



Life and Work of Voltaire



Who Was Voltaire?

- Born November 21, 1694, in Paris, France.
 - Given the name Francois-Marie d'Arouet, he was the fourth of five children.
- Born into a middleclass family, part of the societal elite.
 - Father was a public official.
 - Mother was of aristocratic descent.
- Educated at College Louis-le-Grand located in Paris.
 - Began as a student of law and became a lawyer's apprentice, then secretary to a French diplomat, but abandoned both positions to become a writer.
- Established himself as an independent man of letters in Paris
- Debuted first play, "Oedipe," and pen name Voltaire in 1718
 - Marks Voltaire's ascent into elite literary society



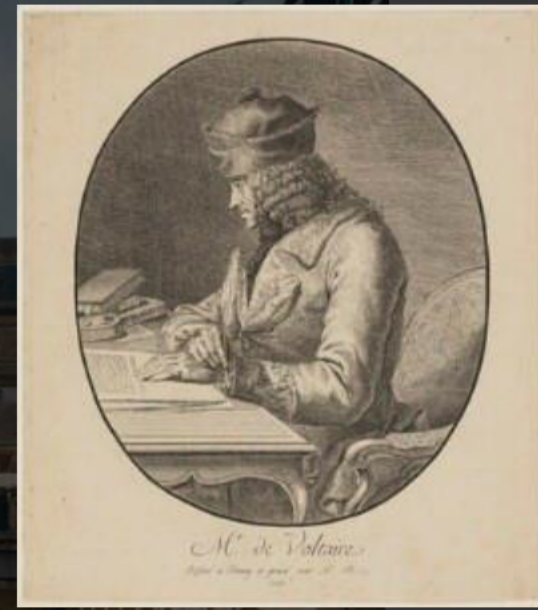
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Monsieur de Voltaire

C. Corbelli fecit.

Early Life

- 1720's: Voltaire's work consisted of a mix of poetry and plays that shifted between libertinism, classicism, and philosophy.
 - Shaped his views by association with Jacobite Lord Bolingbroke, whose chateau was a meeting place for individuals.
- 1726-1729: Voltaire was exiled from France.
 - Accused of defamation by aristocrat Duc de Rohan
 - Traveled to England for exile marks transition to philosophy.
 - Met with English writers who experimented with literary form and Sir Isaac Newton.
 - Learned English natural philosophy.
 - Visited Holland to meet Dutch journalists and writers.
- 1729: Voltaire returned to France a changed writer and thinker.
 - Removed from the court of Versailles and revoked access to pensions.
 - Worked to restore financial and political support.
 - Restored finances by purchasing shares in the French debt lottery and inheritance.



Life continued...

- 1732 Voltaire returned to the court of Versailles.
 - Restored reputation through Old Regime, the political and social system established in the Valois and Bourbon dynasties, patronage system and slowly regaining public opinion.
- 1733 Voltaire begun a relationship with a previous patron's daughter, Marquise du Chatelet.
 - Marquise du Chatelet was married to a military officer, ten years younger than Voltaire, she had her own education and intellectual career.
- 1734 – 1749 Unapproved publishing of Voltaire's Letters Concerning the English Nation caused Voltaire to take residence at du Chatelet estate in Cirey.



Late Life

- Bestowed the title of Royal Historiographer of France in 1745.
- Established himself further in the Old Regime society after Marquise du Chatelet's death in 1749.
- Published criticism against Royal Academy Sciences of Berlin in 1752 and called a rebel for the writings.
- Purchased personal chateau between France and Switzerland remains there until 1759.
- Died May 30th, 1778, in Paris, France.



