1. What seems to be Voltaire's opinion of the nobility?
2. Voltaire satirized the philosophy of his time with his description of Pangloss's opinions. What is the tutor's philosophy? How does he support what he says?
3. Characterize Voltaire's philosophy. Is he pessimistic or optimistic?
4. Why do you think *Candide* was such a popular book in its time? People of different classes read the story, and it appealed to them all. Why? Do you think that everyone came away with the same message?
5. How, in the end, do Candide and his friends resolve their questions about the meaning of life?

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau
The Social Contract

(1762)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was born in Geneva and was raised by his unstable father. Alternately neglected and overprotected, Rousseau received little formal education and was eventually apprenticed to an engraver. He escaped from service and traveled throughout Europe before settling in Paris, where he began writing. He was taken up by the leaders of the salons, the fashionable meetings of French intellectuals, and gained wide popularity for his writings on educational and social issues. Living in constant motion, fearing both his friends and enemies, he finally settled down and married his long-time mistress.

The Social Contract is Rousseau's most significant political work. Despite his own experiences, he had an optimistic view of human nature. He believed that people were essentially good, and that government was formed by them to provide the greatest possible amount of personal freedom. His ideas were central to many of the reforms of the French Revolution.

The Social Compact

I suppose man arrived at a point where obstacles, which prejudice his preservation in the state of nature, outweigh, by their resistance, the force which each individual can employ to maintain himself in this condition. Then the primitive state can no longer exist; and mankind would perish did it not change its way of life.

Now, as men cannot engender new forces, but can only unite and direct those which exist, they have no other means of preservation than to form by aggregation a sum of forces which could prevail against resistance, and to put them in play by a single motive and make them act in concert.

This sum of forces can be established only by the concurrence of many; but the strength and liberty of each man being the primary instruments of his preservation, how can he pledge them without injury to himself and without neglecting the care which he owes to himself? This difficulty as related to my subject may be stated as follows: "To find a form of association which shall defend and protect with the public force the person and property of each associate, and by means of which each, uniting with all, shall obey however only himself, and remain as free as before." Such is the fundamental problem of which the *Social Contract* gives the solution.

The clauses of this contract are so determined by the nature of the act, that the least modification would render them vain and of no effect; so that, although they may, perhaps, never have been formally enunciated, they are everywhere the same, everywhere tacitly admitted and recognized until, the social compact being violated, each enters again into his first rights and resumes his natural liberty, thereby losing the conventional liberty for which he renounced it.

These clauses, clearly understood, may be reduced to one: that is the total alienation of each associate with all his rights to the entire community, for, first, each giving himself entirely, the condition is the same for all, and the conditions being the same for all, no one has an interest in making it onerous for the others.

Further, the alienation being without reserve, the union is as complete as it can be, and no associate has anything to claim: for, if some rights remained to individuals, as there would be no common superior who could decide between them and the public, each, being in some points his own judge, would soon profess to be so in everything: the state of nature would exist, and the association would necessarily become tryannical and useless.

Finally, each giving himself to all, gives himself to none; and as there is not an associate over whom he does not acquire the same right as is ceded, an equivalent is gained for all that is lost, and more force to keep what he has.

If, then, we remove from the social contract all that is not of its essence, it will be reduced to the following terms: "Each of us gives in common his person and all his force under the supreme direction of the general will; and we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole."

Immediately, instead of the individual person of each contracting party, this act of association produces a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly has votes, which receives from this same act its unity—its common being, its life and its will. This public personage, thus formed by the union of all the others, formerly took the name of the city, and now takes that of republic or body politic. This is called the *state* by its members when it is passive; the *sovereign* when it is active; and a *power* when comparing it to its equals. With regard to the associates, they take collectively the name *people,* and call themselves individually *citizens,* as participating in the sovereign authority, and *subjects,* as submitted to the laws of the state. But these terms are often confounded and are taken one for the other. It is enough to know how to distinguish them when they are employed with all precision.

Signs of a Good Government

When it is asked positively which is the best government, a question is asked which is unanswerable as it is indeterminate; or, if you will, it has as many good answers as there are combinations possible in the absolute and relative positions of peoples.

But if it be asked by what sign it may be known whether a given people is well or ill governed, it would be another thing, and the question of fact could be answered.

