

Spring 2011

# Humor and the Meaning of Life in Kurt Vonnegut's The Sirens of Titan

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## Recommended Citation

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**Humor and the Meaning of Life in Kurt Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan***

April 1, 2011

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Reality is unpleasant. The majority of human beings who have ever inhabited planet Earth have had to toil and labor simply to survive, and although the twenty-first century has brought with it technological advancements that have made the act of living life much “easier,” still the majority of the world’s population is confronted with daily struggles and horrors. From the suffering of poverty and hunger, to the terror of war and bloodshed, to the soul-stealing desk job where the individual person becomes nothing but an extension of his computer, it is easy to see how unpleasant reality truly is. As a result of our discomfort, and a psychological unwillingness to face the hardships of existence, humanity has striven to find mental escapes. Among these are various sports, forms of entertainment, literature, and philosophy. There is, ultimately, a presumption of the human mind which believes that we cannot be suffering the toils of existence for no reason. There *must* be a purpose for our existence, a meaning of life which makes all our strivings worth the effort in the end. We cannot accept the painful truth that our anguish is ultimately futile; that we are but a grain of sand in the vast desert of the universe.

In his novel *The Sirens of Titan*, Kurt Vonnegut confronts humanity’s effort to construct meaning in its existence. Specifically, he challenges notions of meaning typically and unquestioningly accepted in mainstream middle-class American culture. Vonnegut’s main tool in deconstructing these notions is humor, and he presents his story to the reader as a series of jokes that ultimately reveal the inherent absurdity of traditionally accepted life “meanings.” From one perspective, humor is a simple mechanism in the human mind of dealing with reality – it is a mode of deriving pleasure (usually through laughter) from a particularly absurd, unexpected, or distressful situation. Laughter is essentially a physiological method of releasing pent up frustration and aggression in a way that is both not harmful, and socially acceptable. In his work *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Sigmund Freud states that “[Jokes] make possible

the satisfaction of an instinct (whether lustful or hostile) in the face of an obstacle that stands in its way.”<sup>i</sup> Furthermore, humor is a way of “extracting the comic from the relation of human beings to the often over-powerful external world... [which] comprises social conventions and necessities and even... bodily needs.”<sup>ii</sup> Through humor, the individual can momentarily defy the oppressive structures and functions of his situation (including restrictive and repressive social norms), and he can do so openly and without fear of accusation or reprisal. Vonnegut’s view of humor coincides with Freud’s, particularly concerning what is often termed “gallows” humor.

According to Freud,

Humour is a means of obtaining pleasure in spite of the distressing affects that interfere with it; it acts as a substitute for the generation of these affects, it puts itself in their place.... The pleasure of humour... comes about... at the cost of a release of affect that does not occur.<sup>iii</sup>

The example which Freud gives is of a man being executed on a Monday, who states as the hangman ties the noose around his neck that, “this is a lovely way to start the week.” The humor in this case (and all cases of gallows humor) is a way of masking the painful emotions which typically accompany a traumatic event or revelation. Like the doomed convict, Vonnegut is using this kind of humor in *The Sirens of Titan* to simultaneously expose the reader to, and hide the reader from, the painful reality that life is meaningless; that humanity is insignificant. In a manner of speaking, Vonnegut light-heartedly unveils life’s meaninglessness in a way that the reader recognizes the author’s depressing conclusion while simultaneously engaging in a fit of laughter. Ultimately, as Unk discovers during his stint in the Martian army, pain and disenchantment are inevitable when uncovering truth, either from the sobering effect it has upon a person’s ego and sense of self-worth, or from the reactionary response of society and social convention which reinforces its position of power against dissent.

The main institutions which Vonnegut deconstructs include war (military service in particular), religion, and economics. Vonnegut essentially mocks the devotion and trust mankind puts into these institutions as valid means of determining purpose in existence. Ultimately, the absurdity created in his combination of gallows humor with science fiction shows that humanity's notion of having any kind of meaning - external to itself and its own personal creation - is ridiculous. In the opening phrase of the novel, the narrator states "Everyone now knows how to find the meaning of life within himself."<sup>iv</sup> Vonnegut introduces the reader to his story by immediately explaining the message he intends to impart – that the meaning of life is not contained or revealed in some external agent like a place or a god or a science, but rather that it is from within oneself that any individual can ever hope to attain a purpose for his existence. There is nothing "out there" from which the human race can discover meaning, rather, it is introspection, and exploration of the human soul which is "the beginning of goodness and wisdom."<sup>v</sup> This is the only means of ascribing meaning to one's life that avoids the oppression of social constructs, and it is subsequently the only way in which a human being can be truly free, and truly happy.

### ***War***

Warfare has been described by the well known Prussian strategist Karl Von Clausewitz as a continuation of politics by other means. To him, the conduct of war represents the chance for a nation to flex its military muscle, acquire critical natural resources, assert dominance, control, sovereignty, or virtually any other political means of exerting power that one can think of. What Clausewitz fails to consider in his statement, however, is the human element of the equation. It is in this respect that Vonnegut appears to take issue with warfare, the military, and the exertion of violence as a means to an end. According to Lynn Buck in her essay "Vonnegut's

World of Comic Futility,” “in his personal life Vonnegut has... expressed a profound distaste for military technology and killing. He has told his sons that they should never work for any companies that produce ‘massacre machinery.’”<sup>vi</sup> Vonnegut - in opposition to the perspectives of many warriors and warrior cultures throughout history that have embraced bloodshed as full of glory and honor - regards war and the military as a degradation of life rather than as something that gives meaning to existence.

In *Sirens of Titan*, the Martian army is intended to be a representation of “real world” militaries. According to the essay “It’s All a Joke” by Ellen Cronan Rose,

We can see that [the Martian story] is a displacement onto the fictional Martian army of a critical or satirical commentary about real (earthling) armies and wars. The implanted antennae, the puppet officers, the control boxes, the mechanical beat of “rented a tent...” is a thoroughly plausible – and cynical – extrapolation into future time and alien space of the inherent mechanization of army life as we know it on earth.<sup>vii</sup>

In the beginning of chapter four, the reader gets a clear sense of Vonnegut’s own perspective of the military from his description of the Martian Army on its way to attend the public execution of Stony Stevenson.

They were an infantry division of ten thousand men, formed in a hollow square on a natural parade ground of solid iron one mile thick. The soldiers stood at attention on orange rust. They shivered rigidly, being as much like iron as they could be – both officers and men.<sup>viii</sup>

There is no humanity present in this description of the Martian forces. On the contrary, both the setting and the soldiers themselves are described as resembling pieces of metal – cold, still, hard, inanimate, thoughtless. Vonnegut also does not distinguish any difference in appearance between average grunts and officers. Traditionally, the officer class has allegedly represented the brain of the military. They are, in essence, the class of soldiers with the ability and responsibility to think, and to keep in mind the bigger perspective that is so easily forgotten during the chaos and

emotion of combat. Yet in this case, even they are indistinguishable from the men. Which begs the question, is it not so in real life as well? Metal does not think, in fact, it has no say at all in how the blacksmith moulds it. It is simply an object *built* for a specific purpose, and it appears that through the above description, Vonnegut is asserting that people inside the military are no different. The Martian army, as well as actual armies in the real world, is built from the mind outward. This fact becomes even clearer when one considers the attempts by Martian authorities to literally brainwash their soldiers.

Mind control through the erasing of memory is the main means through which the soldiers of the Martian army are kept under control. To the average person living in a western, democratic world, such a thing is considered not just inhumane but unconscionable. In a world where individual rights are valued with such a high esteem, the ability and the purposeful effort at removing another human being's agency is horrific, if not evil. Vonnegut, however, is suggesting through the extreme case of the Martian army, that such a process *does* occur in the real world. In fact, when one considers this example, one cannot help but tease out the question: how else does a state or government convince a human being to leave the comfort and safety of his own home, the love of his family, and to travel to some foreign land to kill and destroy other human beings? Is warfare truly an element of human nature? It appears that Vonnegut would argue "no," and that this is the reason for the implementation of a brainwashing process to provide human beings with *incentive* to commit violence, and give up virtually all personal freedoms by subjecting themselves to the orders of superiorly ranked individuals.

The incentive provided in Vonnegut's novel is negative, meaning that it comes from the authorities' removal of something from the soldiers in order to convince them to fight for the Martian army. The things being taken away, of course, are the soldiers' memories. In contrast,

Vonnegut may argue that the incentive provided in real world militaries is more active. Soldiers are given something to encourage devotion and/or inspire a fighting spirit, namely a moral or principled cause that a particular individual from a particular culture deems worth fighting for. Such abstract ideals as glory, honor, virtue, freedom, democracy, religion, and morality serve as examples. Consider the U.S. military's invasion of Iraq in 2003. The alleged reason presented to the American people in order to encourage them to agree to conduct war in the Middle East was that Iraq's dictator, Saddam Hussein, was in possession of nuclear weapons which he absolutely intended to give or sell to terrorist organizations that were bent upon killing American citizens. According to their arguments, these terrorists and this dictator opposed American ideals of freedom, and wished to impose their own lifestyles upon U.S. culture (extreme Islamism). Furthermore, this brutal dictator committed many atrocities almost daily within his own country such as ethnic cleansing of Kurds in the northern portion of the country, and the subjection and oppression of women. From this explanation (and justification) by the U.S. government, many causes were created through which U.S. citizens might be encouraged to accept a declaration of war and the sacrifice of their own lives in its pursuit - causes such as freedom and democracy (both the defense of their own and the spread of such ideals to the Iraqi people), and the rights of women. Whether or not these attempts to get the American people behind the war effort were instances of propaganda meant to deceive is beyond the scope of this paper; however, it serves as a real world example of Vonnegut's portrayal of the Martian army, who, instead of being convinced of a certain cause worth fighting for, had one engraved directly into their brains. It begs the question: would the Martian army (comprised of Earthlings) have been willing to attack their own planet without this process? And similarly, if America's leaders had told the U.S. public that it intended to invade Iraq for the sole purpose of acquiring better access to oil and

other resources, would the people have been so willing to comply? Are resources or wealth enough to compel a population to fight a war? Vonnegut ultimately argues that they are not through the extreme example of the Martian army. In them, he reveals the subtle efforts used by governments in the real world to accomplish their goals of conquest.

