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Rene L. Candelaria
Old Dominion University

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ABSURDIST SCI-FI HUMOR: COMPARABLE ATTITUDES REGARDING ABSURDISM IN *HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY* AND *RICK AND MORTY*

By Rene Candelaria

INTRODUCTION

Science fiction can be an insightful tool in philosophical debate because its fictional elements can serve as anecdotes that ignore real-life limitations, and its scientific elements can tether fiction to reality, differentiating it from pure fantasy. For this reason, science fiction often creates situations that fuel almost entirely new philosophical debates, such as the debate on the definition of artificial intelligence. I say *almost* because most of the 'new' arguments adopt arguments from older philosophical debates. In the case of artificial intelligence, many arguments made about the subject harken back to the arguments made about the definition of consciousness.

Science fiction can cover a plethora of philosophical ground while providing entertainment. Shows like *Black Mirror* reveal the negative things that may happen to humanity or the individual if technology continues in the path we presume it will go. On the other hand, shows like *Star Trek* use the premise of space exploration to reflect the best and worst of our cultural norms using fictitious species. Both examples are of more serious science fiction franchises, but the same and more can be said for comedic science fiction parodies.

The comedic science fiction parodies can make every point any other science fiction work would make, and then flip it on its head in an unexpected way to poke fun at it. In this sense, it can be used to poke fun at logic as well, which is a vital part of both philosophy and science. For examples of this, one can refer to how the proposed Babel Fish argument¹ uses the Watchmaker argument² for God's existence as an argument against the deity's existence in *Hitchhiker's Guide*

to the *Galaxy*, or how in the *Rick and Morty* episode “Get Schwifty,” logical fallacies in the relation of cause and effect are used to start a new religion (Wisecrack, “Get Schwifty”).

These two science fiction franchises are what I would like to focus on. Both are comedic science fiction parodies. The *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* series mainly follows the human Arthur Dent after the Earth is destroyed. Traveling the galaxy with another human, Trillian, two aliens, Ford and Zaphod, and a robot named Marvin, he encounters the bizarre events in the universe that oddly resemble events on Earth, allowing a look at human nature from the outside. *Rick and Morty* follows two members of the Smith family, namely mad scientist Rick Sanchez and his grandson Morty Smith, on their insane adventures across the multiverse. The rest of the family usually becomes entangled within these adventures or on adventures of their own.

If being a science fiction parody were the only criteria, the list would be endless. These two franchises have a lot to say about purpose and meaning in the universe or the lack thereof opposed to a show like *Futurama* which tests the waters of these subjects but derives most of its humor from a more scientific base. This is no surprise seeing that many of the writers of *Futurama* are individuals with degrees in mathematics (Talks at Google, “Simon Singh”).

Using *Hitchhiker’s Guide* and *Rick and Morty* as examples, I intend to identify the absurd as a cultural condition resulting from our societal need to find purpose in a universe devoid of purpose, and in effect, both series explore religion, science, and philosophy as responses to the absurd. This paper’s structure is influenced by the arrangement Amy Kind’s “Life, the Universe, and Absurdity,” where she discusses the philosophy of absurdism within *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. Kind’s paper introduces the concept of the absurd and shows how the *Hitchhiker’s* series represents the possible remedies to the absurd by first setting the scene for the absurd, defining the absurd, and then exploring the different methods of resolving the absurd.

COSMIC HORROR

Despite being comedies, both *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Rick and Morty* use the cosmos to confront our fear of the unknown. Cosmic horror reflects humanity's insignificance when at the mercy of cosmic forces (Wisecrack, "Rick and Morty").

In *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Ford mentions that interdimensional beings destroyed a planet during a game of intergalactic bar billiards. Ten billion lives lost for mere amusement, exposing how inane life is on a universal scale. Furthering the point, Ford nonchalantly adds that it only scored thirty points, showing Ford is either acknowledging life's insignificance or lacks any sympathy.

Earlier in the series, Vogons destroy Earth to make a hyperspatial express route. In one moment, every human, save Arthur and Trillian, is wiped out so that other species may travel from point A to point B more efficiently. This grim joke reflects Arthur's house being set for demolition to create a highway and intends to show bureaucracy's Kafkaesque disregard not only within the British government, but even throughout the galactic government. Even though the joke intended to show the government's disregard for its citizens, the joke also reflects the universe's disregard toward life: a supposedly important species nears extinction and the universe just continues onward.

