

# Dust in the Wind

by  
John Williams

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The hopefulness that the character of Dr. Pangloss shows during the unpleasant circumstances in which he finds himself borders on foolishness. That worldview appears to be the antithesis of the views of other Enlightenment writers such as John Locke. This paper will examine the core of Pangloss's belief and contrast it with Locke's philosophy.

In Voltaire's *Candide* (1758), the foundation of the system to which Dr. Pangloss subscribes is that "everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds" (Sayre 817). The character's circumstances are an unpleasant account of a series of calamities. He is taken from the hangman's noose and sold as a cadaver, though he was not dead. He is partially dissected by a barber surgeon. He is pressed into service on a galley as a slave because of his Christian faith. Finally, he is scourged each day due to his disputes with a shipmate. After all that, Pangloss is reunited with his pupil and exclaims "the concatenation of sublunary events brought you on board to ransom us from slavery" (Sayre 835). This implies that there was no action that Pangloss could have taken that would alter the trajectory of his life, as if he is just dust being blown around at the mercy of the wind to land wherever it is taken.

In his *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690), John Locke wrote about the human mind being a blank slate upon which life experiences etch one's ideas. As a person perceives, considers, and examines their surroundings and circumstances, their thoughts are shaped by their senses and "convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things" (Sayre 769). The very awareness of how our minds are working to perceive the reality around us gives us power over the environment by "perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing, and all the different actings of our own minds" (Sayre 769). A person is an active participant and has influence over the events that unfold around them.

Ultimately, the fiction of Pangloss's belief is revealed and the realization that one's destiny is determined by the effect that one has on their environment, leaving the rest of the world to itself. Locke would surely recoil at the notion of a serendipitous walk through life that had no thought or action that would affect a beneficial outcome.

## **Works Cited (Bibliography)**

Sayre, Henry M. *The Humanities. Culture, Continuity and Change*. Book 4. Saddle Rock, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012. Print.