Although the U.S. military does not blatantly erase the memories of its soldiers, it certainly conducts a process of “normalization” through which soldiers are both physically and mentally incorporated into the military organization. This process is known as basic training. One can see echoes of this in Vonnegut’s description of Unk’s mental state at the beginning of chapter four.

At the hospital they told him again and again and again that he was the best soldier in the best squad in the best platoon in the best company in the best battalion in the best regiment in the best division in the best army.<sup>ix</sup>

This repetition of the word “best” mirrors the repetition of ideas that are preached and instilled into soldiers in the real world as they undergo basic training. Unlike Unk, the powers that be do not have the benefit of erasing their soldiers’ memories to help convince them of the validity of their cause, however, in a process that is very similar to brainwashing, recruits are separated from society, broken down psychologically until they lose any sense of individualism which had defined them up to this point in their lives, and force-fed certain ideas, drills, techniques, mantras, codes of conduct, and patriotic sentiments until they not only believe them, but are ready to die for them. Vonnegut highlights this process of breaking down the recruit and then building him back up into the military’s own image. He describes that “they had blanked out so much of Unk’s memory that they even had to teach him the foot movements and the manual of arms all over again.”<sup>x</sup> Soldiers must even re-learn how to walk through a process called “close order drill.” This process, supposedly, instills discipline in the soldier and, most importantly,

helps to instill the most important trait of all for a foot soldier. “At the hospital they said the most important rule of all was this one: *Always obey a direct order without a moment’s hesitation*” (emphasis mine).<sup>xi</sup> The ultimate correlation between basic training and Martian brainwashing is the nearly complete removal of the individual’s agency. On Mars, this is ultimately accomplished by instilling a chip into the soldier’s skull which provides orders and punishes any soldier who disobeys or even *thinks* in a way that is not acceptable to the military establishment’s paradigm. Although this is not done in a literal sense within the real world’s military, one can easily see from what is described above that a similar, albeit more gradual process accomplishes the same goal. When a person is required, with the threat of punishment, to comply unhesitatingly and willingly to a superior’s order, then that person’s agency is effectively removed – they no longer have a *choice*.

As bleak as this portrayal of the military seems, Vonnegut does provide his readers with hope. The author opens this chapter with a quote from the Martian Director of Mental Health:

We can make the center of a man’s memory virtually as sterile as a scalpel fresh from the autoclave. But grains of new experience begin to accumulate on it at once. These grains in turn form themselves into patterns not necessarily favorable to military thinking. Unfortunately, this problem of recontamination seems insoluble.<sup>xii</sup>

Although the soldier undergoes this subjugation of the mind, he is not lost forever. On the contrary, Vonnegut asserts in this passage that the complete control of an individual is impossible unless that person’s environment is also controlled. Experience is the great shaper of thought, and no person can be refused life experiences unless he is enclosed in a cell in solitary confinement for the duration of his life. This impressionability of the human mind, along with its ability to evolve, challenges the validity of the military profession as a meaningful purpose of human existence. Firstly, if an individual must be convinced through deception or propaganda

(two terms which are not mutually exclusive) to fight a war, then the war itself - along with the cause allegedly justifying it – become questionable. If a cause is truly noble or important, and the person who enlists in its defense, etc., truly believes in it, then no deception is necessary for recruiting that individual. The cause should be able to stand alone as an incentive for the citizen/soldier. If Vonnegut’s assertion in this novel is that the meaning of life is found *within* oneself, as opposed to any external cause, then in order to develop or discover that “purpose/meaning” one must also have agency – the ability and freedom to think and act without external, mental, or physical constraints. Becoming normalized into the military effectively removes the agency of an individual, and replaces it with the will and desires of the organization at large. Sergeant Brackman relates this fact to Unk directly, stating, “that’s the worst thing you can *do*, Unk – remembering back... That’s what they put you in the hospital for in the first place... you were remembering so much, Unk, you weren’t worth a nickel as a soldier.”<sup>xiii</sup> Soldiers are not supposed to think, they are simply required to follow orders. This takes effect in a very hierarchical way, starting minutely with the squad, platoon, or company the soldier is within, and working its way up to the greater, overarching organizations of the overall military and the government it serves.

The military and warfare, therefore, in Vonnegut’s view, cannot be a valid source of meaning in human life because they both remove individual agency and replace it with a constructed mode of thinking. This mode, furthermore, is shaped by the dominant power-structure (the government, business, money, etc.). Vonnegut reveals this through the slowly developing realizations of Unk during his conversations with Boaz. “Unk had the eerie feeling that he and Boaz were the only *real people* in the stone building – that the rest were glass-eyed robots, and not very well-made robots at that.”<sup>xiv</sup> Because the other soldiers had their memories

erased and replaced with the commands of the Martian Army, not only had their agency been removed but their humanity as well. They had become “sheep who, under proper conditions, could commit murder gladly.”<sup>xv</sup> Only Boaz - who as a secret commander maintains full possession of his mental faculties - and Unk - who continually, at the cost of severe pain, struggles to uncover his own memories - can be considered “real.” This implies that something from within individual human beings is what gives them worth – their ability to reason, and then to freely act upon the results of their reasoning.

Ultimately, it is this process of uncovering knowledge which finds any sort of meaningful purpose in Unk’s life as a soldier. In Unk’s letter to himself, Vonnegut portrays the alternative to the military life – a life of obedience, of orders and compliance, of groupthink and structure, a life of emotion and horror, a life without agency. In the letter, Unk lists his discoveries. He writes down the facts that he “knows for sure.” Among these facts are two very important points, through which Vonnegut seems to be speaking directly to the reader about purpose and agency.

Almost everything I know for sure has come from fighting the pain from my antenna... Whenever I start to turn my head and look at something, and the pain comes, I keep turning my head anyway, because I know I am going to see something I’m not supposed to see. Whenever I ask a question, and the pain comes, I know I have asked a really good question.... The more pain I train myself to stand, the more I learn. You are afraid of the pain now, Unk, but you won’t learn anything if you don’t invite the pain. And the more you learn, the gladder you will be to stand the pain.<sup>xvi</sup> (125)

In this particular instance, Unk’s pain is caused by asking and answering questions about himself, as well as questions which defy the accepted paradigm of the Martian military. Unk’s goal is ultimately that of self-knowledge, as well as the unveiling of a “truth” which has been covered up or distorted by the Martian authorities. The pain represents the resistance which occurs to an individual within a certain society, culture, organization, etc., who seeks knowledge that defies or is beyond the norms of accepted thought and/or action within the said group. In the

case of the military/government, it is in the interests of these centers of power to keep the soldier's thought within specified parameters which, ultimately, will support the aims of that power-center. A good "soldier [does not] go around asking question, trying to round out his knowledge. A soldier's knowledge wasn't supposed to be round."<sup>xvii</sup> The pain (resistance), therefore, is an indication to the rebel thinker that he is closer to understanding and uncovering a certain "truth," and furthermore, it is an indication that he is using the ability to rationalize that gives him agency and, ultimately, makes him human. The pain, therefore, will eventually cease to be a nuisance and instead become a source of "gladness." As the thinker exercises his ability, he will eventually see that the pain represents his overcoming of the enforced thought structure, and that he is truly a free agent, capable of thinking beyond the bounds limited to him, and all people, by the power structure. Vonnegut appears to be implying that as long as a center of power exists that perpetually reinforces its position of power, then the efforts of any group or individual to resist or break free from the bounds of thought established by social norms will always require an endurance of pain and/or sacrifice on the part of the free-thinker. Resistance creates an opposite reaction, and one that is often greater in proportion.

Along with the mental limitations placed upon the soldier, and the subsequent removal of agency, Vonnegut addresses the portrayal of war in history. The only accepted account of the war between Earth and Mars was written by Winston Niles Rumfoord, the character who most closely resembles Malachi/Unk's antagonist throughout the novel. Rumfoord is the only man on Earth to have been absorbed into the chrono-synclastic infundibula (according to Vonnegut, the chrono-synclastic infundibula is a location in the universe in which all truths from all perspectives converge – even truths which seem contradictory), and due to this event he exists as

a wave rather than as a point in space and time. He is famous for this endeavor, as well as for his scheduled materializations. He is also commander-in-chief of the Martian army.

