Voltaire’s Victims and Us

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> “J’écris pour agir” (Voltaire)

At the beginning of chapter XIX of Voltaire’s “conte philosophique,” we find Candide and Cacambo, his faithful companion and sounding board, en route from El Dorado and laden with some of its untold wealth, which they see as the unshakable foundation of their imminent happiness: “Nous sommes” says Cacambo, “au bout de nos peines et au commencement de notre félicité” [We are at the end of our travails and at the beginning of our happiness]. This last word has a cruelly ironic resonance, as we are immediately confronted by the exhibition of human ignominy, or “infamy” in Voltaire’s terms, that is recounted in the next two paragraphs:

> En approchant de la ville, ils rencontrèrent un nègre étendu par terre, n’ayant plus que la moitié de son habit, c’est-à-dire d’un caleçon de toile bleue; il manquait à ce pauvre homme la jambe gauche et la main droite. “Eh, mon Dieu, lui dit Candide en hollandais, que fais-tu là, mon ami, dans l’état horrible où je te vois? J’attends mon maître, M. Vanderdendur, le fameux négociant, répondit le nègre. C’est ce M. Vanderdendur, dit Candide, qui t’a traité ainsi? Oui, monsieur, dit le nègre, c’est l’usage. On nous donne un caleçon de toile pour tout vêtement deux fois l’année. Quand nous travaillons aux sucreries, et que la meule nous attrape le doigt, on nous coupe la main; quand nous voulons nous enfuir, on nous coupe la jambe: je me suis trouvé dans les deux cas. C’est à ce prix que vous mangez du sucre en Europe. Cependant, lorsque ma mère me vendit dix écus patagons sur la côte de Guinée, elle me disait: “mon cher enfant, bénis nos fétiches, adore-les toujours, il te feront vivre heureux, tu as l’honneur d’être esclave de nos seigneurs les blancs, et tu fais par là la fortune de ton père et de ta mère.” Hélas! je ne sais pas si j’ai fait leur fortune, mais ils n’ont pas fait la mienne. Les chiens, les singes et les perroquets sont mille fois moins malheureux que nous. Les fétiches hollandais qui m’ont converti me disent tous les dimanches que nous sommes tous enfants d’Adam, blancs et noirs. Or vous m’avouerez qu’on ne peut pas en user avec ses parents d’une manière plus horrible.

—O Pangloss! s'écria Candide, tu n'avais pas deviné cette abomination; c'en est fait, il faudra qu'à la fin je renonce à ton optimisme. —Qu'est-ce que l'optimisme? disait Cacambo. —Hélas! dit Candide, c'est la rage de soutenir que tout est bien quand on est mal." Et il versait des larmes en regardant son nègre, et en pleurant il entra dans Surinam.

[As they were approaching the town, they noticed a negro lying full length at the side of the road and wearing nothing but a pair of blue drawers. The poor fellow had no left leg and no right hand. Candide addressed him in Dutch: "What are you doing here, my friend?" he asked. "And what a dreadful state you are in!" "I am waiting for my master, Mr. Vanderdendur, who owns the famous sugar-works," replied the negro. "Did Mr. Vanderdendur treat you like this?" asked Candide. "Yes, Sir," said the negro, "it's the custom. For clothing we are given a pair of canvas drawers twice a year. Those of us who work in the factories and happen to catch a finger in the grindstone have a hand chopped off; if we try to escape they cut off a leg. Both accidents happened to me. That's the price of your eating sugar in Europe. My mother sold me on the coast of Guinea for fifty Spanish shillings. When she parted with me, she said: 'Always honor and adore your fetishes, my dear boy, and they will make you happy; you have the honor of being a slave for milords the white men, and that is how you will make your parents' fortune.' I don't know whether I made their fortune," he continued, with a shake of his head, "but they certainly did not make mine. Dogs, monkeys, and parrots are much less miserable than we are. The Dutch fetishes, who converted me, tell me every Sunday that we are all children of Adam, black and white alike. I am no genealogist; but if these preachers speak the truth, we must all be cousins. Now, you will surely agree that relations could not be treated more horribly."

