

Don't be a (red)  
sheep



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Throughout Voltaire's *Candide* the reader was introduced to a wide variety of unique characters, each seemingly with their own philosophies and beliefs on how life should be viewed. Voltaire seems to stress through the development of the protagonist, Candide, just how influential the people we surround ourselves with are when it comes to shaping our own beliefs.

Sometimes we completely agree with someone's personal philosophy, while on the other hand detesting others we don't agree with. I strongly believe that when Candide (Voltaire) states that "we must cultivate our garden" (Voltaire. 96), he's implying that we as individuals should think more for ourselves rather than solely base our beliefs on the thoughts of others.

Candide is perhaps the biggest culprit of being more of a follower than a leader in the sense of forming original thoughts on how the world (or even the universe) works. Granted, the privileged boy did grow up with Pangloss as a personal teacher and friend, he still desperately clung to the belief that "things cannot be otherwise, for, everything being made for an end, everything is necessarily for the best end" (2). Intrigued by the idea that he lives in a world where everything happens for a reason, the protagonist mindlessly worships his teacher for the seemingly logical explanations put forth to support said idea. It's widely accepted through modern day studies and research that adult values can be a huge influential factor in determining what a child will grow up to value (Catsambis, 2001; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004) which appropriately explains Candide's admirable persistence in believing in Pangloss' philosophy of cause and effect. Even when things are presumably at their absolute worst, such as when Pangloss himself gets hanged before Candide's very eyes, and despite

sometimes questioning how reliable of a theory it still is, some act of good fortune will usually restore his faith shortly after (like discovering that Cunegonde's still alive). While this pattern persists almost throughout the entire story, Candide's greeted with constant contradictions to Pangloss' teachings to the point where he flat out renounces it all together, literally stating, " you (Pangloss) had not guessed this abomination; this does it, at last I shall have to renounce your optimism" (51). While some could argue that it's this shallow optimism that kept the protagonist's spirits high during all the hardships he faced, it still didn't bring him the happiness in life he's been longing for ever since his first tragic experience (being cast out from the castle after kissing Cunegonde).

After taking the first step toward " cultivating [his] garden" (96) by verbalizing out loud that he can no longer support the teachings of Pangloss, Candide's eyes are opened to yet another intriguing philosophy regarding the meaning of life after meeting Martin. Alone without friends, family, and on top of it all, being robbed of almost all the riches he had brought back from El Dorado, it seemed there was no better time for the story's protagonist to be introduced to Nihilism. Albeit an influence on his mind all the same, there was a very interesting contrast between the nihilistic Martin and the overly-optimistic Pangloss. To be raised on the belief that " all that happens is for the best" (2) and then meeting someone whose misfortunes had led him to believe that " a man is equally badly off anywhere" (92) definitely gave Candide something to think about as he continued his journey to reunite with Cunegonde. I realized that this show of optimism vs pessimism challenged my initial thought that Pangloss' teachings, despite

not always being the most solidly defended belief, could get almost anyone facing a hardship past it by believing something equally great will happen soon after. I too began to feel that persisting optimism truly was the solution for survival in a world riddled with rape, thievery, deceit, and so forth, until Martin proved otherwise. Having lived through a hell only slightly worse than that of Candide's, Martin was still alive after it all, despite being quite possibly the most nihilistic character out of any literature I've ever read (except for possibly Meursault from Albert Camus' *The Stranger*). While Candide never really embraced the nihilistic views of his new friend as he had done with Pangloss, the philosophy still deeply perplexed him nevertheless. Even after Candide's reveling in the realization that they had just dined with six former kings, Martin simply didn't see the big deal, leading him to question, "What does it matter whom you sup with, provided you make good cheer?" (84). Martin's Nihilism was somewhat of a push in the right direction, as it aimed to teach the protagonist that some big things really aren't so big on the grand scale of things, and that perhaps a better time would be had just enjoying more of life's simplicities.

It wasn't until the very end where all conflict had finally seemed to resolve itself with the main characters once Voltaire introduced a farmer who claimed that "work keeps away three great evils: boredom, vice, and need" (95). Even in the absence of heart wrenching tragedy or perilous danger, Candide and co. became so engulfed in boredom that they literally began questioning if it was worse than all their past experiences combined.

Through the acquisition of this new mentality that one simply shouldn't meddle in the chaotic business of others and instead become occupied with

something else, Candide had finally gained a sense of inner peace he had longed for since his younger days. I believe Voltaire's trying to get the reader to acknowledge the dangers of persistently following the views of others, and that discovering the things that make us, as individuals, feel happy and fulfilled is the true path to our own better worlds. Once one learns to cultivate their own gardens, what else should matter?