It has been said that Earthling civilization... has created ten thousand wars, but only three intelligent commentaries on war.... Winston Niles Rumfoord chose 75,000 words so well for his *Pocket History of Mars* that nothing remains to be said, or to be said better, about the war between Earth and Mars. Anyone who... describe[s] the war between Earth and Mars is humbled by the realization that the tale has already been told to glorious perfection by Rumfoord.<sup>xviii</sup>

It is ironic that the greatest commentator upon the war is also the war's greatest benefactor, as well as its main orchestrator. A natural process of history is that victors are publishers. The war's loser is unable to speak its own perspective of events due to the fact that its soldiers are either now under the oppression of the winner (who has confiscated all of the former's property), are discredited as war criminals (might makes right; the winner by default has god's blessing and "must" be the side of justice and righteousness in the conflict), or have been all together annihilated (therefore having no voice). For all of these reasons the war's loser is unable to bring a contending perspective into the historical discussion, and therefore, such a perspective may as well not even exist. Although technically, as the Martian commander-in-chief, Rumfoord did not "win" the war, he stands in a unique position of authority due to his fame, and due to the fact that no one save himself and conscious Martians (true commanders and Unk) know of his involvement behind the Martian war effort. In many ways, Rumfoord appears as a prestigious, objective, third-party observer, and his famous materializations and "knowledge of the future" gives him the credibility to speak on the matter of the war with authority. Rumfoord, as an inhabitant of this authoritative position, has the profound ability to control the image of this historical event, and subsequently he has the power to shape the memory of the Martian invasion as he sees fit.

“I shall bring you a short history of Mars, a *true* history of the saints who died in order that the world might be united as the Brotherhood of man. This history will break the heart of every human being who has a heart that can be broken.”<sup>xix</sup>  
(emphasis mine).

The “truth” of this history is immediately suspect to the reader, who knows that Rumfoord possesses ulterior motives. In the same respect, Vonnegut is encouraging the reader to question the accepted historical accounts of war in the real world. For example, he advocates that the reader should not simply accept the U.S.’s version of the Second World War as objective fact, rather, the reader ought to recognize that, like Rumfoord, the American government also had ulterior motives in its shaping of the historical portrayal of that war, and all wars. Was World War II a noble endeavor fought by the principled, American defenders of democracy and humanitarian ideals, against the vicious spread of Nazi fascism as is taught? Or, were there potentially disturbing acts committed even by the heroic U.S. soldiers, and self-interest involved in the decision-making of the country’s leaders? Certainly the two questions are not mutually exclusive, yet the second question should not be avoided in an effort at tidily answering the first. Vonnegut can attest personally to the atrocity of war from his own experience as a prisoner of war (POW) to the Germans, and as a survivor of the dreadful fire-bombing conducted against the mostly civilian-populated city of Dresden, Germany by his own fellow service-members.

The ultimate power of the historian resides in emphasis. Even an event known worldwide, such as the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has the potential to be distorted based upon what emphasis the author chooses to place upon particular aspects of the event. The U.S., for example, highlights the bombs’ utility in ending the war and preventing the potentially high cost of a siege and amphibious invasion of the Japanese islands. The Japanese, on the other hand, may focus instead upon the drastic amount of innocent civilians killed or maimed by the blast, as well as the lasting impact of radioactive fallout upon the

development of their society and its people. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, may consider the act as intended not only to end the war quickly, but also as an effort by the U.S. to intimidate the communists and to use the bomb as a future bargaining chip at the diplomatic table. If nothing else, these various portrayals reveal how the allegedly “objective facts” of history are subjected by the viewpoint and the motives of the historian. Similarly to the historian, Vonnegut uses emphasis in his portrayal of the Martian invasion. Instead of doing this in an effort to portray the war in an objective, patriotic, or critical way, Vonnegut emphasizes comical absurdities and uses humor to deconstruct the purpose and utility of war in general.

The atrocity of war is profound. Ask any soldier who has experienced combat, read any memoir written by men directly involved in the day-to-day heat of battle, and one cannot help but concur with the timeless statement that “war is hell.” The process of preparing for war is dehumanizing, as shown above, due to the effective removal of the individual soldier’s free agency through a process of breaking down the mind and rebuilding it with “patriotism,” group cohesion, discipline, and a limited, obedient thought-structure. This process, however, pales in comparison with the impact of violence upon the soldier’s mind. To be threatened with death, and forced to kill other human beings in an effort to survive, is both physically and mentally damaging. The effects of post traumatic stress disorder attest to this fact. How does one deal with the anguish caused by this grave enterprise so often undertaken by humanity? Vonnegut provides two methods.

The war between Mars and Earth lasted 67 Earthling days. Every nation on Earth was attacked. Earth’s casualties were 461 killed, 223 wounded, none capture, and 216 missing. Mars’ casualties were 149,315 killed, 446 wounded, 11 captured, and 46,634 missing. At the end of the war, every Martian had been killed, wounded, captured, or been found missing. Not a soul was left on Mars. Not a building was left standing on Mars. The last waves of Martians to attack Earth were, to the horror of the Earthlings who pot-shotted them, old men, women, and a few little children.<sup>xx</sup>

The most striking initial aspect of this passage is its emotionless tone. In a very matter-of-fact description, the war is summarized in basic statistics. The humanity is lost in the numbers, and in many ways it resembles the casualty reports frequently printed in the news media, and in the after-action reports placed upon a general's desk. The strategy of this method is simple: by removing emotion, the reader is spared any personal connection to the event and is spared the emotional pain typically associated with death and violence. Vonnegut, however, deconstructs this typical approach with humor. The exaggerated numbers are comically ridiculous, and due to the author's removed tone, one might as well be reading the results of a lopsided sports score in the Sunday newspaper. Both of these methods – the droning emotionless tone and the humor – disguise the fact that each number in the casualty report represents an actual, individual human being with thoughts, feelings, family, friends, careers, etc.. The ultimate difference, however, is that Vonnegut's humor simultaneously hides and *focuses* the reader's attention upon the depressing reality and implication of the deaths, meanwhile the emotionless, robotic tone of the casualty report *only hides* this reality in an attempt to protect the reader.

The humor continues in the detailed descriptions of battle. The war begins with the illustrious Parachute Ski Marines “seizing” the Earth's moon in a surprise attack, and then threatening the Earth with a continuation of bloodshed should they refuse to surrender.

The Martians announced their presence by radio to Earth, demanded Earth's surrender. And they gave Earth what they described as “a taste of hell.” This taste, to Earth's considerable amusement, turned out to be a very light shower of rockets carrying twelve pounds apiece of TNT. After giving Earth this taste of hell, the Martians told Earth that Earth's situation was hopeless.<sup>xxi</sup>

The Martians' aggression is insignificant given their capabilities and their fruitless strategy of seizing the moon, which Vonnegut describes as only being occupied by European scientists. An act of seizing another country's (in this case, planet's) sovereign territory and threatening

violence upon its people is typically an event of sobering, horrifying seriousness. In this case, however, the attempt by the Martians to threaten the Earth into surrender is so ridiculous that it's cute – like a child threatening to vanquish an adult burglar with a paper mache sword. Although the scenario is so exaggerated that it becomes funny, the laughter accompanying the image of a group of soldiers on skis throwing bundles of TNT at the Earth (probably with ACME Inc. printed on the side of the dynamite) masks the true gravity of the Martian army's situation – inevitable slaughter. The humor only increases with Earth's response, which is akin to killing a house fly with a shotgun. "In the next twenty-four hours, Earth fired 617 thermo-nuclear devices at the Martian[s]... on the moon. Of these 276 were hits."<sup>xxii</sup> It is the exaggerated difference in fighting capabilities and the foolish, misinformed confidence of the Martians which makes this scene appear so hilarious. What, however, is the reader ultimately laughing at? The blatant, unrestrained killing of human beings.

Vonnegut continues to depict other acts of Martian "bravery" with descriptions of soldiers continuing to fight to the death even when all odds are stacked against them. "A single, badly scorched man... attacked all of India with a double-barreled shotgun. Though there was no one to radio-control him, he did not surrender until his gun blew up."<sup>xxiii</sup> He also describes a squad of Parachute Ski Marines surrounded in a market in Switzerland, who, when they are told they ought to surrender to save their lives, respond only with the exclamation "Nuts!" This description is an explicit reference to an actual event in World War II. When the American 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne was completely surrounded by German forces in Belgium, the German commander sent an entreaty to the American commander offering him the opportunity to surrender. The general paratrooper responded with that same, single word. Luckily for the Americans, the regiment ultimately survived the ordeal. Vonnegut does not say what happens to the Parachute

Ski Marines. In both of the above mentioned descriptions, there appears to be an ultimate folly in the bravery of the Martian (and subsequently real-life American) soldiers, who continue to fight despite all odds against them. Initially, the folly appears to be hopelessness. Is this not the essence of bravery? Continuing to hope when there is no hope left? Or, as seems to be implied by Vonnegut, is the folly in the Martians' bravery the ultimate pointlessness of their endeavor? Not only is it true that one man fighting all of India with a shotgun is hopeless because of the odds stacked against him, but it is also true that despite his selfless, sacrificial show of bravery, his efforts will produce no beneficial result. The Martians will not receive any tactical or strategic advantage from this soldier's act of courage, which ultimately makes the brave act pointless. The only result is death; pointless death. Humor, nevertheless, is still present in the scenario for the same reason as it is present in the Ski Marines' seizure of the moon. It is exaggerated and ridiculous, and it serves as an example of the ridiculousness of war in general.