In the *Rick and Morty* episode "Get Schwifty," large sentient heads, later revealed to be a species called Cromulons, terrorize Earth so they can host and judge a cosmic singing reality show. Again, a species uses a planet for entertainment. At some points in the series, Rick serves as the cosmic horror albeit to a lesser extent. In the episode "The Ricks Must Be Crazy," he forces a whole planet within a microverse to do exercises to power his vehicle. He is not killing anyone in this instance, but he is treating a whole species as a battery, not unlike the machines in *The Matrix*.

Time and again, cosmic forces are used to show a species' or world's insignificance, let alone that of one individual. The individual has no chance to find purpose as shown by the Total Perspective Vortex in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* which shows someone the whole of time and space, and for one brief instant shows a small speck that says, "you are here" to torture them. The vortex crumbles our 'vanity of existence,' forcing us to confront 'the infiniteness of time and space contrasted with the finiteness of the individual in both' (Schopenhauer, "Vanity of Existence").

NIHILISM AND ABSURDISM

As previously stated, both series point out life's insignificance with cosmic horror even though most people believe that life has some purpose. The first half of this premise, that life is pointless, evokes nihilism, whilst the latter half extends this nihilism into a form of absurdism.

Nihilism is a philosophy that questions the purpose of morals in a purposeless world (Rattle and Woolf 110). Again, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Rick and Morty* are keen to provide anecdotes of such ethical breaches. The *Hitchhiker's* series is riddled with corporations breaching ethics regularly to increase profit margins, with both characters and the narrator shrugging it off nonchalantly. Rick, quite possibly the most nihilistic fictional character ever conceived, is quick to sell weapons to assassins, participate in another planet's purge, and even enslave entire species to either run his car or add to the hive mind of his on-and-off girlfriend, Unity.

With nihilism setting the stage for life's pointlessness, absurdism can step in to make things, well, absurd. Albert Camus, who is commonly seen as the original mind behind absurdism, would disagree with classifying absurdism as an extension of nihilism since he did not see himself as a nihilist (The School of Life, "Camus"). It seems that he does not understand his own

philosophy very well because in his magnum opus, *The Stranger*, the main character, Meursault, kills a man because he realizes that whether he commits the act or not has no meaning in the grand scheme of things. Sure, Meursault never intentionally goes out of his way to commit only unethical acts, but that is not what nihilism is either. Nihilism merely requires that one realize life's insignificance and not care one way or the other on ethical matters. Meursault, the standard of Camus' 'absurd hero', fits this definition perfectly with his indifference toward domestic violence and animal cruelty when his neighbors commit those acts.

The circle of life is not a new concept, but it is usually praised as a beautiful cycle rather than a monotonous routine leading nowhere. Now, Camus provides the anecdotal myth of Sisyphus when referring to life. Sisyphus was a Greek king punished by Zeus to push a boulder up a hill each day, and at the end of the day, the boulder falls to the ground only for the cycle to repeat itself. This is Camus' own non-horrifying way of pointing out life's meaninglessness. A more fitting example is Joel Feinberg's far timelier supermarket regress which asks: why do we wait in line at supermarkets? So that we can buy food. Why do we buy food? So that we stay alive and healthy? Why do we stay alive and healthy? So that we can work our jobs. Why do we work our jobs? So that we can make money. Why do we make money? So that we can buy food. From which the cycle continues (Joll/Kind).

This can seem very depressing and it begs the question, if life does not matter, why not just end it? In fact, this is the question that Camus starts off his essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus." He claims that suicide is the only 'truly serious philosophical problem' (qtd. in Joll/Kind). He ultimately deems suicide a coward's way out and continues to try and solve this existential despair in his own way (Joll/Kind).

Camus defines absurdism as a conflict between the individual and the universe where the individual attempts to find meaning in the universe and the universe provides none (Joll/Kind). Given this, the universe is not intrinsically absurd, just meaningless. Our attempt to find something that is not there, purpose, makes it absurd. Referring to the examples above, none of them are intrinsically absurd. They are all merely events occurring in the universe. Our attempts to reconcile these events with our idea that there must be a purpose to them is absurd.

