

# The Effects of Human's Rational Subjective Values: An Evaluation of Dan Brown's Inferno

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The article focuses on interpretation of Dan Brown's Inferno of various effects on humanity because of the disappearance of God and the destruction of religion. Humans have found not only meaning but also their definitions in religions, but the disappearance of religion will make them alienated to themselves. Dan Brown has declared the abominable consequences for humanity if they turned down the teachings of religions because the teachings of religions tame them from committing what is obliterating for the social structure and stability. Humans then feel lonely because there is no one to tell humanity about the ethics and code of conduct. Similarly, humanity also feels lonely on an epistemological level, which means that they will become lonely in understanding the true essence of life. Brown also cheers the positive influence of human's rational developments which can make humanity lead a better life by introducing various goods. Brown also applauds the human being on the verge of becoming dummies themselves.

**Keywords:** *Human Rationality, Morality, Subjective Values*

## Introduction

The declaration of death of God is one of the turning points in history of philosophy and literature made by German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. The whole understanding of human beings alters once they lose religious dependency in life. Humans will get rid of the previous norms and standards settled by religion once their belief in hell and heaven

disappears. Allama Iqbal (1998) says, “Friedrich Nietzsche lauds the death of God, for God’s death signifies a turning point in history. Mankind will be changed because its self-understanding will be changed . . . through the proclamation of death of God, Friedrich Nietzsche aims to presage the most prodigious and catastrophic historical experience: the transfiguration of all values, that is, self-overcoming of humanity and the end of all moralistic versions of the Absolute.” It means that the moral values given to Christians by God are now perished from the surface of earth because not only its importance has vanished but also the absolute power has bled to death.

Abandoning God brings humanity to the point of ignorance where it become necessary for human beings to create certain moral values for themselves as there are no one who can tell them how they should lead their life. Human rational development does enable humanity to produce moral values, but it does not ensure the security of our future. Our future will be quite different from this moment, but it does not mean it will be secure for humanity. Humans are naturally ferocious and violent, and anything can be expected from them. Whatever humans invent or discover they, suddenly, weaponize them and want to use them against humans. The future of our whole planet is vulnerable not to any God or goddess but humans. Human’s intellectuality has enabled them to devastate the whole of planet earth not once or twice, but numerous times. The utilisation of human rationality and intellectual virility also ensures that humans will be able (in some time in the future) to generate such genes which can aggrandise their virility and intellectuality. Similarly, human intellectuality also enables human beings with the sense of tackling the natural disastrous issues. Humans’ belief in a new god of rationality and abandoning the Christian God can lead humanity toward both consequences. Humanity should hope for the best, but they should be prepared for an abominable worst as well. Brown has also prognosticated both sides of rational-development’s effects.

The novel *Inferno* was published in 2013 and is the story of a crazy character who made a virus that can make the one of third population sterile, which is a heinous solution of Bertrand Zobrist to the problem of over population. Robert Langdon is tasked by the World Health Organization to stop this enigmatic pandemic. Contrary to their expectations, Langdon is abducted by The Provost’s men who are on the side of Bertrand Zobrist because they were in dark about what Bertrand Zobrist has created.

When, The Provost, The head of The Consortium learns the fact that Bertrand Zobrist, A trans-humanist genius scientist has created a plague/virus, he takes the side with the WHO and recovers Langdon to locate the virus. Following the symbols coded in the lines of Dante’s *Inferno*, Langdon tries to reach the location of virus but unfortunately, the virus has spread among the all the nations of the world. Sienna says that she wanted to stop the pathogen by herself but she failed because she did not trust anyone to reach the virus.



## **Significance of the Study**

It gives a detailed journey of the notions of Dan Brown and how he thinks of the world as at the weakest verge of history. The research is quite helpful in order to elaborate how human's subjective rational morals can lead humanity toward an entire effacement of life. This research attempts to convey the notion that human beings are on the path of eternal obliteration if they refuse the teachings of religion in their life. This research paves the way for the future researchers to easily understand the overlooked horrific teachings of Dan Brown. It also provides the key threats to the world caused by mankind. The research is also significant because it brings forth the benefits of human's ability of becoming gods by themselves.