### ***Religion***

Religion is complex, and there are many different kinds of religions across the world which engage in all sorts of different practices, rituals, customs, norms, etc.. Vonnegut's concern is mainly with Western religion, although his criticisms can also be applied to the general idea of religion as an institution as well. The reader's first overt encounter with religion is in the first chapter, when the reverend Bobby Denton comments upon the discovery of the chronosynclastic infundibula to his congregation, known as the Love Crusaders. Through this initial encounter Vonnegut demonstrates a level of contempt for contemporary religion and its practitioners, who presumptuously assume an air of authority on any and all issues concerning humanity. "It was a situation made to order for American fundamentalist preachers. They were quicker than philosophers or historians or anybody to talk sense about the truncated Age of

Space.”<sup>xxiv</sup> What makes the reverend and his parishioners presumptuous is the assumption that, as followers of god and divine truth, they possess a condescending moral authority to interpret events in which they possess no actual knowledge or credibility. Somehow their alleged connection with god gives them this “right.” Vonnegut’s description of the fundamentalist preachers as jumping excitedly at this opportunity to vocalize their commentary on the issue of the infundibula is put into perspective by their comparison with historians and philosophers, two groups of intellectuals who seemingly possess a higher level of credibility in discussing the effects of this discovery on the human species (interestingly he does not mention scientists, who would seem to possess the most authority in discussing this issue).

Vonnegut deconstructs the preacher’s assumed authority in two specific ways. Firstly, the name of the parishioners – the Love Crusaders – is oxymoronic. Simply placing these two words together in a description results in the phrase’s self-deconstruction. The Crusader, historically, was a European, Christian knight from the Medieval period who sought to conquer the Holy Land (modern day Israel and Jerusalem) in an allegedly divinely inspired quest to retake the sacred ground for his own religion. The Crusades were, effectively, an attempt by European Christians to ethnically cleanse the region of Arabic and Palestinian Muslims for various secular and religious purposes. Contrast this image with the idea of love. Is a love crusader a person who invades other territories and murders people of a different belief system all for the sake of love? The title Love Crusader is comical because it is a name which combines two exaggeratedly opposite ideas into an utterly ridiculous (even contradictory) image that, what’s more, is completely unintended by the name-givers.

The church deconstructs its own presumed authority even further simply by sounding ignorant. Denton preaches,

“And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded... the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel....” This seemed a particularly damning piece of evidence to Denton, and the Love Crusaders agreed bleakly without quite understanding why.<sup>xxv</sup>

It is not the biblical reference itself which is ignorant (although many cynics may argue this point), but the incorrect grammar in the use of the word “builded” which immediately implies a level of ignorance in the reverend. There is a certain kind of language generally associated with authority, and by violating the most basic rules of grammar Denton reveals a lack of education or sophistication, and therefore he loses any kind of credibility which a more refined, well-spoken, charismatic individual may have possessed in this situation. Also, the application of the Tower of Babel story to misadventures in space stretches the limits of metaphorical capability. It is possible to make such a connection, as in both instances humankind is “building” something in order to reach “heaven,” but the association even escapes Denton’s own parishioners who simply nod their heads in dumbfounded agreement. The mass of parishioners is unable to think for itself, rather, it sheepishly accepts the tenets of its faith as told to them by Denton without critically thinking or even understanding it. Vonnegut shows us, through this portrayal, a disdain for masses of people who simply believe what they’re told and are unable to think for themselves.

Another presumption of religion is its elevation of the importance and relevance of humanity. It is understandable that such an instance should occur in the development of religion. Being man-made, it is only natural that religion should center on the importance of humankind as separate from the animal world. Many philosophers and theologians have argued for humanity’s special place on the planet due to our unique ability to reason, which is certainly a truth in many respects. Due to a lack of knowledge about the universe, however, humans have also been led to think of themselves as of central importance in the vast scheme of the cosmos. Ignorance of the

universe allows contemporary people to forgive the inhabitants of antiquity, however, the truly astounding fact is that many people in the world today still believe – even insist – upon humanity’s importance in the grand scheme of the universe. As if, on a large beach in southern California, one grain of sand is somehow more important than another. Vonnegut challenges this perspective on the importance of humanity as a species. “‘What an optimistic animal man is!’ said Rumfoord rosily. ‘Imagine expecting the species to last for ten million more years – as though the people were as well-designed as turtles.’”<sup>xxvi</sup> In our own minds, humankind is eternal. Our problems, our dramas, and our history matter to us, and as a consequence we have constructed a reality for ourselves in which we not only matter, but are the cornerstone of space and time. We believe that god created all this for us! Beatrice is an example of this sort of thinking on a smaller scale.

“I’m going to be thrown right out in the street without even the price of a meal – and my husband laughs and wants me to play guessing games!”  
 “It wasn’t any *ordinary* guessing game,” said Rumfoord. “It was about how long the human race was going to last. I thought that might sort of give you more perspective about your own problems.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

Despite the fact that she has the ability to learn the intricate details of the universe from her husband, Beatrice is instead focused solely upon her immediate problems. Like the average human, her thoughts do not extend beyond her immediate vicinity; nothing else is more important than her present situation. Rumfoord explains that he is merely trying to give her perspective, that her problems are really not so magnificent when seen through a scope as large as his. Her problems are as insignificant to him as humankind’s problems are to the rest of the universe. Politics and war have no affect upon any kind of natural process. Regardless of what we think, or what we do as a species, the Earth will continue to spin and orbit around the Sun, and all the other processes of space and time will go on unaffected. Beatrice’s problems, like

those of humankind, are temporary and arbitrary – or as Rumfoord would say, they are punctual (meaning they exist at a specific point in space and time). Humanity has existed in its present form on this planet for six thousand years, and there's no reason why it shouldn't last for six thousand more – but there's no reason why it should either.

Vonnegut offers a key insight into the processes of religion – and the failure of it to provide a reasonable purpose for human existence – in his portrayal of Winston Niles Rumfoord, who acts as a metaphor for god throughout the story. After crashing his spaceship into the chrono-synclastic infundibula, Rumfoord's entire mode of existence shifts. No longer does he exist in space and time as a point, but instead as a “wave,” continually reverberating along a specific course in the solar system. Whenever a planet or other physical object comes into sync with this wave, Rumfoord materializes at that moment in space-time. Because of his new form of existence, Rumfoord ceases to experience time chronologically; rather, he experiences it all at once. He lives every moment in his life simultaneously (which is hard for the reader, who experiences time in a linear way, to imagine). One effect of this kind of existence is an ability to “know the future,” at least, from the perspective of a punctual person. This kind of existence and experience of time resembles omniscience, a trait typically associated with god. Further adding to Rumfoord's “godliness” is his constant behind-the-scenes control of events. He is, ultimately, a manipulator, striving only to achieve his own particular ends (or so he thinks). As commander-in-chief of the Martian army, he controls and initiates the planet's invasion of Earth (knowing full well what the result of such an invasion would be). He also acts as the major influence in Malachi's life by programming his ship to avoid the invasion and redirect him toward Mercury, by assembling the Harmoniums so that they give Unk clues on how to escape the deep planetary cave, and even revealing to him his “future” at the beginning of the novel. Finally, Rumfoord

invents and establishes a new Earth religion. Although he does not proclaim himself to be god, the act of establishing the institution and of writing its holy text (*The Winston Niles Rumfoord Authorized Revised Bible*) are two functions traditionally associated with the influence of, if not the direct hand of, god.

As a metaphor for god, Rumfoord's fate further reveals the role of religion in human life. In his conversation with Beatrice following the stock market crash, Rumfoord gives the reader a brief glimpse of his ultimate role in the grand scheme of the plot, and subsequently of all human existence. "Stop and think sometime about the roller coaster I'm on. Some day on Titan, it will be revealed to you just how ruthlessly I've been used, and by whom, and to what disgustingly paltry ends."<sup>xxviii</sup> It is at the story's conclusion which we finally discover Rumfoord's true purpose. Just as he manipulated events in order to create his own religion, we find out that he also has been manipulated by the Tralfamadorians. All his actions, therefore, which he had previously perceived as his own, were under the influence of mind control from an alien species. His religion was not, in fact, his own, but was instead a creation of the Tralfamadorians. In a similar way, god and the institution of religion in the real world are not freely acting agents, but are under the control of people inhabiting positions of power. Although humans (as far as we know) do not possess the ability to telepathically engage in mind-control like the Tralfamadorians, people *do* have the ability to affect the thinking of populations through the control and dissemination of ideas. Examples of this behavior are visible in the use of god, or of divine law, as justification for any endeavor. From going to war, to explaining wealth and status, to slavery, to simply making sure that the average citizen behaves himself, god is ultimately used as a metaphysical puppet by the elite in an effort to control the masses. Whether or not this kind of control is employed intentionally by the elite or not (that is, they themselves do not believe in

the religion but are simply using it to achieve their own ends) is debatable, but regardless of the intentions of the centers of authority, the fact remains that institutional religion *is* a structured method of thought control.

In addition to using his god-like abilities to push the Martian army into war with Earth, Rumfoord also uses religion and religious intentions to justify both the purpose of the war, as well as its disastrous results.

