

# Voltaire candide assignment

[History](#)



Francois Marie Arouet de Voltaire was the French author of the novella *Candide*, also known as “ Optimism”(Durant and Durant 724). Voltaire’s *Candide* is a philosophical tale of one man’s search for true happiness and his ultimate acceptance of life’s disappointments. Candide grows up in the castle of his uncle, a German baron, along with his optimistic scholar, Pangloss, and his young, beautiful cousin, Cunegonde. When Candide falls in love with Cunegonde and his uncle sees them kissing, Candide is thrown out of his home and enrolls in the Bulgar army.

After being beaten for wandering from camp, Candide flees to Holland and runs into an ugly beggar, who he is told to be Pangloss. He tells Candide that Cunegonde and her family have been murdered by the Bulgar army. A kind Anabaptist named Jacques to travel to Lisbon, but a storm destroys the ship, and Jacques drowns. In *Candide*, Voltaire sought to point out the fallacy of Gottfried William von Leibniz’s theory of optimism and the hardships brought on by the resulting inaction toward the evils of the world.

Voltaire’s use of satire and its techniques of exaggeration and contrast highlight the evil and brutality of war and the world in general when men are meekly accepting of their fate. Leibniz, a German philosopher and mathematician of Voltaire’s time, developed the idea that the world they were living in at that time was “ the best of all possible worlds. ” This systematic optimism shown by Leibniz is the philosophical system that believed everything already was for the best, no matter how terrible it seemed. In this satire, Voltaire showed the world full of natural disasters and brutality.

Voltaire also used contrast in the personalities of the characters to convey the message that Leibniz's philosophy should not be dealt with any seriousness. Leibniz sometimes regarded as a Stoic or Fatalist because his philosophies were based on the idea that everything in the world was determined by fate, theorized that God, having the ability to pick from an infinite number of worlds, chose this world, "the best of all possible worlds." Although Voltaire chose that simple quality of Leibniz's philosophy to satirize, Leibniz meant a little more than just that.

Even though his philosophy stated that God chose "the best of all possible worlds," he also meant that God, being the perfection he is, chose the best world available to him, unfortunately it was a world containing evil. It seems as though Voltaire wanted to ridicule Leibniz's philosophy so much that he chose to satirize only the literal meaning and fatal acceptance of evil of Leibniz's philosophy. To get his point across in *Candide*, Voltaire created the character Dr. Pangloss, an unconditional follower of Leibniz's philosophy.

Voltaire shows this early in the novella by stating, "He proved admirably that there is no effect without a cause and that, in this best of all possible worlds.... (16)" Pangloss goes on to say that everything had its purpose and things were made for the best. For example, the nose was created for the purpose of wearing spectacles (Voltaire 16). Because of his "great knowledge," Candide, at this point a very naive and impressionable youth, regards Pangloss as the greatest philosopher in the world, a reverence that will soon be contradicted by contact with reality (Frautschi 75).

The name Pangloss is translated as “ all tongue” and “ windbag. ” The colloquialism “ windbag” implies that a person is all talk, and he takes no action. In this case, Leibniz’s philosophy is Stoic acceptance of the evil of the world. As the story progresses, though, Pangloss loses faith in the Leibnizian philosophy. Although Pangloss suffered many hardships, he still sticks to the philosophy to avoid contradicting himself (Frautschi 69). Voltaire uses Pangloss and a contrasting character, Martin, to point out the shortcomings in Leibniz’s philosophy.

A contrast to the views of Pangloss is the character Martin. Martin, a pessimist, is a friend and advisor to Candide whom he meets on his journey. Martin continuously tries to prove to Candide that there is little virtue, morality, and happiness in the world. When a cheerful couple is seen walking and singing, Candide tells Martin, “ At least you must admit that these people are happy (80). ” Martin answers Candide’s comment with the reply, “ I wager they are not (80). ” Martin suggests that Candide invite the couple to dine at his hotel.

As the young girl, now found to be Paquette, tells her story, Martin takes pleasure in knowing he has won the wager. Another contrast to this “ best of all possible worlds” is Eldorado. Voltaire describes Eldorado as an extremely peaceful and serene country. Eldorado, a place that is “ impossible” to find, has no laws, jails, war, or need for material goods. Voltaire uses Eldorado as an epitome of the “ best of all possible worlds. ” It contrasts the real outside world in which war and suffering are everyday occurrences. Another example of how Voltaire ridicules Pangloss’ optimistic philosophy is he mention of the Lisbon earthquake and fire. Even though the disastrous earthquake took over  
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30, 000 lives, Pangloss still upheld his philosophical optimism by stating, “ For all this is for the very best... For it is impossible that things should not be where they are. (26)” The disaster in Lisbon affected Voltaire’s life so much that he wrote the Poem on the Lisbon Disaster, but Pangloss’ philosophy said that the Lisbon earthquake was necessary in the course of nature, and there was definitely a rationale for the situation.

War is another evil which Voltaire satirizes in *Candide*. Voltaire used the Bulgarians and their brutality as a basis for his satire on war. Voltaire writes how Candide was captured by the Bulgarians and is given a choice “ to be beaten thirty-six times by the whole regiment, or receive twelve lead bullets at once in his brain (19). ” Being the “ hero” he is, Candide chooses to run the gauntlet. Instead of the thirty-six times he was to run the gauntlet, our “ hero” made it only two until he pleaded to the Bulgarians to smash in his head (19).

Another satire of war included in *Candide* is the Bulgarians’ burning of the Abarian village “ in accordance with the rules of international law. (20)” Voltaire also shows his satire on war in that the Bulgarian soldiers do not just kill other people, they rape disembowel, and dismember innocent women and children. In fact, Candide’s training as a soldier involved being brutalized and beaten. Voltaire uses this example to demonstrate the inhuman vulgarity of many belligerent groups. He thought that this torture was cruel and unjustified.

If this were the “ best of all possible worlds,” innocent people would not be harmed, and violent peoples such as the Bulgarians would not exist. Upon

arrival in England, Candide witnesses another instance of brutality, the execution of an admiral because of his failure to win a battle (Voltaire 78). A reply to Candide's questioning of the act is, "... it is a good thing to kill an admiral from time to time to encourage the others (78-79)." This is an obvious allusion to an incident Voltaire himself witnessed.

Admiral Byng of England was court-martialed for the same outrageous reason, and although Voltaire tried to stop the execution, Byng was still killed (Durant and Durant 725). Although the novella *Candide* was partially written for entertainment purposes, it was written primarily to satirize the views of Leibniz's philosophy. Voltaire looked at the world with the idea that there could be something done about all of the evil in the world. He achieved his goal of satirizing Leibniz by tearing apart Pangloss' philosophy, using Martin as a contrast to Pangloss, showing the destruction caused by natural disasters, and the brutality of war.