"Oh, Pangloss!" cried Candide. "A scandal like this never occurred to you. But it's the truth, and I shall have to renounce that optimism of yours in the end." "What is optimism?" asked Cacambo. "It's the passion for maintaining that all is right when all goes wrong with us," replied Candide, weeping as he looked at the negro. And with tears in his eyes, he pursued his way to Surinam. (Penguin trans.)]

We do not need an elaborate conceptual or theoretical apparatus to get Voltaire's point: human oppression and cruelty are clearly exposed to censure, along with systemic self-deception about it, which may very well be Voltaire's strongest point. I shall nonetheless engage some basic insights of René Girard's Mimetic Theory and of Eric Gans's Generative Anthropology which builds on it in order to highlight salient features of this episode that have poignant relevance for us today. Girard focuses on sacrificial violence as the origin of human culture, Gans on the deferral of violence through representation: Girard draws our attention to victims, who clearly concern us here; Gans's linguistic approach enables us to grasp more precisely just how our sympathy with the victim is achieved.

Gans has hypothesized that the origin of language, and therefore of the human species as uniquely symbol-using animals, arises from the deferral of violence through representation. To be human, he writes, is to be "too mimetic to remain an animal" (*Originary Thinking* 8) because imitative behavior among us higher mammals has evolved in inverse proportion to instinctual brakes to our mimetic violence, with a consequent breakdown of dominance patterns and pecking orders that stabilize other animal groups. A protohuman or hominid group could only have convened around a desirable prey it had killed long enough to share it peacefully if the act of seizing it provoked a sense of danger from rival contenders that was strong enough to oblige the participants to hesitate and only gesture to its appetitive object. He posits the first sign as an *aborted gesture of appropriation* designating the object as attractive and inaccessible, as sacred, as having the power of convening predators in a moment of "non-instinctual attention" (Girard's expression in *Things Hidden* 99-100) to a center holding the group together. Ritual repetition of this ostensive sign, of this *convention*, resulted in more elaborate forms of collaboration and of linguistic expression, ultimately leading to the declarative sentence. Thus there obtains a key distinction in Gans's formal theory of representation between ostensive, performative language ("Ecce homo," "Crucify him") and declarative utterance, a latecomer to our linguistic facility, which states a fact or a truth in the absence of its referent ("Jesus died and was raised from the dead"), and from which metaphysics no less than fiction draw their formidable and, to some, equally fabulous careers.

A notorious feature of Voltaire's *Candide* is its radical empiricism, its massive attack on metaphysical speculation in the name of indisputably brutal facts. Pangloss' optimistic lucubrations on the law of sufficient reason (loosely drawn from Leibniz) that argues that what is must be, and therefore must be for a reason, which must be the best possible reason in the best of possible worlds, is systematically trumped by Candide's horrendous experience of "le mal moral et le mal physique" (chs. XX, XXIX) as he wanders all over the world in a mock love quest for his beloved Cunegonde. My focus will be on irony, for which Voltaire is best known, and which Gans shows to be an essential property of all language.

The value of Gans's "originary analysis" for stylistic commentary is to center our attention on the fundamental ambiguity of signs, the fact that they relate at once vertically, transcendentally, formally to objects in the world and count as well among the objects in the world. This paradoxical, or shall we say ironic, structure can help us to understand more precisely just how we get Voltaire's point. In so doing we can illustrate very concretely Gans's conception of literature as a "discovery procedure" (*Originary Thinking* 132) and demonstrate further how that procedure is linked to biblical anthropology, to which Girard assigns the core inspiration of his Mimetic Theory (*Things Hidden* II; *Evolution and Conversion* ch. 6). Girard's insights were first inspired by his study of the novel, where patterns of conscious and non-conscious imitation emerge in works from Cervantes through Proust (*Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*). It is not, however, necessary to believe in biblical revelation, as Girard emphatically does, to acknowledge its foundational role for Voltaire's

irony.