It was Rumfoord's intention that Mars should lose the war – that Mars should lose it foolishly and horribly. As a seer of the future, Rumfoord knew for certain that this would be the case – and he was content. He wished to change the World for the better by means of the great and unforgettable suicide of Mars.... “Any man who would change the World in a significant way must have showmanship, a genial willingness to shed other people's blood, and a plausible new religion to introduce during the brief period of repentance and horror that usually follows bloodshed.”<sup>xxix</sup>

Rumfoord's statement resembles the typical excuse made for engaging in “just” war. In an attempt to explain the need for the sacrifice of life, and the resulting horror of combat, national leaders appeal to a higher cause as justification. Somehow, they argue, the world becomes a better place having undergone this immense tragedy of death and destruction – as if the blood of soldiers and innocents soaking into the ground is fertilizing the soil and feeding future generations, like a sacrifice to the gods of agriculture. The stark reality of dead and injured bodies, of the mechanized and emotionless machines of war ripping apart human flesh like freshly baked loaves of bread, is glazed over in favor of patriotic and humanist rhetoric. What is most revealing about the above passage, however, is not Rumfoord's attempt to justify his war with high ideals, but his insistence on the *necessity* of the role of bloodshed in instituting meaningful reform in society. The role of war, in this case, is essentially to destroy hope and any other traits of character bearing semblance to that of humanity. War is not only justified by religion, but acts as a means to either spread its tenets or, as is intended by Rumfoord, to create

new ones. The process is very similar to the acts of brainwashing and basic training mentioned earlier. The world, like the soldier, is effectively cleared of its humanity in a “purification”-like process that leaves a blank slate from which something new can be built. For individual soldiers, those new things include military discipline, group compliance, and mortal skills – in the case of the world, what is being built is a new structure of ideas, or, a new religion.

On the final day of the war, Rumfoord puts his ideal into practice by speaking directly to the world from his home. The audience is a group of tourists, viewing Rumfoord during his materialization as if he were a museum exhibit.

“The war that ends so gloriously today was glorious only for the saints who lost it. Those saints were Earthlings like yourselves. They went to Mars, mounted their hopeless attacks, and died gladly, in order that Earthlings might at last become one people – joyful, fraternal, and proud. Their wish, when they died... was not for paradise for themselves, but that the brotherhood of mankind on Earth might be enduring.”<sup>xxx</sup>

Rumfoord is implying that by “dying gladly” the soldiers willingly sacrificed themselves for the betterment of mankind. This passage is reminiscent of claims made by politicians and military leaders following battles in which there occurred a massive loss of life, or at funerals for dead soldiers. The soldier’s fighting spirit is ennobled and immortalized as a heroic act of unselfishness – as if the final thoughts in the dying man’s mind were of free elections and the right of all human beings to bear arms! In reality, the motivations of the soldiers who fought the hopeless war against earth were not so noble. In fact, due to the brainwashing, memory erasing, and the direct control of the antennae in their skulls, the Martian soldiers had no motivations at all. They were incapable of motivation. Like remote-controlled robots, the Martian grunts were directed by the true commanders (who, in turn, were directed by Rumfoord himself) in all of their actions, and at no point were they able to critically observe or question who they were, what they were doing, or why they were doing it. They neither decided nor wished anything other than

probably staying alive, or protecting their comrades. In a similar respect, it is often assumed in contemporary America that soldiers join the military of their own free will in an effort to defend their country's principles. The American military is an all-volunteer force, which implies that every member has freely chosen to join its ranks, and in some instances this is certainly true. The Martian military deconstructs this assumption. Most people who join an all-volunteer military do so out of financial necessity, or out of a promise of future financial benefits. Vonnegut reveals recruitment tactics in his description of two Martian "secret agents."

Their usual technique was to dress like civil engineers and offer not-quite-bright men and women nine dollars an hour, tax free, plus food and shelter and transportation, to work on a secret Government project in a remote part of the world for three years. It was a joke... that they had never specified *what* government was organizing the project, and that no recruit had ever thought to ask.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Certain demographics of people are, in essence, preyed upon by recruiters to fill empty slots in the military's ranks – mainly poor people. Simply observe the incentives used by military recruiters – steady pay, health and dental insurance, and the promise of future educational benefits following the contracted term of service. Sure, recruits *technically* have the choice to join or not, however, if in a situation with few job prospects, a family to support, and an inability to afford the ever increasing cost of a higher education which has become a basic requirement in ascertaining a job with a decent wage, how much choice is there?

Having softened his audience with the appeal to the heroic sacrifice of the Martian soldiers, Rumfoord continues his pitch for religious and social reform.

"I bring you word of a new religion that can be received enthusiastically in every corner of every Earthling heart. National borders... will disappear. The lust for war... will die. All envy, all fear, all hate will die.... The name of the new religion... is The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent."<sup>xxxix</sup>

This passage thoroughly resembles the rhetoric used during and after the First World War. Supporters of the conflict appealed to the bloodshed as “the war to end all wars,” and following the violence, American president Woodrow Wilson attempted to establish an internationalist League of Nations, in which countries would convene diplomatically in an effort to promote peace and discourage a similar massive war from ever occurring again. Rumfoord, in a similarly paternalistic way, lists what are traditionally the causes of war and then proposes their abolishment through the acceptance of his new religion. Despite the seriousness of Rumfoord’s proclamation, and of the subject at hand, the passage reads like a joke by concluding with the unexpected, and exaggeratedly blunt name of Rumfoord’s new church. Vonnegut plays with the traditional notion of god’s involvement in human conflict. Countries frequently claim to fight in god’s name or to possess god’s favor (the winner is especially fond of the latter), meanwhile people attempt to justify the death and sacrifice of soldiers by appealing to god. Rumfoord, however, does the complete opposite of this, and tells the world that frankly, god doesn’t give a damn! This statement is Vonnegut’s way of lightening a typically depressing topic. Millions of people have perished, and god doesn’t care. Is that because god isn’t actually there? Ultimately, in Rumfoord’s new religion, it doesn’t matter either way.

It is not only the institution of religion which Vonnegut deconstructs, but also the idea of god and spirituality in general as a legitimate means of defining purpose in human existence. Although Rumfoord is a metaphorical representation of the divine, as previously shown, Joseph Sigman states in his essay “Science and Parody in Kurt Vonnegut’s *The Sirens of Titan*” that the man is “far from being a god, Rumfoord is a parody of a deity and through him Vonnegut parodies the entire idea of a divine consciousness as an absolute frame of reference providing a basis for truth and objectivity.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> According to Sigman, Rumfoord’s frequent materializations

and de-materializations are “a parodic death of God.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> This point is further emphasized by the overt non-presence of god or his influence throughout the story.

The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent represents the most blatant absence of god in the novel. The tenets of this new religion are basically the antithesis to Unk/Malachi’s earlier invocation that “someone up there must like me.”

The implications of Vonnegut’s rejection of providence are explored through Rumfoord’s Church.... Malachi states the central theme of the Church when he returns to Earth: “I was a victim of a series of accidents.... As are we all.” While this is a straightforward statement of the planlessness of the cosmos, it is also ironic, for little in Malachi’s life appears to have been accidental. For example, the fantastic luck that built the Constant fortune was presumably the result of Tralfamadorian influence. In one sense, the Tralfamadorian scheme gives Malachi the purpose he always sought. It has provided his life with a meaning, but this meaning is, of course, irrelevant and unsatisfying. It is merely imposed from outside and so runs counter to his own emotional needs.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Rumfoord’s religion does not attempt to contend with the philosophical issue of whether or not god actually exists, rather, it points out that regardless of his actual existence he ultimately does not care about the lives or fates of humans as individuals or as a species. He is not present in human affairs, and therefore no metaphysical influence exists. As a result, humans are free, and they are responsible for the consequences of their own actions. The irony that exists here is that although there is no *divine* control of worldly events, there are nevertheless external, physical forces which impact the lives of humans. Although free, we are not the makers of our own destiny as there are many factors which subtly and blatantly nudge our lives and evolution both as individuals and as a species. These forces include society, the environment, genetics, and the laws of physics, to name a few. The only purpose which Malachi/Unk (or any person) can find in existence is simply to react to these external influences.

The most powerful providential influence in human affairs comes from the Tralfamadorians. Although the aliens are like god in that they are never physically present (save for the messenger Salo), their existence is an objective fact, and they have a concrete position within the universe. Furthermore, though more advanced than the human species, they are equally subject to the laws of nature and physics. If anything, they are representative of the forces of the universe, which humans are both not in control of and unaware of. Eventually, however, after the spare part to Salo's spaceship is finally delivered to Titan, this influence over the human species is finally officially withdrawn from Earth. Rumfoord provides the commentary for the effects of this result when he states, "perhaps, now that the part has been delivered to the Tralfamadorian messenger, Tralfamadore will leave the Solar System alone. Perhaps Earthlings will now be free to develop and to follow their own inclinations."<sup>xxxvi</sup> Sigman responds to this quote, stating,

This withdrawal of extra-terrestrial influence is another metaphorical death of God. It leaves humanity purposeless and free. In the final pages... [the characters] are at last allowed to follow the logic of their own emotional needs and to create their own human meanings in the planless cosmos of modern science.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The idea of god, and the institution of religion, act as oppressive forces upon the human species, and according to this quote humanity cannot be considered "free" until these are eliminated from consciousness. It is quite easy to argue that if there is a god who has an ultimate purpose for humanity – and that each person is a pawn in god's grand strategy to implement his planned fate of the universe – then "free-will" does not exist. One cannot simultaneously have a fate and be free. The *idea* of god acts in a similar capacity. Belief demands obedience, loyalty, and strict adherence to the tenets and dogmas of a belief system. Sigman points out that it is only through the removal of this kind of system that humanity can be capable of freely thinking, and of establishing any truthful perspective of its place in the universe.

