

# Humanities 4: Lectures 7-8

Voltaire's *Candide*



# Voltaire's *Candide*

- Intellectual Background
- Historical Context
- Biographical Sketch
- *Candide*
  - Literary Form
  - Official topic (optimism)
  - Targets of its criticism
  - Positive causes

# Intellectual Background

- Pierre Bayle
- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz
- French Enlightenment: The *Philosophes*



# Pierre Bayle



- 1647-1706
- *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Historical and Critical Dictionary) 1695-97
- Skeptical Atheist or Fideist?



# Gottfried Leibniz



- 1646-1716
- Universal genius
- As a philosopher
  - monadology
  - Principle of Sufficient Reason
  - Free will & determinism
  - *Theodicy* (1710)

# Leibniz's Optimism

- Claim: This is the best of all possible worlds.
- Argument
  - God is omniscient.
  - God is omnipotent.
  - God is omnibenevolent.
  - Thus, God created the best possible world.
- Objection: Why, then, does evil exist?
  - moral vs. natural evil
    - free will
    - privation and permission



# French Enlightenment

- Anti-cleric and anti-establishment
- The *Philosophes*
  - Montesquieu (1689-1755)
  - Diderot (1713-84) & D'Alembert (1717-83)
  - La Mettrie (1709-51) & D'Holbach (1723-89)
- Salons and Literacy

# Historical Context:

## 18th Cent. France, Ancien Régime

- Political structure of the *Ancien Régime*
  - Absolutism: Louis XIV (1643-1715) & Louis XV (1715-1774)
  - Three Estates
- Economic structure
  - Taxes for military purposes & court at Versailles
  - Taxes obtained in inefficient and arbitrary ways
- Military Conflicts
  - War of Austrian Succession & Seven Years' War



# Voltaire's Life (1694-1778)

- European-wide residencies
- Occupations
- Relationships
- Literary Range
- Temperament
- Lisbon earthquake

# *Candide as a Literary Work*

- *Satire*
  - *Definition: a literary technique that exposes the follies of its subject (individuals, organizations, or states) to ridicule, often as an intended means of provoking or preventing change.*
- *Picaresque novel*
  - *Definition: a subgenre of usually satiric prose fiction that depicts in realistic, often humorous, detail the adventures of a roguish hero living by his or her wits in a corrupt society.*



# *Candide's Main Characters*

- Candide
- Pangloss
- Martin
- Cunégonde
- Cacambo

# *Candide's Literary Structure*

- Several possible divisions:
  - Three Parts: Old World (Chs. 1-10), New World (11-20), Old World (21-30), or
  - Two Parts: before and after Eldorado, or
  - Entrance & Exit of Candide's companions: Pangloss, Cunegonde, Cacambo, Martin
- Accelerated Plot
- Resurrections
- Conclusion
  - "work our land"



# *Candide: The Official Topic*

## Optimism

- Possible Philosophical Consequences
  - Atheism?
  - Pessimism?
  - Denial of the relevance of philosophy?
- Rhetorical device
- Foil for criticisms of particular issues

# Voltaire's Targets

- Organized Religion (I and II)
  - Clergy (various orders)
  - Inquisition
  - Muslims
  - Jews
- The State
- The Military
- Man



# V's Targets: Organized Religion

- The Clergy
  - Having sex (repeatedly) & passing on syphilis (e.g., 8)
  - Pope Urban X fathering a child (who becomes the old woman helping C & C) (20)
  - Orders:
    - Franciscan friar steals Cunegonde's diamonds (19) and informs on C & C's travels when caught (29)
    - Benedict. friar buys C & C's horse at bargain price (19)
    - Jesuits in Paraguay encourage tribes to resist the kings of Spain and Portugal (19, 29)
  - Theological debate in Europe is likened to syphilis (9)
  - Monks "teach, argue, rule, conspire and burn people who don't agree with them" (39) & Parisian abbot (53-5)
  - BUT, Jacques, the Anabaptist (6-7) is generous.

# V's Targets: Org. Religion II

- The Inquisition
  - *Auto-da-fé*. To prevent further earthquakes, Pangloss and C. are punished, “the first for having spoken, and the second for having listened with an air of approval” (13).
  - Inquisitor “shares” Cunegonde with Issachar (16),
    - BUT C kills the Inquisitor.
- Muslims
  - Fight vicious civil war, but still pray 5 times a day (23) and other absurd judgments (73-74)
- Jews
  - Religious views aren't target, financial deals are.



# Voltaire's Targets: The State

- Courts' inefficiency and cost (45)
- Police corruption (57)
- Policies (58)
- Deposed royalty at dinner in Venice (68)

# Voltaire's Targets: The Military

- C's time in the Bulgar army (pp. 4-6)  
Cunegonde's treatment (15)
- Various atrocities justified by "the law war" (25) or "international law" (22)
- Knowing the "Bulgar drill" is sign of special expertise (19, 28-9)
- Plymouth Execution (58-59)



# Voltaire's Targets: Man

- “public miseries” vs. “secret sufferings”: envy, anxiety, disquiet (47)
- Power relations:
  - “weak loathe the powerful, while cringing before them, and the powerful treat them like sheep whose wool and meat go to market”
  - “A thousand assassins organized in regiments run from one end of Europe to another, carrying out murder and robbery”
- Three main preoccupations:
  - “love, speaking ill of each other, and talking nonsense” (48)

# Voltaire's Positive Causes

- The treatment of women
  - The old woman (20ff.)
  - Paquette (60)
- Work (menial labor)
  - To relieve boredom?
  - To avoid theorizing?



# Voltaire & the Enlightenment

- Highly critical of prevalent institutions
  - Esp. church in all of its forms
- Satire as his method presupposes rational standards
- No clear, positive proposal for progress