This definition of absurdity is the one used most in *Hitchhiker's Guide* and *Rick and Morty*. *Hitchhiker's Guide* even provides a meaning to life, 42, which is an absurd answer. The computer that calculated this answer, Deep Thought, says that the issue lies with the question, not the answer, as if to say that the issue lies with our attempt to understand, like Camus stated. When the question was asked, an attempt to find meaning was made, thus creating an absurd situation. At the end of *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Arthur tries teaching a caveman language through Scrabble so that the Golgafrinchians do not become the dominant species on Earth. As the tiles are selected they start to spell a message: one that Arthur believes is the Question to the Ultimate Answer. The letters reveal: WHAT DO YOU GET IF YOU MULTIPLY SIX BY NINE. Obviously, the result is 54 and not the expected 42 which is absurd. Even if the result did match up, it is an odd and absurd question. Those familiar with mathematical bases will note that six times nine does equal 42 in base 13, but when confronted with this, Douglas Adams, the author, is reputed to have said that he does not make jokes in base 13.

In *Rick and Morty*, Morty always tries applying his morality to a situation, and it always backfires. In the episode "Mortynight Run," Morty tells Rick that they must save this sentient gas creature from execution. Now on the run from the police for breaking the being out of prison, several cops and gear people die during the chase. This prompts Rick to say, "How do you feel

about all these people that are getting killed today ‘cause of your choices?” At the end of the episode, the gaseous being reveals it will gather his kind to destroy other dimensions, and Morty is forced to kill it. In the end, Morty’s trust in good ethics are shown to be futile and absurd.

The absurd can also be seen in the anticlimactic structure of both series. Whenever the plot goes in a meaningful direction, it backtracks and devolves into absurdity. In both series, the characters and/or audience quest for purpose and the plot offers nothing in return. When Zaphod and Trillian meet the Ruler of the Universe at the end of *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, he turns out to be a skeptic. Zaphod believes that meeting the Ruler will answer some question or solve some problem, but the Ruler is so skeptical that he doubts that there is a universe for him to rule. It obviously intends to reflect a philosophy that the only people worthy to rule are those who do not want to rule, but it also serves as one of the series’ anticlimactic endings. The books never end with some big fight against an antagonist and all the tension that was built up fizzles out instead.

Rick and Morty puts its anticlimaxes in the character development. Co-creator Dan Harmon is a strong proponent of Joseph Campbell's ‘hero’s journey’ and has made his own adaptation that he follows in his own works³. In fact, he has two adaptations: one intended for non-serialized works where the character develops by the end and another designed for serialized works where any development is abandoned or else the story ends, and no one would tune in for the next installment (Wisecrack, “How RICK & MORTY Tells a Story”). In the season two finale, “The Wedding Squanchers,” Rick turns himself into the Galactic Federation to save his family, marking one of the few moments where Rick acts in a selfless nature and possible character development. When the season three premiere, “The Rickshank Rickdemption,” aired, Rick reveals that the real reason he surrendered is so that he could take over the Galactic Federation’s economy from the

inside, shutting down their government. He then saves Morty and Summer in the process to get back in the good graces of his daughter, Beth, and influence her to divorce Jerry. Rick becomes free to perform his usual destructive shenanigans. There is even a flashback in the episode to give Rick's arc purpose, but it turns out to be an artificial memory created by Rick, so he can escape the Galactic Federation's mind interrogation device. Instead, Rick's arc is reduced to a search for a limited-edition McDonald's sauce, because if the universe has no purpose, why not strive for something as absurd as Szechuan Sauce (Wisecrack, "Szechuan Sauce").

