

Philosophical views of life in "candide"

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" We must go and work in the garden" (Voltaire 144). The novella " Candide" by Voltaire (1947) ends with this sentence. It succinctly concludes the message that Voltaire wants his readers to learn and apply in life. He upholds that man should engage in work for "[...] work banishes three great evils, boredom, vice, and poverty" (Voltaire 144) that has caused many of the problems and sufferings of human beings. These problems and sufferings elicit from man diverse philosophies about life, about the world and about God.

So in " Candide", Voltaire exposes the other evils in the society that boredom, vice and poverty bring and presents the different philosophical dispositions of the characters in the story in relation to the events and the evils of men existing around them. The story tells of a how a young man named Candide who was brought up in " the country seat of Baron Thunder-tronckh" (Voltaire 19) in Westphalia has been kicked out of the Baron's house and has suffered so many misfortunes in life because he kissed and he fell in love with the Baron's daughter Cunegonde.

He is able to travel to many and far away places, to meet different people and personalities, to go through a lot of physical and psychological pains, to witness horrible atrocities committed by men against their fellowmen, and to see unexpected events happen. In all of his experiences, he meets people who have influenced his view of life and his attitude towards the world and humankind through their philosophies. These people are Pangloss, Cacambo and Martin who have similar and contrasting views of life and attitudes towards humankind and the world.

The first person to influence Candide's view of life is the tutor of the Baron's son, Pangloss. When Candide was still in the house of Baron Thunder-ten-tronckh, he would often hear Pangloss say: " It is proved [...] that things cannot be other than they are, for since everything was made for a purpose, it follows that everything is made for the best purpose [...] all is for the best" (Voltaire 20). This view of life is very optimistic and idealistic. So, even when he is out of the Baron's house and every time he encounters a new situation, he would remember Pangloss' optimistic view of life: " that all is for the best" (Voltaire 23).

However, his many misfortunes cause him to doubt Pangloss' philosophical disposition and he later modifies his own view of life. As for Pangloss, even when he has already suffered from a venereal disease, has almost been killed by hanging, has been dissected, whipped and has been made to tug at the oar can say: " I still hold my original views [...] for I am still a philosopher. It would not be proper for me to recant, especially as Leibnitz cannot be wrong" (Voltaire 136). He still maintains what he believes in.

The second person who has somehow given direction to Candide's innocence is Cacambo, his personal servant. Cacambo's view of life is balanced and admirable for whenever he and Candide are in the midst of problems or troubles, he does not panic nor become discouraged or pessimistic. He suggests that Candide become a soldier of the Jesuit priests of Paraguay in one instance when he killed Don Isaachar and the Grand Inquisitor and he encourages him by saying: " When you don't get what you expect on one side, you find it on the other" (Voltaire 62).

And in another instance, when they were fleeing after Candide struck the body of Cunegonde's brother with his sword, says to him: " If we don't find something pleasant, we shall at least find something fresh" (Voltaire 74). These statements show that Cacambo takes life's ups and downs positively. Whether he fails or succeeds in his endeavors, he is contented that he has tried. He also has faith in the kindness of man and in the help of God when he cites: "[...] they will be able to help us. Perhaps God will have pity on us in the end" (Voltaire 73).

With this statement, he somehow believes that God will help them. Cacambo, on the other hand, has a negative attitude towards other people. For instance when Candide killed the two monkeys who are possibly lovers of the two naked girls, he tells him: "[...] see how people behave who have not received a certain type of education. All I fear is that these ladies will play us some dirty trick" (Voltaire 70). And this premonition, proved correct when the two ladies reported to the Oreilons about them which lead to their being captured.

What is certainly admirable in him is that he is always prepared for anything that comes whether it is the worst or the best. He always has presence of mind and he can easily think of ways to solve the problems he and his master face. He is not also surprised with unusual things that happen around him like the two ladies who have monkey lovers. The third person who has contributed to Candide's doubts about Pangloss' view of life is Martin. He is a scholar who became very pessimistic because he was betrayed by his own family when his wife robbed him, his son beat him and his daughter abandoned him.

He has been through the worst inhumane treatment and has suffered a lot. He does not believe that God is helping humans. He questions why if God should punish anyone who is evil the innocent persons are killed with them when the innocent have not committed any sin. He also does not find anything good in the world or in the behavior and attitudes of humankind. He thinks that humans will naturally kill and harshly treat one another. Before Candide and Martin go to France, Martin recalls his past sad experience in that place and with the people there.

He told Candide that when he first came there, he got sick yet no one helped him because he had no money unlike Candide. Fortunately, he was able to recover from his sickness. Consequently, he does not have anything good to say about the French. In fact, he talks about human beings' contradictions and inconsistencies and presents a horrible picture of them. He becomes bitterer towards human beings when he and Candide were arrested at Paris without any just reason. When he and Candide were able to escape from prison in France, they headed to the English Coast, yet again he has a negative attitude towards the Englishmen.

When he heard the description of Martin about the English and when he saw Admiral Byng being killed to encourage other admirals to fight bravely in the war that Candide decided not to set foot on the English Coast. Martin does not have faith in humanity's kindness and goodness and he always expects the worst because he has been through worst times and circumstances. Consequently, he always has a suspicious and distrustful attitude towards people which he manifests during the times when Candide gives money to Paquette and Giroflee.

He tells Candide that he would not be surprised “ if those piastres of yours made them even more unhappy” (Voltaire 117). He also doubted whether Cunegonde would really make Candide happy as he says: “ I hope [...] that one day she will make you happy, but I very much doubt it” (Voltaire 117). Consequently, his foresights proved correct later. However, his doubts towards Cacambo proved wrong because Cacambo remained an honest man. Martin has similar and contrasting views with that of Cacambo and Pangloss’ views. Like Cacambo, he does not trust people but he is more doubtful towards others than Cacambo is.

Similar to Cacambo, he is not at all surprised with what happens around him especially the worst events because he always expects them. This view of life is very much in contrast to Pangloss’ belief that “ all is for the best”. From these three persons and from the other characters in the story and with his own experiences, Candide was able to come up with his own unique view of life which is neither too optimistic nor very pessimistic. In conclusion, Voltaire represents a range of philosophical dispositions for the readers to determine which view of life is best for them based on their own experiences.

He ends his novella by telling the readers what view of life and of the world they can adopt in the midst of the evils in this world and this is to work. As it is said “[...] work banishes three great evils, boredom, vice, and poverty” (Voltaire 144). Voltaire supports that “ When man was placed in the garden of Eden, he was put there to dress it and to keep it, to work [...]” (Voltaire 143). Therefore, “ We must work without arguing, [...] that is the only way to make life bearable” (Voltaire 144).