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Optimism has never done very well in literature, or any of the written media. From the very beginning, the stories that were recorded for posterity revolved around chaos, around, heartache, around tragedy. The Book of Job, considered by many to be the oldest part of the Old Testament, is about a wager between God and his adversary over the morals of a man; that man's family and possessions are the chattel in that wager. The earliest Greek writings include the tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus; the plots include twists that might even make the Kardashians blush: a son murdering his father (without knowing the identity of the man he has slain) and then marrying his mother; a young woman committing suicide after being denied the right to bury her brother and then being entombed by her uncle while still alive. The epics of Homer and Virgil are no more sanguine about the realities of human nature. The Enlightenment was no different, at least far as its views about the pig's breakfast that humans have made out of the world they were given. Voltaire's *Candide* does feature the ever optimistic Dr. Pangloss, who believes that the world that we have before us is the best of all possible outcomes. However, many of the events that take place in *Candide* show that there is much to be left desired in the way that people have ordered the world. Instead, the world features violence, greed, selfishness, and a willingness to sell out one's fellow human in order to advance one's own interests - or even just one's animal desires. *Candide*'s hesitation near the end of the story, indeed, can be seen as a rejection of the metaphysical optimism that still characterized many when the Enlightenment began.

Perhaps the most powerful example of Dr. Pangloss' erroneous belief in the best of all possible worlds comes in his own demise. Against powerful odds, Pangloss and Candide make it to Lisbon during their travels, only to find that the city has been leveled by an earthquake, and that the remaining inhabitants have been terrified by the arrival of the Spanish Inquisition. Because of his teachings, Pangloss does not take long to attract the attention of the authorities, and he is hanged for a few weeks, for the crime of heresy. Because Candide listened to Pangloss' teaching without any sort of reproach, Candide was flogged as well (but not killed outright). Despite the fact that Dr. Pangloss had left his position as a family tutor and taken up life in Holland as a beggar, only to run into Candide again, Dr. Pangloss still believed that he lived in the best of all possible worlds. The loss of his life, because of his beliefs, was not all that out of the ordinary during that time period. However, for someone to object to that use of power, as Candide was not inclined to do, would have indeed been out of the ordinary - and might have stopped the horrors of the Inquisition that would come later.

The terrors associated with sex are another sign that the world of Candide and Pangloss is not the best of all possible worlds out there. When Candide first runs into Pangloss again (as a beggar), he is dismayed to learn that his beautiful girl (Cunegonde) has been murdered by the Bulgar army; later, though, when Candide finds Cunegonde in Lisbon, it turns out that she has been "only" raped and then sold - and at that time in the story working as a sex slave owned by a Jew and by Lisbon's Grand Inquisitor. It is certainly worth wondering which is worse about Candide - the level of sexual violence

which is described as having happened during a time in history when the Roman Catholic Church exercised such ostensibly hermetic control over the actions of its communicants, or the blasé manner in which this violence is told by the narrator. Even in modern times, which show much more prurient content in a variety of media than anything that would have been available at the time of *Candide*, it is the matter-of-fact manner in which these events are described that is the most chilling element of the story. Even though *Candide* is able to slay both the Jew and the Inquisitor, and later on the baron, who thwarts *Candide*'s plans to marry *Cunegonde*, there is still no peace that comes from this resolution.

The curious reappearance of such characters as *Pangloss* and the baron, even after their nearly certain deaths have taken place, can be taken on the one hand to show that optimism does have its place in a belief system. However, the fact that *Pangloss* never learns from his trials that the world is indeed not at its best shows the foolishness of the naïve. *Pangloss* is driven from his home, executed (although in an apparently faulty manner), and then placed on a chain gang. Even so, he still believes that the world he inhabits is as good as it can possibly be – in an optimistic way. Some of this optimism has leached its way into *Candide*'s way of thinking, as his response to the sinking of *Vanderdendur*'s ship indicates. After stealing most of *Candide*'s fortune (and much of his optimism), *Vanderdendur* sails away gleefully, leaving *Candide* behind – and bitter. *Candide* leaves for France with the scholar *Martin*, who is the opposite of *Pangloss* in that he displays a most fervent pessimism. *Pangloss*' way of thinking seems to be validated when he

comes across some of his stolen fortune in the wreckage of Vanderdendur's ship at the hands of the Spanish. However, Martin does not see this as a sign that the world has justice; instead, Martin sees it as more of a simple coincidence.

The interplay between optimism and pessimism in *Candide* does not reach its resolution until the plot nears its end. One of the most prominent features of eighteenth-century thought was the interaction between limits and expansion. Because the Enlightenment sought to glorify the individual through the exploration of reason and scientific inquiry, a necessary corollary to this was to identify the point at which barriers existed, and other points at which further expansion was possible. For Voltaire, the entire point of philosophy was to find the place where one should cease inquiry (Brailsford, 122). Voltaire received this inspiration from his mentor, John Locke, who was the first to examine the places where human knowledge would reach its limits (Copleston, 71). A search for limits takes place throughout *Candide*, as the push and pull between optimism and pessimism dominates the conversation. Near the end of the story, when Candide hesitates during Pangloss' final explanation about how the events of the story have all been working toward a higher end, the pause is significant. This hesitation has convinced many scholars as being "synonymous with the failure of metaphysics; if we cannot know for certain, then we cannot believe" (Mink, 15). Those who follow this line of thinking argue that the true story of *Candide* is one of tragedy, of absurdity - Jean-Paul Sartre before his time.

The misguided optimism of Dr. Pangloss has wormed its way further into the intellectual and cultural history of our society. There are those who still believe that, given a minimum of limitations, that people will ultimately choose to do good – the ultimate good, even. These people generally hew to a more liberal line of thinking as far as government planning; in their view, government should do all that it can to provide as many egalitarian opportunities as possible. On the other side are those who feel that there needs to be a clear set of controls keeping people apart from one another, providing regulations and laws to maintain a clear sense of order, because without that structure, people will make poor (or even violent) choices. The horrors that happen to Candide, Cunegonde and Dr. Pangloss all show Voltaire's opinion on the topic – clearly, humanity has a long way to go, in a moral sense, before we can consider ourselves “civilized.” Until humanity makes this shift, dystopian visions will still fill our library shelves and movie theaters, and tales of humanity as an enlightened, morally evolved species will still be absent from our collective consciousness, as the peacefulness that might seem too boring to provide entertainment will also remain beyond our abilities.

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