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PHILOSOPHY OF BOREDOM

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Introduction

Even the most cursory of glances at the history of boredom reveals that boredom has been a topic of immense discussion. That same glance also reveals that there is not just one kind of boredom. There is the *fastidium* of Seneca, the *horror loci* of Lucretius, and the religious boredom of *acedia*. There is the sadness and listlessness of *tristesse* and melancholy, the void of Pascal, and the emptiness of La Rochefoucauld and of 18th-century Versailles. There is the ennui of Mme Du Deffand, of Chateaubriand's René, and of Goethe's Werther. There is the despair of Schopenhauer, the monotony of factory workers, the empty time of leisure, the existential meaninglessness of Sartre's Roquentin, and the profound attunement of Heidegger. And, of course, there is the simple and democratic boredom of the rest of us—that ubiquitous affective state that permeates and colors our everyday existence. The aim of this entry is to provide the reader with a philosophical map of the progression of the concept and experience of boredom throughout the Western tradition—from antiquity to current work in Anglo-American philosophy. By focusing primarily on key philosophical works on boredom, but also often discussing important literary and scientific texts, the entry exposes the reader to the rich history of boredom and illustrates how the different manifestations of boredom—idleness, *horror loci*, *acedia*, sloth, *mal du siècle*, melancholy, ennui, monotony, and emptiness—are grounded in the historical context in which they arise.

Introductory Works, Overviews, and Anthologies

Where should one begin if one is interested in the philosophy of boredom? A natural place to start is with overviews of the history of boredom. Kuhn 1976, Goodstein 2005, Spacks 1995, and Svendsen 2005 offer the reader surveys of the rich history of boredom and an appreciation of how historical and social factors have shaped the experience and understanding of boredom. For examinations of how boredom interacts with sociological and cultural forces, the reader should consider Healy 1984, the essays in Dalle Pezze and Salzani 2009, and Svendsen 2005—the latter meant to offer a philosophical introduction to the topic of boredom. The religious importance of boredom is discussed in detail in Raposa 1999. Finally, brief and accessible overviews of the history of boredom can be found in O'Brien 2018, Ros Velasco 2017, and Toohey 2011.

Dalle Pezze, Barbara, and Carlo Salzani, eds. *Essays on Boredom and Modernity*. New York: Rodopi, 2009. [ISBN: 9789042025660]

A major theme of this edited volume is that boredom and modernity are inextricably connected. In this manner, the book contributes to the idea that boredom has a relatively recent cultural origin and is indicative of a crisis in meaning. The introduction to the volume offers a very helpful historical presentation of the phenomenon of boredom and lists many texts that deal with the topic of boredom.

Goodstein, Elizabeth. *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005. [ISBN: 9780804749589]

A landmark work in boredom studies. The book traces the emergence and evolution of the discourse on boredom within French and German philosophical, literary, and sociological texts. It argues that such a discourse is symptomatic of a type of modern experience that reflects a crisis of meaning.

Healy, Sean D. *Boredom, Self, and Culture*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984. [ISBN: 9780838631461]

Healy discriminates between different kinds of boredom experienced throughout history: temporary impatience, spirit of ennui, and “hyperboredom.” The last one is a state akin to depression or *l’ennui moderne* and arises from the inability to perceive or formulate goals due to the manner in which people have structured their daily experiences.

Kuhn, Reinhard C. *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976. [ISBN: 9780691063119]

In one of the most ambitious works on boredom, Kuhn attempts to trace the development of ennui throughout almost the entirety of Western literature. For Kuhn, ennui is an *idée-force*—a creative force that helps to “mold the human mind and shape reality.” Kuhn painstakingly discusses and analyzes in chronological order texts that deal with the theme of ennui.

O’Brien, Wendell. “Boredom: A History of Western Philosophical Perspectives[<https://iep.utm.edu/boredom/>].” In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, 2018.

In this online encyclopedic entry, O’Brien surveys how boredom has been understood by a number of Western philosophers. It is a very helpful introduction to the history of the philosophy of boredom.

Raposa, Michael L. *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999. [ISBN: 9780813918983]

A detailed investigation of the religious significance of boredom. Raposa argues that boredom stands as a threat to spiritual life because it signifies a failure of meaning (specifically, a failure to interpret and understand life as religiously meaningful).

Ros Velasco, Josefa. “Boredom: A Comprehensive Study of the State of Affairs.” *Thémata* 56 (2017): 171–198. [doi:10.12795/themata.2017.i56.08]

In an attempt to demonstrate that boredom is a topic addressed by philosophers of all times, Ros Velasco presents some of the major philosophical studies on boredom throughout Western history.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. [ISBN: 9780226768540]

Spacks traces the genesis and evolution of modern boredom. The book makes a case for the social construction of boredom and ultimately locates its origin in the wake of modernity’s development of leisure.