Of all the rhetorical ploys worthy of comment here, I shall emphasize those which exhibit this essential feature of Enlightenment reasoning, namely its religious and specifically Christian inspiration, whereby the text performs a critique of Western religion from within its own scriptural tradition.

The mention of the “toile bleue,” of the left leg and right hand, is not gratuitous. The narrative zooms in to provide just enough visual and realist-seeming detail to place readers in the presence of this lamentable figure and to warrant the judgment “horrible” for the man’s “état.” On the other hand, the speaking “en hollandais” lightens the tone by its very irrelevance, an effect that is maintained by the fast-pacing attributives—”dit Candide,” “répondit le nègre,” “dit Candide,” “dit le nègre”—which naturalize, socialize (“mon ami”), civilize a dialogue about horror.

The incongruity of style, or form, and content is a key artifice of satire—think of Swift’s “Modest Proposal”—and it is deployed amply here. To describe such treatment of the slave as “l’usage,” the custom, is in every sense a strategic understatement, for it only magnifies the atrocity by suggesting its commonplace, prosaic ubiquity. Understatement is employed again when the slave summarizes his double mutilation, indicating in effect the brutal economy of slave labor, with the relatively neutral, synoptic formulation: “Je me suis trouvé dans le deux cas.” Then Voltaire lowers the boom on his readers, placing us in direct, causal relation to the victim’s suffering: “C’est à ce prix que vous mangez du sucre en Europe.” The notion of economy, whose worldwide spread today is known as globalization, is thematized by the word “prix,” and it is understood in this context as sacrificial: mutilation here functions as a kind of slow-motion dismemberment and European consumers are drawn into the role of participant-beneficiaries. The force of the statement lies in the disproportion between the huge cost in human suffering borne by others and the trivial benefit to our appetites, between the atrocity and the amenity.

The denunciation of slavery, which downgrades humans from persons to possessions, is clinched by reference to the biblical story of originary Adamic consanguinuity. The creation narrative establishes absolute human equality, “blancs et noirs,” as preached insistently —”tous les dimanches”—by the missionary catechesis, to whose truth—”si ces prêcheurs disent vrai”—Voltaire’s European readers are doctrinally pledged and bound, to which they are in principle compelled to assent. Irony works here not to pit the slaves against the masters but the masters against themselves. Its intention is not to urge revolt but cognitive and spiritual revolution; a conversion, in sum, which is in fact thematized at the end of the dialogue. Something held up as Biblical truth is juxtaposed teasingly, via circumlocutionary understatement, to its flagrantly violent repudiation. The structure of the sentence unfolds like a slow-motion artillery barrage; it simulates the serenity of cool syllogistic reasoning (“Or vous m’avouerez”), establishing a conversational tone that is in outrageous

contradiction with its “horrible” referent. The sentence defers, postpones the shock of recognition in order to deepen its impression, whereby its readers are slowly but surely branded not as soul savers but as persecutors. I will return to this latter point further on.

For all the transparency of Voltaire’s irony, and just because of its simplicity, it is worthwhile to analyze its properly *deconstructive* operations, consisting in a leveling *critique of difference* among humans of the kind that Scripture advertises when it proclaims mountains shall be lowered and valleys filled to “make straight the way of the Lord.”

Irony is ostensibly a simple trope. It consists in saying the opposite of what is meant, it proceeds typically by antiphrasis, as is the case when, regarding the Inquisition, we read of “un bel auto-da-fè” (ch. VI), or of war as “boucherie héroïque (ch. III), or, as here, “l’honneur d’être esclave.” Like all rhetorical tropes, irony triggers an esthetic experience of language, which Generative Anthropology defines as an oscillation of our attention between signs and their referent, such that the artful manipulation of signs both draws from and lends to the prestige or sacrality of what they represent (Signs of Paradox 25, 27, 29, 136-39). This conception offers a more palpable sense to the widely held conviction about the religious origin of art (McKenna, “Art and Incarnation”).