## **Problem Statement**

The research has explored how the death of God and the disappearance of hell and the heavens lead humanity toward the ignorance about the standards of ethics. The study also shows how humans try to use religion as a mere shelter for forgetting the miseries of real life. It explores Dan Brown's thoughts on religion which functions like drugs in human's life and intoxicate hope for this material world and hereafter world which is Muslims belief. The researcher focuses on the hidden facts prevailing behind this novel and explores the horrendous effects of the death of God conveyed in the novel.

## **Research Objectives**

- To locate the effects of the disappearance of divine rule from human society in the novel *Inferno* by Dan Brown.
- To identify how human's subjective morals can lead the world toward the effacement of humanity.

## **Research Questions**

- How does mankind feel lonely in the world if God disappears.
- What are the effects of the death of God reflected in the novel *Inferno* by Dan Brown?

## **Methodology**

The study is qualitative in nature and the researcher has adopted the technique of textual analysis for deconstructing the text of *Inferno* keeping in view Nietzsche's philosophy, death of God, as framework. The textual analysis presented by Catherine Belsey suits my research design which is qualitative in nature. The indispensability of textual analysis as a method for my project is implicated in the scholarly essay "Textual Analysis as a Research Method" by



Catherine Belsey wherein she clearly states “why textual analysis is inevitable for certain texts where research is being done in cultural and theoretical contexts” (p. 157). Textual analysis acknowledges the position of the reader and raises his/her position to a higher level than the author. In this context the reader enjoys a pivotal position in the realm of any text. In this regard, Roland Barthes’ essay “The Death of the Author” has significant value when it comes to the interpretation of the text.

## Literature Review

### The Death of God

Karl Marx is well known for this famous quote, “religion is the opium of the people” (Ollman, 1972). In the early twentieth century, people used opium for the purpose of getting relief from pain. Karl Marx argues that religion is a kind of drug that can give people relief from the physical pain of life. He wants to say that people are less offended by the harsh realities of life because of the drugs that make them hallucinate about various virgins in heaven. Without possessing religious belief, the life of a man would have been miserable.

Bertrand Russell has also written a book ‘The Conquest of Happiness’ in which he gives different causes of unhappiness in human life and one among them is ‘sense of sin’. He tells us that the sense of sin leads us to unhappiness when it is given its harsh form. The fear of sin can be quite helpful sometimes, but it makes the life of human being miserable when it is considered meticulously. He applauds that killing is not good but wonders why sexual intercourse (which can produce individual happiness) is evil. Similarly, he is unable to find any beneficial logical reason for the women to cover themselves up as nuns do in the churches (Russell, 2015).

Yoval Noah Harari (2014) gives us three types of realities or truths. The first is subjective truth which is personal truth of every person, e.g. a person may think ‘girls like rich guys’ but it could be wrong for other hence, making it a subjective truth. Objective truth is the truth in the physical existence of an object outside human being, such as ‘a banana is eatable’. The third truth for Noah Harari is intra-subjective which is the collective truth and emerges not because it in itself exists, but because humans produce it. A currency note with a handsome picture of Quaid-e-Azam does not have any intrinsic objective value in itself, but human beings give it value collectively. If all Pakistanis refused to give value to it, then its value will perish, but a single person denying its value cannot make a Pakistani currency’s note valueless. Noah Harari thought of religion as an intra-subjective reality which has no value in itself but a huge sum of people give value to it. So, the individual Friedrich Nietzsche’s declaration of the death of God will not perish its value. He gives the example of a monkey that does not believe in the notion (although, they are quite similar to humans biologically) that sharing a banana with a fellow monkey will give her twenty sweet bananas after death,



but a human believes in it. He says that all animals just have objective truths, but human can have all the three. This is why he calls human as 'a story-teller animal' because he believes in stories rather than graphs and figures.