Thomas Nagel, like Camus, does not believe that the universe is intrinsically absurd, but rather that absurdity is intrinsic to human thought. He states that everyone has two perspectives in which they view themselves: the internal perspective and the external perspective. The internal perspective is how we see ourselves in the day-to-day context (Joll/Kind). It is the part that cares about the next meal, paying bills, maintaining a job, and other personal tasks and goals. This perspective makes all the decisions in life and carries a person from one moment to another, accessing one's subjective thoughts to do what one is motivated to do at that moment. It can be a simple action such as eating to keep the individual alive or as complex as doing work to make money to buy food to eat. The external perspective is a less often used perspective that occurs when one mentally steps outside of one's self and views his or her life objectively (Joll/Kind). Through this perspective, life will look meaningless because all the actions will seem to go in an endless loop like the supermarket regress. Nagel says the absurd occurs when we inevitably continuing living, by default in the internal perspective, despite the external perspective telling us that it is meaningless (Joll/Kind).

Now, Nagel's definition of the absurd is not used as much in these series, though it begins taking effect in the third season of *Rick and Morty*. This is because Nagel's definition focuses more

on human psychology rather than universal disappointment. This more psychological take falls in line with the shift in *Rick and Morty*'s third season toward family dynamics.

Rick is the most explicit example of Nagel's definition. He is very vocal about his external perspective, always mentioning that nothing means anything including emotions and morals. The absurd thing is that he obviously cares about Morty. Even though Rick has erased some of Morty's memories, injected experimental concoctions into Morty that allow him to transform into a car, and even proved mathematically how much of a pain in the ass Morty is, he still seems attached to Morty. He claims that it is because Morty's stupid brain waves hide his own genius brain waves, but if this is the case, why would he not use the stupidest person in the family: Jerry. Rick's dichotomy is fleshed out in the episode "Rest and Ricklaxation" where the parts he finds most toxic about himself are removed leaving a clean Rick and a toxic Rick. Later, the clean Rick puts the two halves back together because he realizes that the toxic Rick cares about Morty and uses this self-perceived weakness to his advantage.

Rick's external perspective is so prominent, he sees everything in the internal perspective as a weakness. Nagel states that abandoning the internal perspective is literally suicide, which, like Camus, he believes is not the answer (Joll/Kind). After being abandoned by Unity, Rick set up a machine to blow a hole through his head only for him to drunkenly fall over before it can do so. Rick's nearly suicidal and reckless behavior is another sign of his struggle. In the episode "Pickle Rick," the therapist Doctor Wong tells Rick that his failure to take responsibility for his decisions is, at that moment, literally killing him. By existing and making decisions, he is in the internal perspective by definition, but he distances himself from these choices by not taking responsibility for them. He is fine with this because his external perspective is aware of all the other Ricks in all the other universes and fails to see the purpose of his own internal perspective when all the

decisions that can be possibly made were already made by infinite other Ricks. Wong tells Rick that maintaining, or continuing existence in the internal perspective, is not an adventure, but it is necessary. This advice does not ultimately amount to much, not only because of the show's conscious efforts to stunt character development by having Rick and Beth bond over calling the therapist stupid, disregarding her valid points, and refusing to grow as people, but because it only serves to return to the absurd. Wong is essentially telling Rick not to abandon the internal perspective, which would be helpful for him, but this provides no resolution to the absurd. It only serves to bring Rick to the same mental state as everyone else, and everyone is still subject to the absurd.

The whole premise of *Hitchhiker's Guide* and most space-faring science fiction for that matter follows Nagel's definition. When we live our lives, we exist in the internal perspective like Nagel said, but when we crack open *Hitchhiker's* or turn on the television to watch Interdimensional Cable, we see some of the norms we take for granted get subverted by an alien race within the confines of the fictional universe, granting us a forced external perspective. By consuming this media, we can view ourselves from the outside while playing around with some of the extremes of our nature and the possible consequences.

RELIGIOUS SOLUTIONS

Religion attempts to resolve absurdism by negating the initial premise that life is without purpose. According to William Lane Craig, religion is the only option that gives life meaning (Joll/Kind). Given this, he believes choosing religion is a safe bet. Even though this outlook resembles a more updated and lower stakes form of Pascal's Wager, it is no more useful when observed closely⁴. Camus viewed religion as 'philosophical suicide' since he saw it as a coward's

way out of thinking just as he saw actual suicide as a coward's way out of living (Joll/Kind). Amy Kind notes two ways religion tries to give life meaning: through supposed immortality and service to a higher being with an assumed purpose.