How does that work in this episode, where the function of irony is to withdraw respect for the colonizing referent, to downgrade an accepted practice, to utterly deride and diminish it and its agents? What is learned with the knowing smile, the cognitive pleasure, that this experience procures?

Irony says one thing and means another, but unlike lying, its declarative or constative falsehood *means to be perceived* as intending the opposite of what it says (*Candide: Textes et contextes* 283). Gans writes that truth is predicated “as the ‘value’ of the declarative proposition” (the cat is on the mat; the cat is not a mat) (*Signs* 60); in ironic utterance, untruth is more than implied. Irony *ostentatiously* negates what it affirms, and in so doing exploits to the utmost the ambiguity, the double dealing of language that Gans describes as the mimetic paradox, namely, the fact that “the sign that is in the world represents the world it is in; the sign that stands above the world remains within the world of the sign” (*Signs* 35). Both transcendent and immanent to the world, the use of signs generates what the anthropologist Louis Dumont (*Homo hierarchicus*), and Jean-Pierre Dupuy after him (*Le Sacrifice et l’envie* 196-97, 204), has identified as a tangled hierarchy, where the sign names a class of objects of which it is a member; the sign is both inside and outside the world, of the world and beyond it, transcendentally.

The fact that signs can refer to signs among other objects in the world is evidence for the self-referential potential in every use of the sign. Irony exploits this potential to the fullest because of its self-negating, literally para-doxical, double-talking structure. “Paradox, writes Gans, “is the privileged road to understanding the human, because paradox reveals the

seam—the umbilical hole—in the hierarchy of sign and referent that is the essence of human language" (*Signs* 13). Irony consists in an active performance, a dramatic deployment of this paradox; it inhabits that seam, re-marks that hole and makes its home in it; makes it a *scene*, makes a scene about it, to recall a core notion of Generative Anthropology, namely, that human interaction in space and time is experienced as essentially scenic. Opposing the sign to itself, irony is the *mise-en-scène* of language as event, of utterance as performance.(1) Irony is deconstructive in its every instance, its every agency: the dichotomous relation of constative and performative utterance is exposed as a tangled hierarchy: by ostentatiously negating what it affirms, irony performs the difference between declarative or constative utterance and performative, ostensive utterance, and collapses the former into the latter, inscribing both under the heading of the performative. Furthermore, irony instantiates, activates epistemics as ethics: if we say butchery among humans is horrible we are confirming a moral consensus about what it refers to, while implicitly assenting to the ethical telos of language; if we say it is heroic, we are apparently negating that consensus, but just as apparently redoubling it, reiterating it, as it were, upside down or inside out.

Irony plays a double game, a game of double meanings; it trips a mechanism that in comic theater parlance is called a double take ("say, what?!"). It engages language in a mechanism of self-referential contradiction or self-contradictory reference, whereby our attention oscillates—but only fleetingly—between what is said and what is meant as between the constative and the performative. Where the originary ostensive at the origin of language named the central referent as sacred, whereby those on the periphery refrain from a mêlée of acquisitive violence that would dissolve the group, just the opposite occurs with irony: a hitherto hallowed reference (heroics, autodafè) is hollowed out, desacralized; the aura of sanctity or respect enshrouding certain practices is dispelled, definitively profaned. Voltairean irony typically snaps the links of the sacrificial circle that divinizes human violence,(2) creating space for a rational, "enlightened" consensus that renounces it. After Homer, Archilochus (Gans, *The End of Culture*, ch. 10).

In *Signs of Paradox*, Gans devotes a chapter (5) to the structures of irony, though limiting its discussion to classical tragedy and romantic melodrama. This is strange, since it is in Europe's neoclassical era, from Molière and Pascal ("le plaisant dieu que voilà!" he says of us) to Chamfort, and with Dryden, Pope, Swift and Fielding, that irony has its luminously golden age. The chapter ends with this observation, decisive for my purposes: "regardless of wisdom or cynicism, in order for the esthetic to function, we must experience irony through our own lived illusion and disillusion" (74)—to which I would emphasize: in that order. We smile as the scales fall from our eyes because disillusion is lived, performed, consented, with pleasure.