### *Economics*

With war and religion failing, according to Vonnegut, to provide humanity with a valid, fulfilling meaning for existence, what remains in Western culture for people to devote their lives to? There is one institution which has managed to avoid serious criticism in mainstream America in the modern and postmodern ages – the institution of capitalist economics. Regardless how one feels about the call of duty or the “glory” of war, and despite one’s opinion about the necessity of religion or spirituality, capitalism has maintained an overwhelming, unquestioning support in the U.S. as an infallible economic theory. Accumulation of capital is, to Americans, not just a contending influence in humanity’s pursuit for meaning in life, it is the centerpiece. The “American Dream” itself is based upon the “worthiness” of the pursuit of wealth. At the outset of the novel *Malachi Constant* is the wealthiest man in the world. He has inherited his riches from his father, and spends the majority of his early life partying while the company he owns – *Magnum Opus* - is run by the president Ransom K. Fern. Malachi is referred to as the luckiest man in the world due to his vast amounts and constant accumulation of money.

“They tell me you are possibly the luckiest man who ever lived.”

“That might be putting it a little too strong,” said Constant.

“You won’t deny you’ve had fantastically good luck financially,” said Rumfoord. Constant shook his head. “No. That would be hard to deny,” he said.

“And to what do you attribute this wonderful luck of yours?” said Rumfoord. Constant shrugged. “Who knows?” he said. “I guess somebody up there likes me,” he said.

Rumfoord looked up at the ceiling. “What a charming concept – someone’s liking you up there.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Malachi cannot explain his good fortune in any way other than that “someone” (god) must like him enough to bless him with such a favorable life. This idea of luck is synonymous with the idea of a “blessing.” Generally, luck is not earned or inherited, rather, it is simply a metaphysical explanation for the good fortune of an individual. “Blessings,” or divine providence, similarly

serve to explain the good fortunes of a person but, instead of ascribing the cause to random chance, places the cause of success into the hands of a divine entity. Vonnegut shows the connection between these two concepts in the above conversation, while simultaneously revealing the absurdity of such a view through Rumfoord's response to Malachi's "charming" concept. To a space traveler experiencing time and space in a non-linear way, who sees the past, present, and future simultaneously and, as a result, knows many secrets about the universe which the average person does not even begin to contemplate, Malachi's view of his status is quaint and ignorant. Furthermore, it directly reflects the view of the masses concerning the ability of one person to accumulate such a vast amount of wealth in comparison with the average population. "Man – you must have some kind of guardian angel.... Sumpin' sure must be lookin' out for you!" Then it hit Constant: *This was exactly the case.*<sup>xxxix</sup> This view of wealth as a manifestation of favor from some kind of external agent justifies the capitalist paradigm, and although it has evolved in certain ways throughout American history, it nevertheless has continued to have a subconscious effect upon the psyche of the American mind even into the present day.

The earliest European settlers on the shores of present-day New England were, as is well known, members of the Puritan church, a church which ascribed to a Calvinist view of the universe. This view mainly preached the ideas of predestination and divine providence, or, that the hand of god was directly involved in all human affairs. In accordance with this belief, it was widely accepted that god's grace can be directly visible through a person's actions. From this, it follows that grace ought to be visible in other facets of a person's life as well. According to philosopher Max Weber in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*,

The methodical development of one's own holiness to ever higher levels of firm assurance and perfection as measured against the law was a *sign* of a state of grace... [and] God worked in those... by giving them signs.<sup>xl</sup>

Wealth, therefore, is an “obvious” sign that a person has been blessed by god, meanwhile poverty is a sign of being forsaken. This quote from Weber implies that god is actively engaged in the worldly and financial pursuits of all humankind. Malachi reflects this view in his explanation and justification of his gross amount of wealth. Despite the alleged secularization of American thought since the seventeenth century, Vonnegut shows through Malachi that this heuristic method of explaining an individual’s accumulation of wealth is still present in the contemporary world in terms such as luck, or “business savvy,” or the “forces” of the free market. The second implication that comes from Malachi’s statement about luck follows from the first. If the hand of god is actively involved in the finances of individuals, and if he uses economics to bestow blessings and reflect his will upon society, then economics must contain a significant level of importance or value.

Vonnegut, however, deconstructs these two views of economics beginning with the financial collapses of Malachi and Beatrice Rumfoord. In a conversation with his wife in a materialization following Beatrice’s loss of all her worldly possessions, Rumfoord states,

“I just wish we could go out to the chrono-synclastic infundibula together... so you could see for once what I was talking about. All I can say is that my failure to warn you about the stock-market crash is as much a part of the natural order as Halley’s Comet – and it makes an equal amount of sense to rage against either one.”<sup>xli</sup>

By comparing the stock market crash to the passing of Halley’s comet, Rumfoord claims that the two are simply forces of nature, a fact which can be taken two ways. On the one hand, the reader can perceive the “force” of nature as synonymous with the “hand of god,” in which case the financial status of all individuals is justified by some metaphysical order, or fate, that moulds everything in the way it ought to be. On the other hand, the laws of physics which govern how nature operates are not dependent upon the influence of some divine force. Halley’s comet is

simply a rock being flung through space by the gravitational forces of massive bodies like planets and stars; there is no invisible guiding hand, rather, the comet is simply a subject of the environment that it's in. Similarly, the stock market behaves in a way that is not under control of the will of a divine being, rather, it simply reacts to the pushes, tugs, and pulls of events that occur within its environment. One cannot, therefore, complain about the stock market's fluctuation any more justifiably than one can berate gravity for holding him onto the Earth's surface. Rumfoord's final statement following the hyphen shows that Vonnegut's intention of this passage is the latter interpretation. Furthermore, one can deduce from this passage that not only is economics *not* influenced by divine providence, but also that its value is completely arbitrary.

There is a question which arises from this description of economics as a consequence of nature. If economics is not divinely influenced, then is it scientific? Many in the contemporary Western world would argue yes, especially those who ascribe to the economic views of Milton Friedman. This view of economics as scientific, however, is in reality not any different from the view that it is divinely influenced. In both cases, the capitalist paradigm ascribes a metaphysical attribute to the accumulation of wealth. Although a person's wealth is no longer attributed to the hand of god, the perspective of economics as a science, coupled with the "American dream" of "work hard and you shall be rewarded," still justifies the accumulation of excessive amounts of wealth as the result of a person's superiority – in this case intellect and work ethic rather than spiritual purity. Vonnegut reveals the absurdity of this hard-working, scientifically "infallible" view of capitalism in his description of the investment practices of Malachi's father and, subsequently, Malachi himself. The rule, or economic theory, which Noel Constant subscribed to, and which resulted in his accumulation of vast riches, consisted of only one tenet: to buy

corporations with the initials of each successive pair of letters in the Bible, beginning with the first line and progressing from there. “Noel Constant wrote the [first] sentence [of Genesis] in capital letters, put periods between the letters, divided the letters into pairs, rendering the sentence as follows: ‘I.N., T.H., E.B., E.G....’”<sup>xlii</sup> There are entire schools and colleges dedicated solely to the study of economics and investment in the stock market, yet Noel Constant’s success came from half-wittedly selecting nearly random letters without any guiding theory or economic principle! A hilariously depressing fact for any person who has devoted his time and life to the study of economics or the profession of finance capitalism.

Noel Constant did it without genius and without spies. His system was so idiotically simple that some people can’t understand it, no matter how often it is explained. The people who can’t understand it are people who have to believe, for their own peace of mind, that tremendous wealth can be produced only by tremendous cleverness.<sup>xliii</sup>

The Constants neither worked hard nor possessed superior mental abilities, they simply happened to buy or sell the right companies at the right times in order to make money. Yet, because of the historical influence of Puritanism, as well as the currently prevalent perspective of economics as scientific, the average person is unable to see the Constants’ success for what it is. This is ultimately why the study of economics even exists. “I had a professor in Harvard Business School,’ said young Fern... ‘who kept telling me that I was smart, but that I would have to *find my boy*, if I was going to be rich.”<sup>xliv</sup> The ultimate purpose of economic schools and all the tongue-twisting jargon is simply to obscure the utter simplicity behind it all – that finance capitalism is nothing more than a process of intelligent guessing; high stakes gambling for people who have no skills to serve or produce for society. It is unacceptable to the contemporary mind that one percent of the population, who possess ninety-nine percent of the country’s wealth, could possibly be so successful out of mere happenstance. According to Vonnegut, however, this

is exactly the case. No skill, virtue, or superior character is required. All a person needs is a little luck, and a bank account large enough to support risky investments that yield high returns. This is not to say, necessarily, that the study of economics as a philosophy is futile. On the contrary, understanding the distribution of capital in an attempt to better people's lives (although the motive behind studying economic principles is usually much more selfish) can have a direct affect upon society. It can even be admirable, depending upon the fruits produced by such studying. What *is* being said is that capitalism is not a scientifically objective fact. It is, above all, a philosophical theory, and it should be treated as such.