Craig says that a life without immortality 'leads only to the grave' (qtd. in Joll/Kind). The problem with this is that even though his claim is true, it only demeans mortal life and adds nothing to immortal life. The whole immortality argument suggests that a mortal life is pointless, agreeing with the philosophies established thus far, but fails to say what makes an immortal life any more meaningful. Amy Kind remarks that if 'the fact that life has a beginning does not seem to contribute to its absurdity, so why should there be anything absurd about the fact that it has an end?'

Camus reasons that if a normal lifespan is pointless then prolonging that span infinitely just makes it infinitely more pointless, stating through the perspective of Meursault that, "it doesn't much matter whether you die at thirty or at seventy" (Camus 114). Nowhere is this more exemplified than with Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged in *Life, the Universe, and Everything*. Wowbagger accidentally obtained immortality and initially used it to have dangerous fun, but he grew tired of all the activities and attempted to find life's meaning. He assigned himself the purpose of personally insulting everyone who ever existed and ever will exist in alphabetical order. Wowbagger even admits to himself that this is not much of a purpose, but with nothing left to do, this would have to suffice.

Rick suffers a similar fate but for far different reasons. Rick does not have the luxury, or curse, of immortality, but he does have an infinite number of lives across the infinite number of universes. This gives Rick the notion that his actions do not matter because there are probably some other Ricks doing good things and others doing bad things. He can act in complete disregard and despair knowing that there is nothing new he can do because it is very likely another Rick has

done so already. Whether living an infinite life or an infinite number of finite lives, the result is boredom and the awareness that all the things that one has done are meaningless.

The higher being answer calls into question the existence of a higher being. *Hitchhiker's* and *Rick and Morty* are quick to express this atheistic viewpoint. The Babel Fish Argument in *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* argues that God vanished in a 'puff of logic'. In the first episode of *Rick and Morty*, Rick says, "There is no god, Summer, gotta rip that Band-Aid off right now."

Despite their claims that there is no god, other parts of these series clash with this idea. In the book *Mostly Harmless*, it is a well-known fact that gods were made about "three millionths of a second" after the Big Bang. Later in the book, the Norse god Thor appears at a very long party. Also, God left a final message for his creation as seen at the end of *Life, the Universe, and Everything*, and God vanished at the end of the Babel Fish Argument which infers that he existed before said nonexistence. In the episode "Something Ricked This Way Comes," Rick becomes a makeshift business competitor to the devil, which may or may not infer the existence of God. In both series, the religious lore is unclear and leaves room for a higher being's existence.

Even if a higher being does exist, there is no guarantee that it has a meaningful purpose either. It may be as misguided and clueless as we are. Under the assumption that there is a higher being, we must ask the same question posed by Oolon Coluphid: 'Who is this God person anyway?'⁵ There is a chance that individuals like us in another universe created this universe. In *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Zarniwoop creates an identical universe where Zaphod is the most important being. If this could be the case, what guarantees that our higher being has any more meaning than us? When the Cromulons terrorized Earth in "Get Schwifty," many were unaware of the game show and began worshipping the giant heads. Human sacrifices were made even though these assumed gods' true purpose was to make reality television. In the episode "The

Ricks Must Be Crazy,” Rick, a character that admits his and everyone else’s pointlessness, has created a microverse to power his car battery. When the battery stops working, Rick and Morty go inside the microverse, and it is revealed that the people in this microverse see Rick as a higher being. They have no idea that their lives’ purpose is to power a vehicle; like the people who died as sacrifices to the Cromulons had no idea that their planet was part of a game show and the people within the matrix (in *The Matrix*) had no idea they were really being used as batteries. In these instances, even though the individuals are serving a higher being’s purpose, these purposes are ultimately meaningless.

The mice from *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* elevate this rebuttal to another level. All of Earth’s mice are revealed to be part of a race of interdimensional beings that built the Earth ten billion years ago to calculate The Question to the Ultimate Answer; that answer being 42. In this instance, the purpose seems worthwhile. Despite this, the next book reveals that when Marvin scanned Arthur’s brain, he figured out the question. Even though he now had both the question and the answer, he remained a very depressed robot who could not see meaning in anything. Marvin’s lack of revelation may be due to his programmed personality or the fact that the Golgafrinchians landing on Earth soon before the cavemen’s extinction may have contaminated the Earth’s calculations. This leaves the higher being answer unclear. Too many factors such as the existence and nature of a higher being are unknown, reducing religion to a leap of faith. Which is fitting since the God in *Hitchhiker’s Guide* said, “...without faith I am nothing.” For those who require more evidence, a solution that provides more evidence than religion does is required to resolve this existential crisis.

