

Candide response

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Arthur Johnson Western Letters – Professor Fayard Response Essay 2

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#2 Francois-Marie Arouet De Voltaire shows in many instances in Candide that he does not buy into the idea of the Enlightenment. With Voltaire's simple mockery of the idea of a perfect world with a perfectly good God, it is evident that he does not appreciate the idea that everything happens for a reason.

Despite Voltaire holding these extremely negative views on whether or not there is a good God, if there is a God at all, he puts in place a character in Candide that arguably contradicts his hateful and pessimistic views on the idea that everything happens for a reason. Voltaire places an old lady in Candide, whom clearly suffers greatly, but continues to get out of her tragedies and makes the decision to continue on living life because living is worth every bit of pain and suffering that comes.

This old lady contradicts Voltaire's negative views on the idea that everything happens for a reason because she continually escapes from her tragic experiences. The old lady continues to reinforce the idea that there is a purpose for everything and that good will eventually come out from even the most evil of situations and scenarios. The old lady not only contradicts Voltaire's hateful outlook on the idea that everything happens for a reason, but she to an extent revamps and matures Pangloss' outlook on optimism.

Instead of thinking that everything is great and perfectly good, the old lady believes that there are some horrible things in life, but living is worth every bit of struggle that comes along with it. In theory it would be safe to come to a conclusion that would suggest that the old lady believes that despite of all

the horrific and brutal events that come with living, there are greater things in life that make suffering a worthwhile price. This idea would also fall into the idea that everything does indeed happen for a reason.

The old lady used to live a promising life as the daughter of the pope and a princess, who was once seen by many as one of the most beautiful people women ever, a woman who had a body as beautiful as “ the Venus of Medici”. For a better graphic, the Venus of Medici was a Hellenistic life-size classical statue, much like the Venus de Milo, that was a depiction of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite. The old lady was at one point in her life a modern day celebrity, but all of what she had going for her was stolen, and yet she continued to live.

The old lady while in conversation with Candide and Cunegonde says “ Imagine my situation, the daughter of a pope, only fifteen years old, who in the space of three months had been exposed to poverty and slavery, been raped almost daily, had seen her mother torn to pieces, had endured war and famine, and who is now dying of the plague in Algiers. As it happens, I didn't die” (Voltaire). Voltaire also makes a strong emphasis on the old lady losing one of her buttocks, but despite that she continues to get on her horse, and ride it with just one of her buttocks.

The old lady has clearly suffered tremendously. She has been through more hardships and trials than Candide and Cunegonde ever have, even though they seemed to have suffered a lot themselves. Despite all of the pains and sufferings that this old woman has been through, she consistently chose not to loathe in self-pity, and also chose life over death one hundred out of one hundred times. If this old woman did not sincerely believe that there was a

reason to live and suffer, then why in Heaven's mind would she ever decide to continue to live a life full of painful and tragic events?

Simply putting it, she would not be in her right mind to continue on living a life of pain and suffering if there was no greater payout or at least a small reason for her pains and sufferings. The old woman's reason for living, the old woman's payout for all of her pains and sufferings, and the old woman's reason for not loathing in self-pity and ending her life was because she enjoyed living life too much. The old lady says to Candide and Cunegonde, "a hundred times I wanted to kill myself, but always I loved life more" (Voltaire).

On the contrary the old lady also mentioned that the notion of loving life while it is miserable is equivalent to holding on to existence in horror, but still clinging on to it or to fondle a serpent that devours until it has eaten our hearts away. The old lady labeled this notion that she carries and that many others carry as ridiculous, extremely weak, and one of human's worst instincts. Yet, she still decided to endure the hardships, live in her self-labeled "weakness", and continued on living a life that pays her with reasons in wanting to live out her life.

There is never a crystal clear glimpse of why the old woman loves living so much, but she does defy Voltaire once more at the end of Candide. While in conversation with Candide in the final chapter, the old lady says to Candide "I should like to know which is worse, being raped a hundred times by negro pirates, having a buttock cut off, running the gauntlet in the Bulgar army, being flogged and hanged in an auto-da-fe, being dissected and rowing in the galleys—experiencing, in a word, all the miseries through which we have

passed—or else just sitting here and doing nothing? (Voltaire). Voltaire places Candide's garden in Candide as another form of mockery to the idea that everything happens for a reason and their world is the best of all possible worlds. Despite Voltaire inputting the garden as a mockery to Candide's "ignorant and ridiculous" philosophy on life, the old lady was not any happier than she was when she was being raped, flogged, beaten, or hung. The old lady was just as "miserable" as she was during all of her actual tragedies and hardships she faced, and yet she still continued to love living life and not loathe in her self-pity.

The old lady's life is a testament to there being a reason to the events and tragedies that occur in life. All of the hardships, pains, and sufferings that enter the lives of people happen so that people can grasp and understand the greatness and love for living life. Much like the old lady, people have to endure the pains and sufferings of life because living and experiencing life is worth every ounce of lost blood, sweat, and tears.