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A central theme in Voltaire's *Candide* is the philosophy put forth by Dr. Pangloss. His beliefs are a combination of optimism and determinism: that, as explained by his follower Candide, "there is no effect without a cause … all things are necessarily connected and arranged for the best" (26). Voltaire attacks this belief throughout the novel, demonstrating that it is inconsistent with the reality of the world. Ultimately, both Candide and Pangloss change their views as they realize this inconsistency.

Pangloss and his philosophies are introduced with hints of their absurdity. He is introduced as a teacher of "metaphysico-theologo-cosmolo-nigo-logy" (20), and his logic has a similarly nonsensical quality. His "incontestable" proof that "it is impossible for things not to be where they are, for everything is for the best" (35) arises from such odd contentions as "Legs were clearly intended for breeches, and we wear them." (20). He believes that everything is arranged in a "pre-established harmony" (136) and that it is necessarily for the best.

Candide initially shares Pangloss's philosophy, but the suffering and cruelty he encounters convince him otherwise. Nearly every character suffers some horrible fate: Candide is beaten by the Bulgar army and the Inquisition; Pangloss is disfigured by a disease then hung as a heretic; the honest Anabaptist Jacques is drowned; the Lady Cunégonde is ravished and disemboweled. These lead him to question his optimistic outlook: when he is told that Cunégonde is dead, he exclaims "Oh, what has become of the best of worlds?" (29). He realizes that "whatever Professor Pangloss might say, I often noticed that all went badly in Westphalia" (77). The only place in which Pangloss's notions are reasonable is in the utopian kingdom of Eldorado, where gold and jewels are so ubiquitous as to be garbage, courts and prisons are unnecessary, and everyone including the King treats Candide and his companion with equality and respect. Even this, however, cannot be the best of all possible worlds, for before long Candide must leave the isolation of Eldorado to seek Cunégonde.

Pangloss clings more strongly to his views, but eventually comes to the same conclusion.

When he is reduced to a beggar covered with sores, he still professes optimism. He ascribes a distinguished genealogy to his disease and claims that it is "indispensable in this best of worlds … a necessary ingredient" (30). However, he too suffers sufficiently to change his opinion. After he is hung by the Inquisition then survived only to be enslaved, he tells Candide that he "still hold[s his] original views," but only because "I am a philosopher [and] it would not be proper for me to recant" (136), Indeed, though he continues to halfheartedly express it, he no longer remains convinced of his original philosophy: "he still maintained [that everything would turn out right in some marvelous way], however little he believed it" (140). Thus Voltaire expresses his belief in folly of an optimistic attitude such as Pangloss's by depicting a world so full of evil and misfortune that not only Candide but even Pangloss must lose faith in their original beliefs.