SCIENTIFIC SOLUTIONS

Luckily, for those who require more evidence in a solution, science solely bases itself on evidence. The scientific method requires proof for any development. Since absurdism centers around humanity's meaningless contribution to the universe, the science of how the universe works may reconcile the issue.

Science is a broad field that is always making advancements, but when it comes to understanding the secrets of the universe, quantum mechanics and astrophysics are at the forefront. In 2012, scientists working at the Hadron Collider proved the existence of the Higgs boson particle, that was first theorized in the 1960's. Proved is a relative term in this case because the official statement says they proved within five sigma, or about 0.00006 percent chance of error, assuming a normal distribution of data, that the particle exists⁶. This level of error is standard in the field and is likely beyond a reasonable doubt if doubt was quantifiable (Particle Fever). The fact does remain that there is a possibility of error and uncertainty in the measurement, which is always the case until something better comes along. Newton's equations are technically wrong when accounting for relativity. They work just fine for most everyday occurrences since the speeds are so small relative to light speed that the differences in the results from Newton's and Einstein's equations are negligible. It is quite common for science to get something wrong only to resolve it later, like when geocentrism was proven wrong and replaced with heliocentrism. A study could be released tomorrow proving that everything we know is a lie and can be explained some other way. The scientific method is designed so that any issues that may arise, such as the raven paradox, may hopefully get resolved by future experiments⁷.

This is not to say that science is wrong. Quite the opposite, but the idea of absolute knowledge is impossible. Physicist Brian Cox sees science as an ongoing process that cannot be

fully understood, and if it were, then lack of new discoveries would be boring, making life meaningless again (PowerfulJRE, “Brian Cox”). In this way, science can be a provocateur of the absurd rather than a solution.

Both series show errors with science which may be why they do not take a solid stance on religion either. In *Hitchhiker’s Guide*, most technology is in some way corrupted and does more harm than good. In *Rick and Morty*, science either makes situations worse or does not work to begin with. Science has many hurdles to leap, but it is constructed in such a way that many believe that it will soon uncover the answers to all our questions including the absurd. Despite this, the fact remains that science in our daily lives has yet to explain the universe’s mysteries and there is uncertainty regarding whether it ever will. Though the belief that science will one day find the answer requires a smaller leap of faith than standard religion does, the leap still exists.

PHILOSOPHICAL SOLUTIONS

If neither religion nor science can provide a viable answer to the absurd, then the philosophy that ignited the issue may hold the solution. Camus proposed the ‘absurd hero’; an individual who is aware of the absurd and meets it with defiance and scorn (Joll/Kind). In the example of Sisyphus, he says that Sisyphus must push the boulder up the hill with a defiant pride. Meursault faces his execution with the same defiance stating that he hopes the onlookers hate him and throw fruit at him in his final moments. The scorn is supposed to win out like standing up to a bully. The universe continually mocks our attempts to find meaning, like a bully or Internet troll, but defiance is supposed to suck the joy from the tormentor. The main problem with this solution is that our tormentor, the universe, has no emotion and does not care if we are tormented by its

nature. It may console some to think that having a certain attitude will help with dealing with the absurd, but it does not seem like a concrete solution.

Nagel decides to reject the notion that absurdism is even a problem, thus not warranting any solution. He argues that since the internal and external perspectives are inherent to human nature, and therefore unavoidable, then they should not be considered a problem. The major problem with this mindset is that problems, imminent or avoidable, still occur and cause problems. Kind mentions climate change as an example, which is unavoidable at this point. This does not mean that the sea levels will suddenly not rise (Joll/Kind). The argument that the unavoidable nature of absurdity discredits the issue from being an issue is ridiculous.