To sum up, first we have the well-known ploys of satire, with its put-down, punishing laughter, what Baudelaire called "le comique significatif" ("De l'essence du rire" V), which

puts the reader on Voltaire's side, which is the victim's side, and which scriptural testimony is invoked to endorse, to ratify, against practices that can no longer be taken seriously on their own terms, that can only be acknowledged henceforth as abuses to be repudiated and abolished. This is the irony of Voltairean irony: he mocks religious practice ("nos fétiches… les fétiches hollandais") by invoking biblical authority; he opposes his culture to itself, from within its own belief system. In so doing, his text is faithful to deepest and strongest current of Europe's religious tradition, which is that of self-criticism, of criticism from within (Alison). This is the legacy of prophetic witness denouncing persecution and disregard for suffering and of penitential psalms denouncing cultic complacency that culminate alike in the Gospel narratives and parables. This anti-sacrificial tradition of human self-inquiry is the launching pad and the engine of Western culture's truth-seeking impulse, which Girard (*The Scapegoat* ch. 15) traces to the representation of social reality from the perspective of the victim rather than from that of the sacrificial crowd or the jeering mob—or clamoring consumers, for that matter—and that goes as far back as the murder of Abel whose blood "cries out from the ground" against his murderous brother. This is the *originary*, if not the only, basis of Voltaire's ringing exclamation to Calas's judges: "Vous devez compte aux hommes du sang des hommes!" [You are accountable to humans for the human blood you spill](http:///www.site-magister.com/intro.htm). Those howling mimetically for blood—or cheaper goods—"know not what they do" (Lk 32.34), but now we know, ineradicably, and nothing is proof against that anthropological revelation. Neoclassic linguistics notoriously identifies the rhetorical trope as an "écart," a departure from standard, straightforward utterance (Fontanier). With irony, signs are at an "écart" from themselves and lived as internal exile. No figure is better suited to self-criticism, the hallmark of Western culture's uniquely anthropological vocation (Kolakowski 18-19).

Voltaire's constant recourse to ironic understatement guarantees that his readers will share in the knowing elation of his notoriously mocking smile before he openly solicits, indeed dramatizes their sympathy with Candide's relentless sobbing. We cannot fail to infer that he means for his readers to share in this grief. In this regard, the narrative sequence in these two paragraphs is crucial, momentous. First the satire, with its cognitive effects, then the affective response. The deluge of tears are not those of outrage only, of indignation against what is forthrightly named and definitively classed as an "abomination," a term, we note, of distinctly biblical provenance. The tears in their excess—all the way to Surinam—are more essentially those of compassion, of identification with the victim— "il versait des larmes en regardant son nègre"—and as readers we inevitably identify with Candide's prolonged grieving. But here's the catch: if we profess the equality of all humans, then we are condemned out of our own tea cups and candy bars. Use of the possessive adjective is decisive, probatory here: We broke it, we own it, this slave is our "nègre" now.

We need to stay with Candide's tears yet a while more, as the text clearly, emphatically intends that we should, in order to define our own relation to it. Roland Barthes has described Voltaire as "the last of happy writers" in that he could write with a clear

