.

Chapter 25. Candide visits Lord Pococurante, who has everything and values nothing.

Chapter 26. Candide and Martin have supper with six deposed kings. Cacambo shows up--he's a slave now. Cacambo tells Candide that Cunegonde is in Constantinople.

Chapter 27. Candide ransoms Cacambo and they travel to Constantinople. Cacambo tells him that Cunegonde is now a slave and ugly. They travel on a galley and Pangloss and Baron Thunder Ten Tronckh are among the galley slaves. Candide buys their freedom.

Chapter 28. Pangloss tells his story of misery, yet he still thinks this is the best of all possible worlds.

"Well, my dear Pangloss, Candide said to him, now that you have been hanged, dissected, beaten to a pulp, and sentenced to the galleys, do you still think everything is for the best in this world?

"I am still of my first opinion, replied Pangloss; for after all I am a philosopher..."

Chapter 29. Candide finds Cunegonde and she is ugly. He ransoms Cunegonde and the Old Woman. The Baron still refuses to let Candide marry Cunegonde.

Chapter 30. Candide sends the Baron back to be a galley slave and then he marries Cunegonde. The group of friends move to a farm outside Constantinople where they are horribly bored and miserable just hanging out doing nothing. They visit the Dervish to ask why there's so much evil in the world.

"What does it matter, said the dervish, whether there's good or evil? When his highness sends a ship to Egypt, does he worry whether the mice on board are comfortable or not?"

On their way home they meet a hospitable Old Turk. They admire his lifestyle and think he must be rich.

"I have only twenty acres, replied the Turk; I cultivate them with my children, and the work keeps us from three great evils, boredom, vice, and poverty."

Pangloss continues to philosophize, but Candide realizes finally that philosophy is useless and the only solution is "that we must cultivate our garden."

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## GARDENS IN *CANDIDE*

There are several gardens in *Candide*, including the original garden of the castle of Baron Thunder Ten Tronck in Westphalia,

the garden of Eldorado, the garden of the Old Turk, and Candide's final garden. A garden is a place where people take care of the earth, and in turn receive food and comfort from it. Some gardens are better than others, and any garden can be destroyed or one can be kicked out of it or one may foolishly leave, as Candide did Eldorado, but for the moment, while working in the garden and eating food from the garden, one is as close to happiness as human beings can get. This is the moral of the tale of *Candide*.

Candide's garden in Turkey is not a special place, but an ordinary one, where ordinary people could try to live their ordinary lives. Candide had returned to Europe wealthy, but found that even with money life in Europe was wretched. His final garden is a small community, outside of Europe entirely. The initial problem in this garden is boredom. The characters need to learn from the old Turk that work makes life tolerable. This work ethic is a rejection of the European social order based on inherited wealth and status. Voltaire's message here is: do not overthrow European states, simply leave them. (Mason, 62-3)

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