Jonathan Westphal and Christopher Cherry decide to take an approach that is prevalent in *Hitchhiker's*, *Rick and Morty*, and most of society. This approach is like David Hume's answer to skepticism. Hume realized that arguing with skeptics led nowhere because they can always claim that everything is arbitrary because it does not really exist (Joll/Kind). Zaphod runs into this issue when conversing with the Ruler of the Universe. This can also be said for nihilists and absurdists because they can always claim that everything is arbitrary because nothing has meaning. Hume responded to the skeptics by saying that distraction helped him overcome the overwhelming depressive thought that everything is meaningless because of its possible nonexistence. Westphal and Cherry take this approach and apply it to absurdism (Joll/Kind). There is no solution to absurdism that cannot be explained away as meaningless, but one should not wallow over such a depressing notion. Instead, one should go out and live the life he or she has, no matter how inane that life is, to distract from how meaningless those actions are.

Amy Kind highlights a study done by Peter Singer in the 1950's on the daily life of housewives to show that distraction is a viable option. Before this time, it was common for a wife

to spend the eight hours that the husband and children spent at work and school, respectively, doing chores, thus keeping her busy all day. The 1950's saw a boom in household technology that made chores easier. It became the new norm for the wife to finish the chores within the first few hours of the husband's shift and the children's school day. Now, with nothing to do and no one to talk to, boredom set in quick along with depression and a sense of meaninglessness. Some of these housewives started to watch soap operas and begin book clubs. The boredom they experienced led to the next wave of the feminist movement. Women started getting jobs in traditionally male-dominated fields. The book clubs, soaps, and jobs filled time in their daily life, keeping the internal perspective busy on these tasks and leaving less time to ponder within the external perspective. This is a prime example of how the depressing thought of meaninglessness comes with boredom and is kept at bay through distraction.

Distraction plays a major role in human evolution when things go awry. Sports and movies saw a massive increase in viewership during the Great Depression because entertainment is an excellent distraction, especially since the age-old distraction, alcohol, was illegal at the time. Alcohol may be a flawed and temporary distraction, but it is one touted by the equally flawed characters in both series. The *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* guidebook within the *Hitchhiker's* series references many alcoholic beverages including recipes for them. The series makes several references to one drink in particular: The Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster. After time traveling to the end of the universe, Ford decides to drink three Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters to take his mind off how absurd being at the end of time is. After encountering the Ruler of the Universe, Zaphod, disappointed with the anticlimactic nature of that meeting, starts drinking at a pace unusual for even himself. But these examples are only sprinkled about the *Hitchhiker's* franchise. Alternatively, alcoholism is a major character trait in Rick and his daughter, Beth. Beth can be

seen drinking wine quite often throughout the series. After mistaking Mr. Poopy-butthole for a memory parasite and shooting him, her first response is to open the cupboard and pour herself a glass of wine with shaky hands. Rick's alcoholism is far more pronounced. He carries around a flask and burps his way through every other sentence. In the pilot's opening scene, Rick drunkenly stumbles into Morty's room and drags Morty into his spaceship mumbling about a bomb only to pass out at the wheel and crash, thus revealing a neutrino bomb, seconds from blowing up, in the trunk. It is always assumed that something dark happened in Rick's past to cause his alcoholism; giving him a need for the escapism it offers.

Alcohol is not the only method of mental escape displayed within these series. At the end of *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Ford decides to flirt with some Golgafrinchians, and advises Arthur to do the same, to distract Arthur from thinking about the meaning of life after Arthur's recently failed attempt to find it via a caveman playing Scrabble. In *Mostly Harmless*, it seems Arthur has successfully taken Ford's advice after crash landing on a pre-industrial planet and becoming the village's humble sandwich maker rather than dwelling on all the absurdity he had seen up to that point.

In *Rick and Morty*, Jerry's entire personality is a distraction from life's meaninglessness, which is probably one of the reasons Rick hates him. If anyone should believe that the universe is devoid of any meaning, it should be Jerry, the jobless, talentless, and cowardly idiot who is either too dumb to realize he is in a failing marriage or too spineless to do something about it. He has no direction in life, yet he is unusually happy apart from the occasional bout of sadness usually brought on by someone ridiculing him for his stupidity. Jerry is the epitome of the ignorance-is-bliss style philosophy and the antithesis of Rick. His willingness to just go along with the inane activities put in front of him distracts him from truly thinking about those actions, leaving him the

happiest member of the Smith family while Rick, constantly questioning every norm, is the most depressed.