Will Durant (2014) says that heaven and hell are places for him not in another world but the psychological states of human mind in this world distinguishing good from bad. He was deeply influenced by Christianity in his adulthood. He says if he gets a new life with the same mind and intellect, he will not write philosophy or history but will try to establish a society free from theological influence. He argues that the declaration of 'God is Dead' by Nietzsche in 1883 was a grand event that took place in history. He thought that there will be a time when people will study history as 'history before Nietzsche and history after Nietzsche'. Similarly, Durant was sceptical about 'crimes' caused by poverty and displacement of labour to machinery, but he was confident that crimes increased due to the 'disappearance of hell and the death of God'. Meaning, he was certain about the fact that religions restrict people from committing crimes.

### **The Idea of 'God is Dead' in Other Literary Works**

The idea of God's death and the disappearance of hell and heaven is reflected in many literary pieces. The idea has magnanimity; therefore, it is portrayed in various literary works of world literature.

'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' is a tremendous work by German Philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche which was published and paid for by him, but he sold only forty copies of this book and eight were given to libraries. No one applauded this literary piece which will never be forgotten in human's history (Durant, 1961, p.317).

Zarathustra is the prophet of Zoroastrianism who presented the concept of "*Ahura Mazda*". Nietzsche takes the character, Zarathustra, and announced his philosophy of "Death of God" through him, as once he gave birth to him. Zarathustra when dismounted from the mountain meets a hermit who tells Zarathustra about the existence of God. Zarathustra gets astounded by the fact that this wild human being has not yet heard of God's death. Zarathustra thinks "Could it be possible! This old saint in his woods has not yet heard the news the *God is dead!*" (Caro, 2006, p.5)

Friedrich Nietzsche declared the concept of God's death various times through the character of Zarathustra. He tries to promulgate the idea that the God no longer is surviving in the life of humans which was once given more importance than anything Caro (2006) stated "What does the whole world know today?" asked Zarathustra. 'This perhaps, that the old God no longer lives, the one in whom the whole world once believed.' ( p.209)

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is one of the best plays that portray the idea of 'God is dead'. The play does not have any plot structure and only attributed the Samuel Beckett's philosophy. The play was written between 1946-1950 and was originally published in French language in 1952 and was produced in Paris in 1953.

In this drama, there are two main characters Estragon and Vladimir. Estragon is fed up with his irritating boot which has wounded his foot and wants to pull it off. On the other hand, Vladimir is bothered by something dwelling in his hat. He tries to take off his hat and shakes it, turns it down, looks into it and then puts it on. They both are in a miserable state and are waiting for a messiah who will come for salvation but don't know about his exact arrival phase. The name of that messiah is Godot and is considered only hope they have in their life but unfortunately, he does not come. Instead, a boy comes daily and tells them that Godot will arrive tomorrow for your salvation. When they come tomorrow, the same thing happens again. Many critics are of the view that Godot represents God in the play.

Godot has some qualities of gods which is why he is considered as the God by many people. Godot can punish Estragon and Vladimir, has the power to secure them but does not appear by own, instead, he sends his messenger who offers Godot existence to Estragon and Vladimir. Stephani Pofahl Smith (1974) says in her book, *Between Pozzo and Godot: Existence as Dilemma* that:

“Godot is clearly related to God by his ‘divine’ attributes. He resembles God more significantly, however, in that all that is known about him comes from secondary sources, is uncertain and contradictory, while he himself remains absent and silent (Smith, 1974).”

Similarly, Vmanimozhi (2013) in his article, *Optimism in Samuel Beckett Waiting for Godot*, says that “as God is invisible, Godot is not seen on the stage (Vmanimozhi, 2013).” Jing Wang (2011) in *The Religious Meaning in Waiting for Godot* says:

“Needless to say, Godot is similar with God in pronunciation, which is enough to trigger the audience's association with God. Of course, other descriptions of Godot in the play can also make the reader consider him to be God of Christianity (Wang, 2011).”

Hence, Vladimir and Estragon wait for God and think that one day he will come to save them from the dangers of the world, but it all proves an unfortunate hope.