Vonnegut not only poses a critique of finance capitalism in particular, but of the whole economic theory in general. During Noel's initial meeting with Ransom K. Fern, the future Magnum Opus president reveals to the lucky man the main error in his entire investment scheme. "I can show you where you should have made two hundred million where you made only fifty-nine. You know absolutely nothing about corporate law or tax law – or even common-sense business procedure."<sup>xlv</sup> Only one thing matters to a business man in a capitalist economy, and that is the accumulation of profit. Life, to the capitalist, is essentially nothing more than a grand game in which the winner is the one who has possession of the largest quantity of wealth upon his death. Fern implies further, in the above comment, that it is "common-sense" in the business world to know the rules of the game, and to exploit them at every opportunity. "Fern showed him an organizational plan that had the name Magnum Opus, Incorporated. It was a marvelous engine for doing violence to the spirit of thousands of laws without actually running afoul of so much as a city ordinance."<sup>xlvi</sup> The true capitalist hates any and all forms of regulation, therefore it is his duty to understand the constraints imposed upon him by corporate and tax laws, and then to slip stealthily through the loopholes. Spawning from this mindset is a "monument to hypocrisy and

sharp practice,<sup>»xlvi</sup> the creation of the non-existent corporate body. An entity which exists in name and on paper only. Vonnegut writes that Noel built his investment company, Magnum Opus, “with a pen, a check book, some check-sized Government envelopes, a Gideon Bible, and a bank balance of eight thousand, two hundred and twelve dollars.”<sup>»xlviii</sup> This is essentially a nonsensical statement, and Vonnegut intends it to be so, as nothing can literally be *built* with these materials. In order to build anything, a person must be in possession of very specific tools and resources, such as a hammer, nails, a saw, wood, etc.. Magnum Opus is built with none of these things, rather, it is constructed with paper and ink. Furthermore, Noel runs his business from a hotel room by himself. He has no staff, there are no papers recording his transactions or file cabinets to store receipts, it is only him in a sparsely furnished room with the items listed above. Magnum Opus is physically non-existent - an invisible entity that exists as an idea only. Because Magnum Opus is not an actual place it also carries out no actual function. It produces nothing, and it provides no services. The company simply buys and sells other corporations, and it does so without regard for what those corporations actually are. When Noel first meets his future company president Ransom K. Fern, the Harvard business school graduate asks him why he chose to invest in the company Indiana Novelty. “I was simply asking for my own curiosity. From your reaction, I gather that you haven’t the remotest idea what Indiana Novelty does.”<sup>»xlix</sup> Noel’s lack of knowledge about the company he owns (albeit temporarily) reveals a disconnect between the executive leadership of the corporation and the lowest, most basic levels of the company’s function - namely, the commodities that are built for exchange in the market, and the workers who are paid a wage to produce those commodities.

In fact, because Magnum Opus does not exist in a physical or literal sense (although maybe in a legal sense), it does not have the ability to play any actual role in the production

performed by the corporations it owns. Ultimately, the companies it buys and sells, as well as the people laboring within them, are treated as commodities. They are evaluated in terms of their exchange value, meaning that their value is determined solely by the amount of money which they can be bought or sold for. In this process of thinking by Magnum Opus, and by all capitalist corporations, people are devalued; the individual's humanity is removed, and the worth of a person is degraded into a calculation of cost-benefit analyses and profit margins. If the meaning of life is found within the human soul, as Vonnegut proclaims in the opening pages of the story, then not only does economics/capitalism fail to provide an adequate avenue for discovering one's purpose of existence, but it is also a direct affront to the idea that humanity (or life itself) has any value at all.

### ***Humor***

Humor is the ultimate force of deconstruction in *The Sirens of Titan*. Lynn Buck describes Vonnegut's literary world as "a zany mixture of hilarity and futility, illusion and truth.... And for him, the elements of death, fear, and humor are almost interchangeable, the presence of one leading quite naturally to a consideration of the other two."<sup>1</sup> Vonnegut is oft considered a "black" humorist because he confronts these sobering issues with comedy, but how is it that something "funny" can simultaneously be powerful enough to inspire doubt and reexamination of the most accepted, unquestioned institutions of society? First, it is beneficial to examine humor in its most basic, and most widely practice form – the joke. According to Ellen Cronan Rose in her critical article "It's All a Joke,"

Using Freud's analysis of the techniques of joking, we can see that *The Sirens of Titan* is, technically, a joke. Vonnegut announces in the opening pages of the novel that he is telling a joke by drawing attention to the verbal nature of his book. Not all novels acknowledge that they are merely words on a page.<sup>ii</sup>

If this is the case, then it is pertinent to ask what is a joke, what is its purpose, and what is its structure? There are many different kinds of jokes, but regardless of whether they are long, drawn out stories, or simply begin with the phrase “knock, knock,” all jokes consist of a “set up” and a “punchline.” The punchline is ultimately the main purpose of the joke; it is the climax that releases all the energy and expectation built up during the “set up,” and its ultimate goal is to produce laughter in the listener. Punchlines are always either unexpected or exaggerated, and the extent of their exaggeration reaches from subtle to absurd. It is the punchline, ultimately, which is the deconstructing force of a joke, because it causes the listener/reader to re-examine the narrative of the “set up” portion as questionable. The authority of the “set up” story, and even of the joke teller, is deflated. This is, in fact, partly the cause of laughter and pleasure derived from joke-telling to begin with. The joke teller takes satisfaction from the misplaced trust and subsequent duping of the listener, while the listener cannot help but react through laughter at the foolishness of his uncritical acceptance of the now clearly ridiculous story. If, according to Vonnegut, “laughter is a response to frustration... [and it's] what a human being does when there's nothing else he can do,”<sup>lii</sup> where does the frustration come from? From many places, but among them is the disappointment in the joke-teller for the betrayal of the previously freely given trust, and/or a reprimanding disgust in oneself for having given that trust so unconditionally in the first place.

Contrary to Rose's assertion, *Sirens of Titan* is not a joke as a whole, but is instead a series of jokes. Vonnegut's story is a constant flow of “set ups” and punchlines in which the author develops fictional representations of existent American institutions (the military, Wall Street, Christianity) and then peppers his descriptions with bits of absurdity which, ultimately, dissolve the authority of the said institutions by showing them to be absurd themselves. This

method of social critique helps to present the reader with a new perspective on reality, and attempts to instill within the reader a natural inclination toward skepticism about accepted norms of society. Vonnegut, essentially, wants the reader to not only see his story as a joke, but to view the institutions he's describing as a joke as well.

If nothing else, *The Sirens of Titan* shows us that life, in all its variations and structures, is itself a joke in which the processes of living are always conditioned with unexpected, and usually unsatisfactory, consequences. By drawing the reader's attention to *The Sirens of Titan* as a series of jokes at the beginning of the novel, Vonnegut creates an atmosphere of criticism. As discussed, a punchline causes the reexamination of the "set up," and it results in a betrayal of trust. If the listener knows ahead of time that the narrative being relayed is a joke, then instead of producing disenchantment through betrayal, a different expectation pervades the listener's mind in the form of skepticism and produces an inclination to cynically question every detail of the story as potentially deceptive. Vonnegut reveals the topic of the novel in the opening line, "Everyone now knows how to find the meaning life within himself."<sup>liii</sup> So, if *The Sirens of Titan* is supposed to be a discourse on the meaning of life, and Vonnegut informs the reader in the opening pages that the story is ultimately a series of jokes, then all the purported "meanings" of life, along with the general idea of life having meaning at all, become suspect. War loses credibility through the brainwashing of its soldiers and the endured slaughter of their invasion of Earth, the absurdity of economics is shown through the arbitrariness of success, and religion is ultimately deconstructed when the people start worshipping a god who either does not exist or does not care. The purpose of human existence itself is revealed in the end of the story to be simply to build monuments (like the Pyramids and the Great Wall of China) that act as superficial reassurances to an alien messenger on Titan, who in addition is engaged in an equally

arbitrary mission to deliver a message across the universe saying simply, “Greetings!” Even if the author himself, in a brief effort at “seriousness,” attempts to provide an actual answer to the question of purpose, that answer will – and ought – to be viewed with the same kind of skepticism pervading Vonnegut’s deconstruction of war, economics, and religion.

In addition to acting as a deconstructing force, humor also offers Vonnegut a degree of protection from the repercussions that come with challenging the central notions of a society’s ideology. According to Peter Reed in his essay “Hurting ‘Til It Laughs,”

[Vonnegut] can thus express a philosophical point of view or make a moral judgment in a manner that may avoid the resistance argumentation might invite. He gains the freedom to play both sides of an issue, and by his humor he can enlighten or provoke while entertaining.<sup>liv</sup>

Rose further expresses this unique ability of humor when referring to Freud’s theory of tendentious jokes.

The critic’s purpose was to insult his hosts with impunity, and the joke provided him with the perfect technique for meaning something without saying it. In fact... [a] joke serves two purposes. Not only does it permit the joker to make a hostile remark, but it protects him from the consequences of his aggressiveness.<sup>lv</sup>

Social criticism, one could easily argue, is part of the fabric of the American paradigm. It is built into the U.S. Constitution in the form of the Bill of Rights, particularly the first article which states that all persons have the right to “free speech.” Regardless of this legal protection, however, American history is fraught with examples of infringements upon the First Amendment, including the Alien & Sedition act in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Espionage act of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the Patriot act of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, it is certainly important to note that *The Sirens of Titan* was published in 1959, in the midst of the Cold War and at the height of the Red Scare.

Ever since 1950 Vonnegut has been writing about the evils of technology, the inhumanity of war, the absurdity of patriotism, all highly unpopular subjects in

the complacent fifties, the era of loyalty oaths and McCarthyism and great reverence for technology and advanced weaponry.<sup>lvi</sup>

It was a period of distrust and public displays of contempt toward philosophies which contended with the institutions of Christianity and capitalism. Criticizing these institutions was not only considered unpatriotic, but also traitorous, so for Vonnegut to undertake a project in which he deconstructs the values of these institutions certainly required a form of protection from potential reprisals. Humor provides this protection through the use of absurdity and exaggeration. It is ironic that the method which unveils the ridiculousness of the institution being portrayed simultaneously hides itself as criticism. Rose comments further upon this ability of humor.