The solution proposed by Westphal and Cherry makes sense because it does not actually solve the problem. It just puts a SEP field around it⁸. There is no actual solution. If there was, it would be meaningful and negate the initial problem creating a logical paradox, not unlike that of the Babel Fish argument. It seems that for Rick to finally find some peace he should take his own advice and not think about it, something he clearly intends to do through his alcoholic misdeeds but ultimately fails because these deeds are so fueled by his toxic thoughts and he is, therefore, not actually letting it out of his mind.

CONCLUSION

Even though both series explore many possible solutions to the absurd, they seemingly agree that all their solutions fall short. Religion and science are two sides of the same coin, each requiring a leap of faith to fully commit to either one although one of those leaps is, admittedly, more rationally guided than the other. A big problem with these attempted solutions is that they try to directly answer the absurd; according to Camus' definition trying to answer the absurd is absurd.

This leaves philosophy to resolve the absurd. Despite having much to say about Camus' and Nagel's definition of the absurd, both series give little credence to their solutions. Rather, they seemingly push the distraction method proposed by Westphal and Cherry. Rather than imagine Sisyphus, or ourselves, happy as Camus suggests, we must create happiness out of tasks or distractions. We should not ignore that absurdity is a problem like Nagel suggests, but we should distract ourselves enough to ignore trying to solve it because that would just add fuel to the fire.

Ultimately, this paper could not be more absurd. It brings up the absurd, discusses absurd solutions, and then tells one to drop it all and continue living as if never having read this paper. It is like the child's game when someone tells another not to think about elephants and now all that person can think about is elephants. I urge you to forget this elephant and surround it in a SEP field. You should dine, play games, discuss other topics, and hang out with friends, following Hume's response to the skeptics.

NOTES

1. The Babel Fish argument states that the Babel Fish, by feeding off of the brainwave energy of whoever wears one, translates any language for the wearer, is so useful it could not have been made randomly by evolution; like the Watchmaker argument. It then perverts this by stating that God says, “Proof denies faith, and without faith I am nothing.” Thus, the Babel Fish proving his existence causes God to ‘vanish in a puff of logic.’
2. The Watchmaker argument states that if one were walking in a desert and came across something as complex as a watch, one would assume that the watch was made by some intelligent creator, therefore since humans are complex beings, some intelligent designer must have created humans. For more information, refer to the Watchmaker analogy Wikipedia page.
3. The hero’s journey is a narrative path described by Joseph Campbell in his book on comparative mythology: The Hero with a Thousand Faces. It is often referred to as the monomyth. For more information, refer to the Hero’s journey Wikipedia page.
4. Pascal’s wager states there is nothing to lose from being religious, because if God does not exist nothing happens either way, but if he does then heaven is to be gained through faith and hell is the punishment for lacking faith. Represented by the following diagram:

	God exists	God does not exist
one has faith	heaven	nothing
one does not have faith	hell	nothing

The issue is that this assumes the only two options are Christianity and atheism, when in fact there are many religions, thus complicating this simplistic diagram and reasoning.

For more information, refer to the Pascal's wager Wikipedia page.

5. Oolon Coluphid is an author in the Hitchhiker's series.
6. There is a 0.00006 percent chance of making a type 1 error. The type 2 error is minimized by the many trials run over the course of the two years CERN was conducting the experiment. For more information, refer to the Type I and type II errors Wikipedia page.
7. The raven paradox is a paradox that points out a fallacy in the scientific method. If one were to hypothesize that all ravens are black, then it can also be said that all non-black things are not ravens. Using the second statement one could reason that observing many non-black things are not ravens increases the likelihood of the original statement being true. For example, one could look at green chairs all day, conclude that none of those green chairs are ravens, and then conclude that all ravens are black. This is obviously a great leap of logic and exposes a fallacy in the scientific method. For more information, refer to the Raven paradox Wikipedia page.
8. Somebody Else's Problem. The field does not fully cloak something it just causes one to not pay any mind to the cloaked object thinking that it is somebody else's problem.

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