Philosophies In Voltaire’s Candide Essay, Research Paper

Philosophies in Voltaire’s Candide

Voltaire’s Candide is a novel with many philosophical ideas about life. Through Candide’s journeys and interaction with different cultures throughout the book, we the reader find that Voltaire is describing his ideas or outlooks on life. In the novel, Voltaire portrays three philosophies that are of importance. The first is the philosophy of a utopian society, the second is the philosophy of optimism, and the third is the statement, ” we must go and work in our garden.”.

The first of the philosophies is that of the utopian society. In the novel, the city of Eldorado is portrayed as the utopian society. Eldorado is Voltaire’s ideal world, one that he knew could never exist, but could provide him with an agent to point out sad failings of the real world. In Eldorado, every person is on an equal, class levels don’t exist, and crime is nonexistent. In the novel, when Candide sees all of the riches that the Eldoradans inhabit, he is so taken aback by their lack of real interest in it all, he can’t understand why they live the way they do. He also uses his philosophy of the utopian society to show how very far short of being perfect our culture falls. He uses it to contrast the experiences that Candide had throughout his journeys. Candide’s observance of the horrors of war, devesting earthquakes, the Inquisition in Portugal, and tyranny are there to represent real world dilemmas, while Eldorado represents an oasis of perfection in the real world. Eldorado is a heaven on Earth and something unattainable by the society of Voltaire’s day. It can be argued though that because everyone is so wealthy and so happy, there would be absolutely no diversity. Everyone is the same and would be virtual robots living in a land of plenty. Voltaire’s philosophy of the Utopia represents many things in Candide , all of which were criticism of the real world.

The second philosophy is that of optimism. In this sense, Voltaire decides to criticize the theory of optimism, rather than support it. Voltaire’s primary purpose in writing Candide was to demolish the theory of optimism. The formula ” best of all possible worlds ” appears again and again only to be disproved with satire and irony. Oftentimes, after experiencing terrible suffering and real danger, the immediate reaction is that Doctor Panglos might possibly begin to doubt his own philosophy. For example, when Candide finds out that the Oreillons labeled him a Jesuit and were planning to roast or boil and then eat him, his immediate reaction was:

” What would Professor Panglos say if he had seen how unsophisticated nature behaves? No doubt all is for the best, but I must say it is very cruel to have lost Lady Cunegonde and to be skewed by the Oreillons. “(pg. 71)

Here at the end, Voltaire adds the doubt that Candide is having in Panglos’s optimistic philosophy at the moment he sees death staring him right in the face. In another instance, after Candide listened to the old woman tell of the horrible ordeals she had been through, he says:

” It is great pity, that the at an auto-da-fe’ was broken and our sagacious Panglos hanged: for otherwise he would have made some remarkable observations on the moral and physical evils which infest the earth and sea, and with all due respect to him I should have made bold to offer a few objections. “(pg. 58)

In this quote, Candide is saying that he knows that Panglos could have made a credible argument by quoting his optimistic phrase ” the best of all possible worlds “, but he would have to object to some of Panglos’s argument due to the nature of the old woman’s story. Voltaire again is discrediting optimism through the words of Candide and making the theory look very questionable. It is often that through brief statements such as these that an author can obtain an underlying voice. In that underlying voice is where Voltaire places his belief in the faults of the philosophy of optimism.

Finally, the third philosophy represented in Candide is the statement that, “we must go and work in the garden “. In context, the conversation where this statement is made happens when Candide is speaking to the neighborhood dervish. The first question that is asked is: ” Will you kindly tell us why such a strange animal as a man was ever made? “( pg. 141) The dervish’s response is: ” What has that got to do with you? Is it none of your business? “(pg. 141). What Voltaire is saying here is that those type of questions are none of our business and should be left well alone. He believes it is Gods business to know, not ours. Next, Candide poses this question: ” But surely reverend father, there is a great deal of evil in this world. “(pg. 141). The dervish responds: ” And what if there is? When His Highness sends a ship to Egypt, do you suppose that he worries wether the ship’s mice are comfortable or not? “(pg. 141). Voltaire now is saying that the evil in this world is so trivial, like the mice on a ship, that God doesn’t waste his time with something that isn’t his problem. Evil is an Earthly problem and needs to be dealt with in an Earthly manner. No higher power is going to intercede and fix the problem for us. God has left it up to us. That leads to the next statement after Candide has finished contemplating the dervish’s preaching. As Candide walks with Panglos, he makes the statement: ” We must go and work in the garden “(pg. 144). This is Voltaire’s way of explaining why the problem of evil is not Gods issue. Voltaire uses the garden to represent the world. We as a people who created evil must come and cultivate or weed out the evil in the world. God leaves it up to the people of Earth to seek out the evils of the world and not let them spread. This philosophy is a corner stone for the entire novel and its statement can be applied to the time that Voltaire was living in.

In conclusion, this novel projects many philosophies on life even satirizes some of them. Candide’s travels revealed to us these philosophies that Voltaire held dear and some that he didn’t quit agree with. Voltaire’s philosophies of the utopian society, optimism, and that ” we must go and work in our gardens ” are statements that Voltaire was trying to make to the world of his day to point out failings of the world and misconceptions about philosophical ideas.