## Analysis and Discussions

### Effects of God's Disappearance

Dan Brown offers various effects of the death of God and human's becoming a new god of the universe. Dan Brown himself is sceptical about the advantages and disadvantages of 'super-humanity' but even then, he illustrates the miseries it will bring for humanity as well as applauding the positive beneficial outcomes of it. Both sides are discussed below.

### The Horrors of the Death of God

Human beings know themselves and the purpose of their life through the help of God. The questions about fundamental origin, end and purpose are dealt by religion but when suddenly, religion fades, humanity lose its human identity at its root level. Then there remains no difference between humans and animals. Human beings become alienated to themselves which is reflected in the novel.

"Robert, I . . . I don't know what to do. I don't know who I am anymore. Look at me.'  
She put a hand on her bald scalp. 'I've turned into a monster.'" (p. 441)

When mankind believes in his own rational power and God disappears from amongst them, they become blind in a way, that they do not know then what is right and wrong, what is good and evil. It is religion that satisfies humanity by the provision of a certain code of conduct. The 'sunlight' or 'daylight' reflects the light of rationality and the disappearance of God.

"For a moment Langdon was blinded. The sun was directly in front of his eyes, sinking low over the western end of St. Mark's Square, bathing the entire balcony in a golden light."(p.330)

Dan Brown thought that the human rationality does not guarantee whether it will lead humanity toward a secure future or an apocalyptic end. He is hopeful that when humans embark on the journey of rationalism, their future will be a lot different, but humanity does not know whether it will be good for them or worse.

"As the minutes ticked past, Sienna Brooks gazed absently out the kitchen window and wondered where the day would lead her. Wherever it was, she had no doubt that by day's end, her world would look a lot different." (p.54)

The disappearance of God from human's life lead humanity toward a position where they do not find order and harmony in life. Then the value of each thing changes and nothing remains the same forever. Life then, becomes like a landscape where there are obnoxious and obscure

pictures without any specific definitions. “This strange day had left Langdon feeling as if he were moving through a landscape composed of nothing but vague shapes with no particular details.” (p. 274)

Similarly, the same notion is portrayed when he quotes Dante’s real text in the book. Brown thinks that a person who turns his back at religion suddenly finds himself in the darkest forest where he does not know how to act. “Midway upon the journey of our life I found myself within a forest dark, For the straightforward pathway had been lost.” (p.77)

The novel illustrates the horrific consequences of rationality which can lead humanity toward its obliteration because of human’s wild nature and psyche. The mind which has the ability to create can also be used in destroying humanity. The new technologies developed by human beings have always been weaponized by them. Dan Brown thinks that the destruction that can be caused by a creative mind will be far greater than those of gods. “Nothing is more creative nor destructive than a brilliant mind with a purpose.” (p.163)

The novel reveals the catastrophic results of human’s becoming gods themselves through the hallucinations of Langdon. The novel prognosticates that human’s rationality and subjective morality as well as the disappearance of hell and heaven can lead humanity toward the end of life on the earth. It has been forecasted that human development and technology can lead them toward a bloodbath and wars which will bring horrendous effacement of life on the planet.

“Langdon took a step toward the river, but he could see the waters were bloodred and too deep to traverse. When Langdon raised his eyes again to the veiled woman, the bodies at her feet had multiplied. There were hundreds of them now, maybe thousands, some still alive, writhing in agony, dying unthinkable deaths . . . consumed by fire, buried in feces, devouring one another. He could hear the mournful cries of human suffering echoing across the water.” (p. 9)

The last, but not the least one is, that rationality, human development and the disappearance of God can lead humanity toward the production of such a virus which can be used for eradicating specific nations or ethnicities, because, as Brown portrays, the virus will be coded in such a way that it will assail a specific kind of DNA. There will come a time when human wisdom will be used, not for the welfare of humanity, but for the genocide and ethnic cleansing of a nation.

