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Optimism and Pessimism in *Candide*

In *Candide*, Voltaire paints a dismal satirical view of the world. The characters are constantly facing great adversity and comparing stories of hard times. In chapter 10, Cunegonde states that her misfortune is so great that she does not see how the old woman's story can surpass hers. In chapters 11 and 12 the old woman then goes on to tell of her misfortune. When she finishes Candide and Cunegonde are amazed at the hard times this woman has faced. At the proposal of the old woman, Candide and Cunegonde ask others on the ship relate their adventures, and sure enough, the others on the boat have stories that can match or surpass Cunegonde's tale of woe. In *Candide*, Voltaire shows the pessimistic view of the growth process of a naïve youth who is raised to believe that this is best of all worlds to become a man who lives a monotonous boring life.

Throughout most of the book, Voltaire pokes fun at Leibniz's that according to the hierarchical structure of monads that this is best of all possible worlds. Candide and Pangloss are the main characters used to satirize the belief that this is the best of all possible worlds. Pangloss is a blind optimist; he refused to see things being anything other than the best. No matter what sort of natural disaster or misfortune falls upon someone Pangloss heralds it is being for the best. Candide—the naïve follower of Pangloss—is first a blind follower of Pangloss, but eventually comes to reject his teachings. In chapter 3 after meeting John the Anabaptist, Candide affirms, "now I am

convinced that my Master Pangloss told me truth when he said that everything was for the best in this world." However, in the beginning of Chapter 4 only few paragraphs later Candide contradicts his master, "Dead! Is Miss Cunegonde dead? Ah, where is the best of worlds now?" In chapter 6 Candide again doubts the correctness of Pangloss, "If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others?" Through satire, Voltaire completely rips apart the idea that the all things in this world are for the best. The multitude of things that happen to characters in the book, the war between the Bulgars and Avars, and the disasters occur make the idea that this must all be for the best seem absurd.

Though not a supporter of undying optimism, Voltaire adds optimistic note to his tale. For instance, the only of Candide's positive influences to die is John the Anabaptist. Cunegonde survives; Pangloss survives; the Baton survives. Cunegonde is raped by Bulgar soldiers; however, as she points out in chapter 8, "a modest woman may be once ravished; but her virtue is greatly strengthened thereby."

However, the touch of optimism does not last. In the end they are forced to live out their days in manual labor on the farm the Candide bought. In the conclusion of the book in Chapter 30, Cacambo is left to curse his fate. Pangloss in despair that he is not an important person at a German university, and Martin is left believing that people are equally well unprepared for what ever they do. Pangloss still maintained his systematic optimism. In chapter 30 Voltaire sums up Pangloss' feelings best, "Pangloss avowed that he had undergone dreadful sufferings; but having once maintained that everything went on as well as possible, he still maintained it, and at the same time believed nothing of it." By the end of book Candide has completely abandoned the belief that all is for the best. In response to a claim by Pangloss that Candide's adventures had

been for the best, Candide responds with a sarcastic, "excellently observed, but we must cultivate our garden."

By showing the extreme absurdity of the statement, "this must be for the best," Voltaire portrays his belief that this is not the best of all possible worlds. Though some good things happen along their adventures, Candide's fellow adventurers face great misfortune. Eventually they are forced to live a life of labor—not at all befitting their noble ancestry. Though greatly disappointed with their outcome all but Candide insist on claiming that all is for the best. The complete absurdity that one could go through as much and end up in the place where they end up and still claim that all was for the best furthers Voltaire's belief in the fallacy of systematic optimism.