

Strength Through Adversity

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How does a person stay true to his naïve belief? Sooner or later, everyone has to face the harsh world that is at his or her doorsteps. Reality comes in many forms, it depends on how each of us views it and digests it later on. The book *Candide* by Voltaire, tells the epic journeys of three main characters that challenge the capabilities of their physical and mental strength against the real world problem. This paper will show the naïve mind of man when they are placed in a difficult situation by looking at the mental condition of the three main characters, Candide's perception about his sufferings, and his choice of salvation from reality at the end of the book.

This paper will focus on the character's discovery of their harsh society and its impact on their view on life later on. Candide, Pangloss and Cunegonde are the three main characters. In the first chapter, Candide was content with his life in the castle with his lover Cunegonde and Pangloss as his mentor. After he was banished from the castle, Candide went on life-changing adventures that led him to buy a farm and live with his friends. In the beginning, Candide was naïve about his situation. For example, after he was flogged publically he still believed he living in the best of all worlds (V., 1991, p.13). Also, he admitted that his love for Cunégonde and his blind dream to reunite with her was his reason to continue living after all the misfortune he suffered. Candide's reason to continue living is naïve because he does not have any plans on where and how he is going to see Cunégonde again. His blind dream was vague which he thought he would be happy just by being with Cunégonde. Later, Candide discovered that money, peace, and liberty could not bring him true happiness. Even after buying the freedom of his slave, Cacambo, and marrying Cunégonde, Candide was not happy and his effort did not make any of his friends content with their lives. Candide's optimism fluctuates in his journey and he realized the only way to be happy is through self-directed improvement and work.

On the other hand, Candide's mentor Pangloss remained positive throughout his journey. His famous quote "best of all possible worlds" was Pangloss's optimistic foundation when he was overwhelmed by syphilis, a near death situation, false accusations and imprisonment (V., 1991, p. 13-81). In the end, Pangloss still preserved his philosophy but he had trouble believing it after all he had been through. He does not want to tarnish the beauty of his idea with his new knowledge and thus stating his optimistic idea would remain more attractive than reality (V., 1991, p. 81).

For Cunégonde, she was beautiful and adored by suitors wherever she was sold to. She believed the world was perfect and simple until she was raped, sold and tossed around by many man for sexual purposes. Cunégonde placed herself as the victim of every situation until the old woman told Cunegonde her story and that there are other people who have far worse luck than her. In the end, Cunegonde became ugly and she realized that she is just a piece of meat. She saw Candide as her savior, she reminded and pleaded him to marry her in order to save herself from the harsh reality (V., 1991, p. 82). Cunegonde who thought she was a beautiful woman living in a perfect world discovered she is just a pawn in society. These three naïve characters undergo life-changing events that make them different people by the end of the book.

Voltaire gave the characters a push to the tough reality outside their castle walls. It seems the author wanted to point out that humans are at the mercy of their society. At first, the characters were shrouded by luxuries and pampered by it. But Candide and his friends had to suffered through trials that tormented them until they are able find a way to escape from their rigid reality. In chapter 22 of the book, Candide said, "All marvelously well; these are but the shadows on a beautiful picture" (V., 1991, p. 60). Candide chose to view those events as stepping-stones to where he is now, he sees those as lessons for him to learn for a greater cause

in the future. If he had chose to sit by and do nothing, he would not be able to live to realized that he has chasing a blind dream which is to marry Cunégonde. In the book, Candide was shocked by the change in Cunégonde looks that he could not recognized her, but he remembered his promised to her and he married her because he believed it was his duty (V., 1991, p. 81-83). Even after all he has been through, he was not content and happy that he got his wish to be with Cunégonde. Therefore, it is better for the characters to have suffered through their trials in order to gain an insight on their flaws and ignorance about reality. If they just sit by and do nothing, those moments would pass but it does stop reality from coming back into their lives. By sufferings, Candide's view on the world has shifted to the empirical reality lens where he use his experiences he gained from his journey that would influence his judgment in the future.

In chapter 30, Candide said, "All that is very well, but let us cultivate our garden." (V., 1991, p. 87). In Candide's words, he decided to cultivate his own garden in his land and gain benefit from it. The way Candide sees his garden as the way for him to control his reality on his own. Even when he took the jewels and lambs he could carry from El Dorado to the outside world, it brought him misery than being the riches man in the world. According to John Locke (1980), "Every man has a property in his own person. This nobody has a right to, but himself" (p. 18-30). In this garden that symbolize Locke's State of Property, Candide realized that he was greedy and took too much from nature without adding his own labor into it. Therefore, he understood that everyone has their own land and they have to cultivate from it. Thus, he puts his labor into it and gains its value. Only then he is able to appreciate its benefit from nature.

Pangloss stated that unlike Adam and Eve who started out from the Garden of Eden, Candide and his friends ended up in their own Garden of Eden (V., 1991, p. 87). Compared to the beginning of the book, Candide was ignorant about the reality as he was trapped behind the

castle walls that he thought were his utopia. If not for his romantic action towards Cunégonde, he would still be stuck in the castle. That action was his first sin like Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit. Candide had to experience what society and reality has in store for him in return for him to be enlighten about his naïve philosophy. At the end, Candide bought a farm and made it his own utopia. He chose his subjects, which are his friends to be part of it. Then, he believes that with everyone's ability to toil the land, they will be free from the harsh reality as they will be too busy thinking about the good and bad of the world (V., 1991, p. 84-87). Candide did become wiser at the end with his own El Dorado compared to the castle. This shows human were naïve of their society until they experience it by themselves, and nothing could satisfy them unless they put their efforts into it.

As human's minds are naïve to the idea of reality itself, Candide and his friends' fate were not so kind as they were tested in numerous trials and on their faith to survive to the end. Voltaire ended the book with Candide having his own garden satires solution for human suffering by withdrawing from society after realizing his or her own desires. This act helps them to distract themselves from their unhappiness and concentrate on building their own society from nature. Candide views his Garden of Eden as the best of all possible worlds.

References

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