“Imagine a pathogen that attacks only those people whose genetic code contains certain ethnic markers. It could enable widespread ethnic cleansing on the genetic level!” (p. 440)

Dan Brown of course realises the horrors of human rationality and the death of God but he is also hopeful for a better future. He has portrayed in *Inferno* that if rationality can lead them toward obliterating consequences, it can also heal them with various solutions for the predicaments they confront. After the spread of the Bertrand Zobrist virus, the DNAs of one over third of the population were programmed in such a way which caused sterility in them as the virus spread orally but attacked DNA. The novel brings forth that we can develop a new virus which can reshape human DNA to its original shape.

“I imagine the first proposed solution will be to analyse Bertrand’s virus, understand it as best as we can, then attempt to engineer a second strain of it –a strain that we reprogram in order to change our DNA back to its original form.” (p. 451)

Dan Brown becomes more mysterious when he prognosticates the virus known as Covid-19, which broke out in the last month of 2019 and spread to the whole planet because it was orally transmitted Italy was one of the earlier places bathed in the virus entirely. The book is published in 2013, and says about the virus of Zobrist:

“A virus –unlike a bacteria or chemical pathogen –could spread through a population with astounding speed and penetration. . . . An infected individual would then exhale or sneeze, sending respiratory droplets out of his body; these droplets would remain suspended in the air until they were inhaled by other hosts, and the process began all over again.” (p. 433)

Here, the mysterious novel raises various questions like Whether is Covid-19 really the wrath of God bestowed upon the unlawful acts of human beings or is it the effect of a human’s mischievousness? Whether is it created like Bertrand Zobrist’s did for a purpose or is it a causal natural disaster? These questions are yet need to be answered.

### **Benefits of Human’s Rational Development**

Dan Brown has also depicted some benefits of human’s rational development, in other words, the death of God in the novel ‘*Inferno*’. On one hand, he threatens the world with the horrendous calamities and the effacement of life; on the other hand, he cheers the advantages of religious eradication from the lives of Europeans.

In the novel ‘*Inferno*’, Dan Brown has shown that humankind has started searching truth and meaning for life in outside this material world which is considered need of the era. The values and meaning that were previously sought by studying and contemplating the ‘self’ and human body have now broken down into pieces. Mankind is at the point in history where he seeks truth, not in himself but in things outside, therefore, he discovered the mass of electron, the speed of light, the distance between earth and moon, internet, artificial intelligence,

computers etcetera. The woman in the hallucinations of Langdon starts radiating light and at the end blasts into many pieces, which portrays the same idea of human's trying to understand the world in its real form.

“Without warning, she began radiating a white light . . . brighter and brighter. Her entire body started vibrating intensely, and then, in a rush of thunder, she exploded into a thousand splintering shards of light.” (p.10)

The novel also reveals that human's wisdom is the only option humanity has in order to eradicate the obnoxious conundrums of the future. The development of rationality offers 'hope' for mankind, the hope of security, exaltation and life's purpose. Brown thinks that the new god will lead humanity toward peace, stability, humanity and social order “With purity of conscience, I have bequeathed to you all the gift of Hope, salvation, of tomorrow.” (p. 43)

Dan Brown is excited because he thinks human beings now exist at a point in history where rationality and human intelligence have enabled them to generate such genes which can prove fruitful to humanity. The new genes can be developed which will be able to transform human's whole identity and make them superhumans by enhancing their craftiness, virility, and even intellectuality in short time. This is referred to as a new evolution in human history because it will be generated by humans themselves. The people after this evolution will be known as *post-humans*. Dr. Sienna Broke explains to Langdon:

“We now literally have the capacity to activate certain gene sequences that will result in our descendants having increased dexterity, stamina, strength, even the intelligence –essentially a super-race. These hypothetical 'enhanced' individuals are what Transhumanists refers to as *posthumans*, which some believe will be the future of our species.” (p. 294)

Similarly, the novel shows us the philosophy of Posthumanism, which is quite important for Dan Brown. It states that technology should and could be used for the development of the human body for the betterment. He believes that this philosophy will lead humanity towards a new evolution in their life.