conscience, with certitude that he was struggling for justice and against prejudice and cruelty. For him, institutions of violent power seemed concentrated, compact enough to be effectively skewered; his enemies could be named, classified (99). In its moral dualism, Voltaire's vision was simple, static; his histories are mere chronicles (97) with no connecting tissue defining an era, giving it significant form. Barthes credits Voltaire's humorless, mostly unironic foil, the implacably sincere and serious Rousseau, with getting history on the move by injecting the idea of human perfectibility into literature (100). That history, from 1789 to the present, is most remarkable for the revolutionary utopias whose harvest of victims is so colossal as to render ironic mockery inapposite, unseemly in their company (94).(3) It is the world in which Nietzsche said that truth could only be uttered with sarcasm, a word rooted in the image of tearing at flesh; irony with its teeth bared, gnashing, and bloody. Of course, this is already Hamlet's truth ("Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping" 2.2) no less than Lear's ("Plate sin with gold/ And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks:/ Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it/ None does offend, none…" 4.6). The devastating disillusion and disenchantment they enunciate is for all time: it just may be that our world "out-herods Herod" better than ever before because it is the world of Baudelaire's "hypocrite lecteur," whose destructive barbarity is the more thorough for its being denied, blasé, *banal*, as we say after Hannah Arendt. The discovery procedure into which Voltaire's little apologue induces us, or that it induces in us, is one that unveils "things hidden since the foundation of the world," namely, our violent, sacrificial origins that are now revealed—with us as part and party of the "dramatis personae." That's not new to wisdom, but it is news to us every time we take pleasure in (re)reading *Candide*. Not least of Voltaire's accomplishments is to bring our biblical knowledge back home and tellingly present to us. We rate this work as a masterpiece because it subordinates our moral groping to its persuasive clarity.

First, then, the wry, knowing smile, then the tears; the smile is for the 18th century, the tears are for ours. For I think Candide's extended grieving pulls Voltaire's text into our modern world as nothing else we find in his writings: they last long enough to express diverse emotions: sympathy, and sorrow too, for the many who suffer our "nègre"'s fate; indignation, certainly, at the system which produces it. But the full truth of these tears must include shame for being complicit with that system, which is now our system, known as *globalization*. We don't get to condemn it except out of the rankest self-deception. Panglossian optimism is not the sole target of Voltaire's "philosophical" critique; it embraces the sacrificial character of all institutions because it assails the sacrificial rationality from which all institutions draw their violent energies since the foundation of the world. It is the rationality for the crucifixion expressed by Caiphas: "it is better that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (Jn 11.48) and, as Jeremiah Alberg has observed, without Christianity its logic is unassailable (182).(4)

It is not only the law of sufficient reason or philosophical rationality as such that is sacrificial: this logic extends to the market, with its cost/benefit analyses, and especially to

modern markets, where money serves to mediate and neutralize exchanges and thereby detach them from the scene of human, social costs. As Paul Dumouchel maintains in *Le Sacrifice inutile* (ch. 1), relations of reciprocal obligations that define a community, bonds of dependency and deference, of help or hatred, are erased or suspended. All such relations define the "moral distance" among subjects, and in market situations that distance is maximal (83); human interaction is atomized and depersonalized. A lot of good and bad things can occupy the space opened up by this moral distance. The absence of internal structuration favors a climate of indifference: subjects are free to indulge in a great variety of exertions and exemptions.

It is because markets are value-free that they are so efficient. Market exchanges are people-neutral, which has incalculable advantages for the expansion of trade, while defusing in advance potential dangers humans represent to one another, whence the widespread Enlightenment belief in the pacific benefits of commerce. The downside is the potential for damage to humans that by definition does not enter into calculations that subordinate everything to debit/creditor and profit/loss valuations. Candide's tears are evidence of an anthropological truth, that of our ineluctable, structural, complicity in malfeasance, wrongdoing, for which our religious tradition supplies the word "evil," on a global scale. Over against Ivan Boesky's notorious encomium of greed to his Wall Street audience, and then Gordon Gekko's more famous iteration of it in the film by that name, the anthropological truth borne by Candide's tears is the one emphatically and repeatedly heralded by the penitential psalms and the prophets from Isaiah (e.g., 62.1) through Joel (e.g., 2.12-13), no less than the gospels, namely, that guilt is good for you, and especially *white guilt* as proper to that minority of the world's population which commands its wealth and therefore is responsible for, answerable to the impecunious majority. (It seems that the present pope is addressing first world economies in just this way.) Needless to say, this guilt is good if and only if it is a goad to humility and a spur to action; if, as Gans stipulates, it is "finite and functional" ("Chronicles." No. 337. "Ending White Guilt." Aug. 5, 2006) rather than a pretext for more scapegoating.(5)

