

## VOLTAIRE, CANDIDE -- IDEAS FOR READING

The plot is basically the education of Candide, from his original innocence and dependence upon the ideas of a mentor, to gradually opening his eyes to the world around him and coming to a sensible (Voltairean) point of view.

Show how the human condition in the 18th century is depicted in the novel. Do human beings suffer from physical misery coming from natural causes? What about the suffering and evil inflicted by humans upon themselves? What are Voltaire's favorite targets (religion, intolerance, war, etc.)?

When would-be reformers look at the human condition, they must first overcome certain attitudes. Pococurante. Martin and his Manichean pessimism. Focus especially on the "philosophy of optimism" put forth by Pangloss (derived from the philosophy of Leibniz) -- this is the best of all possible worlds, from partial evil comes universal good, etc. Are the ideas of Martin and Pangloss really that much different? What is the impact of "optimism" on our willingness to face up to the presence of evil in the world and to do something about it?

Does Voltaire give us any model of what he wants? The character and behavior of James the Anabaptist? What about the institutions and society of El Dorado? Even if he likes this place, does he think it really attainable? Do certain plot patterns influence your interpretation -- e.g., the condition of Cunegonde when Candide finally finds her?

Does Voltaire have a solution to the problem of evil in the world? Does politics play any role? What is the meaning of Candide's final statement -- "we must cultivate our own garden?"