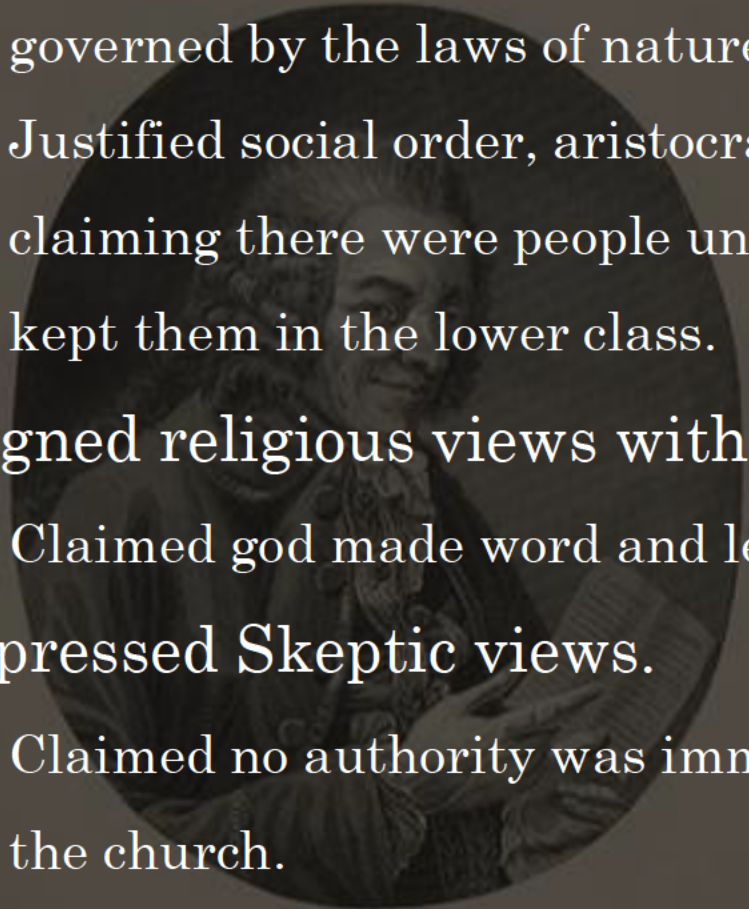
Prominent Works:

- 1718 Oedipe
- 1745 Elements of the Philosophy of Newton
- 1751 An Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of Nations
- 1755 Voltaire contributes articles to Encyclopaedia
 - French publication rights revoked 1759
- 1759 Candide
- 1763 Treatise on Tolerance
- 1764 - 1770 Philosophical Dictionary



Voltaire's Beliefs:

- Considered a liberalist.
 - Questioned human freedoms by arguing humans were creatures of free will but governed by the laws of nature.
 - Justified social order, aristocracy and upper class above the working class, by claiming there were people unable to control their nature and the lack of control kept them in the lower class.
- Aligned religious views with deism.
 - Claimed god made word and left it to run.
- Expressed Skeptic views.
 - Claimed no authority was immune to critical thinking and questioning, especially the church.
 - Believed philosophy that subverted doubt and appealed to the imagination was not philosophy.



PHILOSOPHICAL DICTIONARY;

FROM THE FRENCH

M. DE VOLTAIRE.

WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES, BOTH CRITICAL AND ARGUMENTATIVE,

By ABNER KNEELAND.

Without Philosophy, we should be little above the animals that dig or seek their sustenance, prepare their food to them, take care of their little ones in their dwellings, and have, besides, the good fortune, which we have not, of being less easily cheated.—*Fal. J. p. 30.*

How charming to divine Philosophy!
Not harsh, and cold, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectar'd verse,
Where no crude words their rights—*Milton's Com.*

AMERICAN STEREO TYPE EDITION.

VOLUME I.

BOSTON:

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Voltaire's Beliefs Continued:

- Argued with hedonistic values.
 - Said morality was based on a positive perspective on personal and bodily pleasure.
 - Rooted arguments in the hedonistic value to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.
- Defended Newtonian natural philosophy.
 - Valued the empirical sciences over traditional natural philosophy
 - Defense of Newtonianism classified Voltaire as an outlaw until French society accepted the philosophy in 1750.