“Transhumanism,’ Sinskey said, ‘is an intellectual movement, a philosophy of sorts, and it's quickly taking root in the scientific community. It essentially states that humans should use technology to transcend the weaknesses inherent in our human bodies. In other words, the next step in human evolution should be that we begin biologically engineering *ourselves*.” (p. 293)

## Loneliness of the Superman

Inferno reflects that the disappearance of God from human life overthrows the thrones of morality from life where a human being feels not only alienated to himself but also realises loneliness. Nietzsche's superman turns down all the ethical values of society because he thinks he can find a standard of conduct for himself by utilising his rationality (Caro, 2006). Similarly, Dan Brown also depicted that humans are lonely in this world without God, as their will be no code of conduct for them as well as no healer of their miseries and despairs.

Brown thinks that a person, who wants to rationalise every meaning of life and reject the previous values which make no sense for him, will feel loneliness for being different among the ignorant. He shows that Sienna and Bertrand Zobrist, who wanted to save the world, felt so lonely amongst the people ignorant about the horrors of future. Sienna's head with different brain structure shows us the peculiarity and loneliness of Sienna. The peers of Sienna are interested in things which do not have any value for her. Those old people who do not know about the true realities of world are called children who do not have any standard of measuring good vs. bad or moral vs. immoral. Brown mourns over those who do not even think about the true values of life.

“Here, amid the masses of Venice, she felt a familiar loneliness settling in. The feeling was nothing new. Since childhood, Sienna Brooks had felt alone. Growing up with an exceptional intellect, Sienna had spent her youth feeling like a stranger in a strange land . . . an alien trapped on a lonely world. She tried to make friends, but her peers immersed themselves in frivolities that held no interest to her. She tried to respect her elders, but most adults seemed like nothing more than aging children, lacking even the most basic understanding of the world around them, and, most troubling, lacking any curiosity or concern about it.” (p.349)

Dan Brown thinks that the awful loneliness is one which comes due to being misunderstood in society. A ‘superman’, who seeks values of life for himself and others, is often misunderstood by the whole of society which makes him a lonely person in that society. Sienna, with a peculiar brain, feels all alone in the society because her distinct mind has enabled her to realise the dangers of the future and the true value of life, which is saving the world.

“Believe me, I know what it's like to feel all alone . . . the worst kind of loneliness in the world is the isolation that comes from being misunderstood. It can make people lose their grasp on reality.”(p.449)

The novel reveals that the human cries for the Being who showered them with meanings of life, served them and fulfilled them with many things. The mentor has now disappeared from



their society like Europeans and Americans. Disappearance of God has created loneliness amongst humanity, because they feel lonely not only in tackling the miseries of world but also laying a fruitful platform for their life as well. Humanity also craves for the certainty of a secure future which feels now more insecure, because rationality does not prognosticate the better future but can forecast that the future will be a lot different.

“She cried for the life she could not control. She cried for the mentor who had died before her eyes. She cried for the profound loneliness that filled her heart. But, above all, she cried for the future . . . which suddenly felt so uncertain.” (p. 40)

## **Conclusion**

The research found human loneliness was caused by the death of God which was reflected in Dan Brown’s novel ‘Inferno’. The novel has tremendously advocated the view that humans are empty and hollow without God. If God fades away from the life of the human being, he will crave vehemently. Similarly, it elaborates that humanity confronts the worst loneliness when they lack a healer and moral-driver, and the person who seeks morality for himself in society feels different in the society because society misunderstands him. It explores how empty humans are in the eyes of Brown, when divinely ordered ethics no longer remain in their life. The study brings forth the effects of the death of God and their attempt to make rationality as their new God. Dan Brown warns us about the apocalyptic consequences that can be caused due to the subjective morality of human beings. He portrays that human beings are violent and aggressive which can make them use their own rationality against the people they hate which will bring nothing but the end. Moreover, Dan Brown also suggests some fruits of the disappearance of religion from the life of man. He thought that if a human can make plagues and terrors with the help of rational power, they can also find solutions for them using the same intellectual power. Brown thinks that humans can start a new evolution in their life by introducing such genes to their bodies which can make them virile and intellectually superior than they are.



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