Vonnegut can approach the dangerous and painful truths he (and we) might not otherwise be able to bear.... Some very disturbing things are said and said quite openly. But it is all safely displaced onto a science fiction. Comfortably surrounded by that fiction, we can tolerate some truth.<sup>lvii</sup>

The science fiction element of Vonnegut's novel allows him to take real problems, as he sees them, and place them in a fictional environment in which they appear to be exaggeratedly "unreal." The details, therefore, divert the reader's attention away from the seriousness of the actual issue, and shield him from a direct confrontation. He does not, therefore, appear to be describing the actual U.S. military or capitalist economy because they are not named, rather, they are sub-textually hidden underneath a comical, science fiction jargon. The author is, therefore, protected from the consequences of attacking accepted institutions of society

It is not only from the potential repercussions of society that humor protects the author and his readers. The truths which Vonnegut reveals through *The Sirens of Titan* have a psychologically damaging potential. Topics like slaughter, death, and poverty are depressing. Furthermore, war, economics, religion, and similar institutions valued by society are all, ultimately, arbitrary attempts at an expression of purpose and meaning to human existence. They

represent the worst aspects of humanity, a truth that is not pleasant to confront. Vonnegut eases the impact of the discussion and the subsequent conclusions he reaches by presenting them in a humorously absurd, joking way. Robert Uphaus states, “Vonnegut’s humor represents a perceptual slant that makes destruction a bit more tolerable... [and] permits the reader to accept his apparent condition with some detachment, if not with good cheer.”<sup>lviii</sup> The novel’s ultimate revelation of humanity as a small, insignificant, purposeless organism is masked by the laughter-inducing ridiculousness of Vonnegut’s descriptions, rather than directly confronted for the sobering truths that they ultimately portray.

What do we finally learn about life? That the universe is not schemed in mercy.... That everything that ever was always will be, and everything that ever will be always was.... It’s all very bleak. We can tolerate it only because it’s said jokingly. We can take the knowledge that the universe is indifferent to man because we learn it from Winston Niles Rumfoord aflame with St. Elmo’s fire, his chrono-synclastic-infundibulated spiral on its way to another galaxy.<sup>lix</sup>

Humor is, therefore, not only protective but necessary to humanity’s ability to continue living.

According to Reed, “Good comedy holds within it the potential for tragedy, and derives its cathartic value from alleviating broadly perceived threats or dangers.”<sup>lx</sup> Rose continues,

The affirmation at the end of *The Sirens of Titan* – “somebody up there likes you” – is just a joke. But it is more than a defense. It is a nourishing, life-sustaining fiction. It is a joke in the service of humor. Freud called humor the “highest of [the] defensive processes” because it does not evade pain but transforms it into pleasure.<sup>lxi</sup>

The ultimate joke is that the joke’s on us. The seriousness with which we take ourselves and our daily endeavors, from the actions of the individual person to those of an entire nation or species, is completely foolish given our true position in the universe. Our lives are the “set up,” and the punchline is our inevitable death, the event which calls into question the utility of everything we achieve in our lifetimes.

In contrast to Rose's claim that all is a joke in *The Sirens of Titan*, John May claims in his essay "Vonnegut's Humor and the Limits of Hope" that the author does impart a final message to his reader. According to May, love is the answer.

Malachi Constant is fond of thinking that "somebody up there" likes him, and the aimlessness that is ultimately disclosed shows how terribly fallible man can be in his judgment of purpose. The novel... urges us to be much more cautious in assigning reasons for things and events. The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent... professes belief that "there is nothing more cruel, more dangerous, more blasphemous that a man can do than to believe... that luck, good or bad, is the hand of god." Man consistently and foolishly, Vonnegut insists, attributes divine purpose to events that are either pure chance or human folly. But this is not to say that there is no purpose in existence, that all is a joke. Beatrice Rumfoord and Malachi, unwilling partners in marriage, had only during the last year of their lives come to love one another.... "a purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved."<sup>lxii</sup>

The differing opinions between Rose and May are the ultimate contention that every reader must struggle with upon finishing *The Sirens of Titan*. In a world of utter meaninglessness, where god is either uncaring or does not exist, where the whole of human existence is no more important than the stellar equivalent of a yellow sticky note left as a reminder on a refrigerator, can meaning still be found in the emotional companionship humans feel toward one another. Technically, no. The emotion of love is no more important than any other human endeavor, because accepting the idea of true love and its pursuit as a purpose for existence is ultimately no different from viewing humanity as the centerpiece of the universe. To believe that love is where meaning is found is self-indulgent and self-centered, and is simply another method of believing that "someone up there" either does or does not like you. But what else is there?

Vonnegut persists, nevertheless, in seeing the funny side of that situation. The comedy in his fiction expresses a resistance to accepting the logic of the horrors it depicts. His ability to create comedy from the frightening implications of the human condition as he sees it may only be a form of gallows or trench humor. But it may imply some measure of confidence that the same aspiring human spirit that so often lands us in trouble can say once more, "Now here's the plan."<sup>lxiii</sup>

At the end of Vonnegut's novel there is nothing left worth believing in, nothing worth living or dying for. Malachi/Unk has spent his entire life under the arbitrary control of an alien species, and all that humanity has endeavored to build or accomplish up to this point has resulted in naught. Malachi has nothing left, no other option but to love the people around him, and it is in this that he finally understands true happiness – through the providing for and interaction with Beatrice and his son that is absent of any external motivation (money, fame, knowledge, etc.). This point is summed up in the novel's final scene, when under the hypnotic spell of Salo, Malachi/Unk dies hallucinating that he is with his friend Stony Stevenson. Everything Malachi has felt and hoped to feel through his relationship with this man comes true in Malachi's mind as his body expires. Is dying under the influence of a happy illusion better than knowing the truth? In the end, why does it matter? Knowing or not knowing has no bearing upon one's actual place in the cosmos. The arbitrariness of life and unimportance of humanity is not affected by a person's understanding of it to be so. Despite this meaningless and the ability of humor to both uncover the absurdity of our beliefs while masking the pain of such revelations with pleasure, Vonnegut shows us in the final scene of the novel that these illusions are imperative to our continued existence. As Unk ascends to paradise at the behest of his friend Stony Stevenson, the reader knows that the entire event is a hallucination - and in some unconscious way Unk probably knows this as well – but it does not matter. Regardless of this knowledge, the man dies happy, and in a similar respect, it is the illusion of purpose in life that allows humankind to be happy. It allows us to maintain hope, to overcome obstacles, and “to love whoever is around to be loved.” So Vonnegut tells us to love one another and make each other happy, because in that we will find the meaning in which we will *be* happiest. In a universe wrought with meaninglessness, what other purpose can there be?

## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1960), 101.
- <sup>ii</sup> *Ibid*, 196.
- <sup>iii</sup> *Ibid*, 228-29.
- <sup>iv</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, *The Sirens of Titan*, (New York: The Dial Press, 2006), 1.
- <sup>v</sup> *Ibid*, 2.
- <sup>vi</sup> Lynn Buck. "Vonnegut's World of Comic Futility." In *The Critical Response to Kurt Vonnegut*, ed. Leonard Mustazza (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 154.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ellen Cronan Rose. "It's all a Joke: Science Fiction in Kurt Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan*." In *The Critical Response to Kurt Vonnegut*, ed. Leonard Mustazza (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 20.
- <sup>viii</sup> Vonnegut, 95.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Ibid*, 99.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid*, 100.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Ibid*, 105.
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid*, 113.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid*, 111.
- <sup>xv</sup> *Ibid*, 133.
- <sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid*, 125.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid*, 120.
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid*, 167.
- <sup>xix</sup> *Ibid*, 184.
- <sup>xx</sup> *Ibid*, 168.
- <sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid*, 169-70.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid*, 170.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid*, 171.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Ibid*, 26.
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid*, 26-27.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid*, 47.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid*, 48.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> *Ibid*, 60-61.
- <sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid*, 176.
- <sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid*, 182.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> *Ibid*, 87.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> *Ibid*, 182-83.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Joseph Sigman. "Science and Parody in Kurt Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan*." In *The Critical Response to Kurt Vonnegut*, ed. Leonard Mustazza (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 29.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> *Ibid*, 34.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Vonnegut, 304.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Sigman, 34.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Vonnegut, 15.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> *Ibid*, 42.
- <sup>xl</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells, (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 90.
- <sup>xli</sup> Vonnegut, 52.
- <sup>xlii</sup> *Ibid*, 71.
- <sup>xliiii</sup> *Ibid*, 70-71.
- <sup>xliv</sup> *Ibid*, 75.
- <sup>xlv</sup> *Ibid*, 76.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

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<sup>xlix</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>i</sup> Buck, 151.

<sup>li</sup> Rose, 18.

<sup>lii</sup> Robert W. Uphaus. "Expected Meaning in Vonnegut's Dead-End Fiction." In *The Critical Response to Kurt Vonnegut*, ed. Leonard Mustazza (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 171.

<sup>liii</sup> Vonnegut, 1.

<sup>liv</sup> Peter J. Reed. "Hurting 'Til it Laughs: The Painful-Comic Science Fiction Stories of Kurt Vonnegut." In *Kurt Vonnegut: Images and Representations*, ed. Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 20.

<sup>lv</sup> Rose, 20.

<sup>lvi</sup> Buck, 152.

<sup>lvii</sup> Rose, 21.

<sup>lviii</sup> Uphaus, 170.

<sup>lix</sup> Rose, 21.

<sup>lx</sup> Reed, 20.

<sup>lxi</sup> Rose, 22.

<sup>lxii</sup> John R. May. "Vonnegut's Humor and the Limits of Hope." In *The Critical Response to Kurt Vonnegut*, ed. Leonard Mustazza (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 132.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Reed, 37.

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