World During Voltaire's Life:

- 1715 – 1723 France experienced a regency period of cultural vibrancy between the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV.
- People lost faith in divine right, kings, and queens as just; people sparked wars throughout the eighteenth century over the ruling class.
 - Challenged through satire.
- Develop the modern sciences from Enlightenment desire for the truth.
- Increase in literacy
 - Use of convention in writing to align with modern ideas of world structure
 - Allowed for new ideas to spread more into the general populous
- Beginning of the French Revolution, 1789.

Enlightenment Ideas:

- Separation from religion, sciences, and the mind into different aspects of study and life.
- Commit to the concept of universal truth, individualism, and progression of science.
- Rise of empiricism, the conception of truth and knowledge from experiences.
- Use of skepticism to call reasonings into question for rational justification.
 - Places authority in reason rather than pre-existing authority or religion.
 - Questions the experience that led to knowledge rather than interpretation of an event.

Enlightenment Continued...

- Shifts the focus of science to humanism and human capability limits.
- Altered views on religion.
 - Allowed people to develop new perspective on church; saw the church as separate from science and no longer all powerful.
 - Questioned the people of the church as opposed to God directly.
- Developed views of natural order.
 - Questioned relationship between things in nature and the laws that dictate nature itself.
 - Looked at humans as a fully natural creatures and extended the scientific understanding of people to the world.
- Argued about the nature of human reason.
 - Focused on the innate power of humans and their limitations.



Analyzing *Candide*

- Voltaire uses the character in *Candide* to express the different applications of skepticism during the Enlightenment.
 - Pangloss represents a perspective lacking skepticism.
 - Martin represents a perspective with an abundance of skepticism.
 - The Grand Inquisitor represents why readers should utilize skepticism.

Pangloss and Skepticism:

"Pangloss was right indeed when he told me everything is for the best in this world "(Voltaire 8641).

- Teaching his view to Candide, Pangloss creates the main point of conflict in *Candide*.
- Viewing everything for the best creates problems for Candide throughout his journey because he never looks too closely at any person or occurrence for ulterior motives.
- Establishes to readers that blind trust in others and a good outcome result in being taken advantage of in less ideal circumstances.
- Assessing people and situations with a skeptical eye allows for many of the circumstances Candide suffers from to be avoided.

Martin and Skepticism:

"I don't believe... any of the dreams which people have"(Voltaire 9337).

- Shows skepticism in action through Martin by asserting that Martin does not believe things that are not real.
- Supported view with concepts of empiricism, that knowledge comes from experiences instead of imagined scenarios.
- Pushes readers toward a skeptical view by contrasting Candide's lack of skepticism with Pangloss's teachings.
- Exemplifies the difference in perspective from Pangloss to Martin through Martin's use of skepticism.

The Grand Inquisitor and Skepticism:

"The Grand Inquisitor took notice of me at mass;
he ogled me a good deal"(Voltaire 8650).

- Calls into question through skepticism the separation of church values and human control.
- Shows readers that people do not always act following the values society expects them to uphold.
- Maintaining skepticism when viewing others allows readers to discover the nuances between someone's presentation and actions or words.
- Shows that skepticism can reveal a person's nature and prevent a reader from being taken advantage of like Candide.

Conclusion

- Pushing different forms of skepticism in his characters, I. Voltaire teaches readers to analyze the world around them and seek the truth.
- Pangloss shows what happens if you are not skeptical of others and the world.
- Martin reveals to readers the world from a skeptic's eyes.
- The Grand Inquisitor provides an example of what readers should be skeptical of in their own lives.

CANDID*: OR, THE OPTIMIST.

CHAP. I.

How Candid was brought up in a magnificent castle; and how he was driven from thence.

IN the country of Westphalia, in the castle of the most noble baron of Thunder-ten-tronckh, lived a youth, whom Nature had endowed with a most sweet disposition. His father was the greatest part of his mind. He had a solid judgment joined to the most unaffected simplicity; and hence I presume he had

* The principal design of this performance, (if the author had any other design but that of amusing his readers) is to ridicule that maxim in Ethics, that every thing which happens, is the best calculated to answer the wise ends of Providence: but it likewise contains a very severe satire on the morals, manners, and customs of mankind.

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