How, then, are we today to understand Candide's retort to Pangloss's prattle on the benefits of munching marzipan and pistachios at the cost of the serial thrashings, expulsions, and thefts he has endured: "Il faut cultiver notre jardin" [We must cultivate our garden]? We need to look how this statement responds to his preceptor's lucubrations. A Rabelaisian carnival of syllabic resonance precedes Candide's earlier enunciation of this dictum after Pangloss' babble on the fall of the mighty, a catalogue of kings where sound and cyphers drive out sense in a kind of phonemic pinball:

"car enfin Églon, roi des Moabites, fut **a**ss**a**ssiné par **Ao**d; **Ab**salon fut **p**endu par les cheveux et **p**ercé de t**roi**s dards ; le **roi** **Nadab**, fils de Jéro**boa**m, fut tué par **Ba**aza ; le roi Él**a**, par Z**am**bri ; Ocho**sias**, par **Jéhu** ; Athal**ia**, par **Joïa**da ; les rois **Joa**chim, **Jé**chon**ias**, Sédéc**ias**, furent esclaves. Vous savez comment périrent Cré**sus**, Astyage, **Da**ri**us**, **De**nys de

Syrac**use**,**Pyr**rh**us**, **Per**sée, Annibal, Jugurtha, Arioviste, César, Pompée, Nér**on**, Oth**on**, Vitellius, Domitien, Richard **II** d'Angleterre, Édouard **II**, Henri **VI**, Rich**ard III**, Marie Stu**art**, Charles **Ier**, les**trois** Henri de France, l'empereur Henri **IV** ? Vous savez… — Je sais aussi, dit Candide, qu'il faut cultiver notre jardin."There is no need to translate here, since it is sounds rather than sense that are driving Pangloss' "reasoning;" then numbers take over, because they are in themselves meaningless. The ellipses, too, are significant here: for the first time Candide cuts his mentor's burble short by repeating: "Cela est bien **DIT** répon**DIT**, Can**DI**de mais il faut cultiver notre jardin" (ch. XXX). Syllabic resonance here places emphasis on language. We can only regard these words as an expression of hopeless resignation if we ignore the context of this retort, which phonemically mocks our endless reason-seeming prattle. Clearly, one of the things meant by this rejoinder is that there is no verbal solution to the question of evil (Weightman 155); that for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see, it calls for performance, not utterance.

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Notes

1. "The most important feature of the biblical account [of creation] is not its naïve anthropomorphism, but its dramatic form; the creation of humanity takes place as an *event*. An event is not simply an occurrence; it is an occurrence significant for a mind." (*Originary Thinking* 4-5) (back)

2. Girard has credited Voltaire with introducing violence into Western literature, of thematizing violence as such, as opposed to its particular forms as war, murder, etc.: "To ask 'why is there so much violence around us?' may feel like an eternal question, but in fact it is really a very modern one. As a Frenchman, I feel that the question really goes back to Voltaire. In *Candide*, the question is 'why is there so much violence in our world?', and the question has been with us ever since. Voltaire's pessimistic cynicism in *Candide* makes him seem more like a twentieth-century man than an eighteenth century *philosophe*." ("Victims,

Violence, and Christianity" 129) (back)

3. Barthes astutely remarks that Voltaire would have hated the Marxists with all the vehemence he exercised against the Jesuits. (back)

4. Those critical of the US war on terror are often scandalized by the alliance of its collaterally damaging implementation *with* Christianity. (back)

5. My thanks to Suzanne Ross of the Raven Foundation (ravenfoundation.org) for help in clarifying this issue with the admonition that "one can run from guilt, attempt to assuage it on the cheap through justifying the making of new victims, scapegoats for one's unease." (back)