However, it is not answered because each wishes to answer it in his own way. Subjects vaunt public tranquility; citizens, individual liberty; one prefers the safety of property, and the other that of the person; one thinks that the best government is the most severe, the other maintains that it is the most gentle; this one wishes that crimes be punished, and that one that they be prevented; one finds it delightful to be feared by his neighbors, another prefers to be unknown to them; one is content when money circulates, another requires that the people have bread. Even were an agreement reached upon these and similar points, would an advance be made? Moral qualities lacking exact measurements—if an agreement were reached as to the sign, how could it be reached as to the estimate to be put upon them?

As for me, I am always astonished that so simple a sign fails to be recognized, or that such bad faith prevails that it is not acknowledged. What is the *object* of political association? The preservation and prosperity of its members. And what is the surest sign that they are preserved and prospered? It is their number and population. Do not look elsewhere for this much disputed sign. Other things being equal, the government under which—without outside means, without naturalization, without colonies—the citizens increase and multiply most, is invariably the best. That under which a people diminishes and perishes is the worst. Statisticians, it is now your affair; count, measure, compare.

The General Will Is Indestructible

As long as men united together look upon themselves as a single body, they have but one will relating to the common preservation and general welfare. Then all the energies of the state are vigorous and simple; its maxims are clear and luminous; there are no mixed contradictory interests; the common prosperity shows itself everywhere, and requires only good sense to be appreciated. Peace, union, and equality are enemies of political subtleties. Upright, honest men are difficult to deceive, because of their simplicity; decoys and pretexts do not impose upon them, they are not cunning enough to be dupes. When we see among the happiest people in the world troops of peasants regulating the affairs of state under an oak, and conducting themselves wisely, can we help despising the refinements of other nations, who make themselves illustrious and miserable with so much art and mystery?

A state thus governed has need of few laws; and, in proportion as it becomes necessary to promulgate new ones this necessity will be universally recognized. The first to propose them will say only what all have already felt, and it requires neither intrigues nor eloquence to cause to become laws what each has already resolved upon, as soon as he can be sure that others will do likewise.

But when the social knot begins to relax, and the state to weaken, when individual interests commence to be felt, and small societies to influence the great, the common interest changes and finds opponents: unanimity no longer rules in the suffrages; the general will is no longer the will of all; contradictions and debates arise, and the best counsel does not prevail without dispute.

Finally, when the state, near its fall, exists only by a vain and illusory form; when the social tie is broken in all hearts; when the vilest interests flaunt boldly in the sacred name of the public welfare, then the general will becomes silent; all being guided by secret motives think no more

like citizens than if the state had never existed. Iniquitous decrees are passed falsely under the name of the law, which have for object individual interests only.

Does it follow that the general will is annihilated or corrupted? No; it is always constant, inalterable, and pure; but it is subordinated to others which overbalance it. Each in detaching his interest from the common interest, sees that he cannot separate it entirely; but his part of the public misfortune seems nothing to him compared to the exclusive good which he thinks he has appropriated to himself. This particular good excepted, he desires the general well-being for his own interest as strongly as any other. Even in selling his vote for money he has not extinguished in himself the general will—he eludes it. The fault which he commits is in evading the question and answering something which has not been asked him; instead of saying by his vote, "It is advantageous to the state," he says, "It is advantageous to such a man or party that such or such counsel prevail." The law of public order in assemblies is not so much to maintain the general will there, as to see that it is always interrogated and always answers.

I should have here many reflections to make upon the simple right to vote upon each act of sovereignty, a right which nothing can take from citizens, and upon the right to think, to propose, to divide, to discuss, which the government has always taken great care to allow only to its members; but this important matter will require a separate treatise, and I cannot consider it fully here.

1. What is the fundamental problem the social contract is meant to solve?
2. What are the signs of good government?
3. How do Rousseau's assumptions about how a society is organized differ from the assumptions of earlier theorists like Machiavelli or Richelieu?
4. Rousseau has much to say about the general will. What is it, and how do we know what it is?
5. Rousseau's view of human nature colors his political views. How does his general optimism affect his work? What assumptions does he make about human nature?

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Cesare Beccaria
On Crimes and Punishments

(1764)

Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794) came from an aristocratic family in northern Italy. He received the standard legal education of the day and became a doctor of laws in 1758. In Milan at the time resided a group of enlightened