Svendsen, Lars. *A Philosophy of Boredom*. London: Reaktion Books, 2005. [ISBN: 9781861892171]

Svendsen provides the reader with an informed and detailed summary of how boredom has been treated in the history of philosophy, literature, and popular culture. He focuses almost exclusively on what he calls “existential boredom.”

Toohey, Peter. *Boredom: A Lively History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011. [ISBN: 9780300141108]

The book offers a summary of how boredom has been historically understood, presents a characterization of boredom that is in line with a psychoevolutionary theory of emotions, and explores boredom’s role in art and culture.

Boredom in Ancient Times

In his autobiography, *From My Life: Poetry and Truth*, Goethe wrote that the ancients were never bored because their minds were filled with stories and myths, as if they were libraries. But Goethe was probably wrong. Bruss 2012, Kuhn 1976, and Toohey 1988 argue that boredom was a common experience in ancient times, even though it was barely discussed in literary and philosophical works. Toohey 1987, Toohey 1988, Toohey 2004, and Kuhn 1976 articulate in detail what we can conclude about the experience of boredom in the writings of classic authors such as Homer, Pindar, Aristophanes, Euripides, Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Leslie 2009 argues that in the case of ancient Greek literature, the lack of any frequent mention of boredom has a social and moral explanation: the political responsibilities and demand for self-cultivation through discipline that ancient Greeks would have experienced made them reluctant to discuss boredom publicly. Indeed, an acknowledgement of the experience of boredom would have been an indication of idleness and a lack of interest in and dedication to the *polis*. The situation was different for the Epicureans, for whom acquiring virtue required liberation from political affairs, and being idle and bored was a natural consequence of the acquisition of leisure time. The spreading of Epicurus's ethics and the loss of popularity of the *homo politicus* led to additional discussions of boredom either as *taedium* or *fastidium* in Seneca 2008 and Seneca 2004, or as *horror loci* in Lucretius 1996. Lastly, and originally composed much before the Roman philosophers, Solomon 2008 offers a description of a phenomenon that is very close, if not identical, to boredom.

Bruss, Kristine. "Searching for Boredom in Ancient Greek Rhetoric: Clues in Isocrates." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 45.3 (2012): 312–334. [doi:10.5325/phlrhet.45.3.0312]

Paying attention to Isocrates' work *Panathenaicus*, Bruss discovers that boredom (*ὄχλος*) genuinely concerned the Greek speaker who tried to avoid repetition, excessive length, and lack of originality and variety in order not to cause boredom and fatigue in his audience.

Kuhn, Reinhard C. "The Black Gall." In *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature*. By Reinhard C. Kuhn, 15–38. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976. [ISBN: 9780691063119]

The chapter that opens this important work is devoted to exploring boredom in antiquity. Kuhn demonstrates that although there is not a philosophical treatise on boredom in this period, the passing mentions of monotony (*ἄλγος* and *taedium*) by Plato, Lucretius, Horace, Seneca, or Plutarch show that boredom was a well-known emotion to the ancients.

Leslie, Isis. "From Idleness to Boredom: On the Historical Development of Modern Boredom." In *Essays on Boredom and Modernity*. Edited by Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani, 35–59. New York: Rodopi, 2009. [ISBN: 9789042025660]

The essay traces the historical manifestations of boredom in the West, from Attic Greece to the modern age. It advances and defends an explanation as to why there are hardly any mentions of boredom before classical Greece. It also explains how political and moral changes under the Roman Empire gave rise to the appearance of philosophical reflections on boredom.

Lucretius. *Lucy Hutchinson's Translation of Lucretius, De rerum natura*. Edited by Hugh de Quehen. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996. [ISBN: 9780472107780]

The text offers one of the earliest descriptions of boredom in Western literature. Lucretius's notion of *horror loci* describes the experience of a restless dissatisfaction with one's life and resembles, at least behaviorally, contemporary boredom's ability to instigate a search for a meaningful activity. From *c.* 1st century BCE.

Seneca. *Letters from a Stoic: Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*. Selected and translated with an introduction by Robin Campbell. London: Penguin Group, 2004. [ISBN: 9780140442106]

In these letters, Seneca introduces the concept of *taedium* as an existential condition that may afflict wealthy people bored with the sameness of their lives and who try to alleviate boredom through travel. *Taedium* is a serious condition that may even provoke a desire for suicide. Originally written *c.* 65.

Seneca. "On the Tranquility of the Mind." In *Dialogues and Essays*. Translated by John Davie, 112–139. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. [ISBN: 9780199552405]

Latin title: *De tranquillitate animi*. Seneca gives advice to his friend Serenus, who has fallen prey to boredom. Seneca describes two kinds of boredom: one comes from fickleness and restlessness and resembles melancholy; the other arises from a lack of motivation. The text offers an analysis of the bored person, a discussion of how they typically act to overcome *taedium*, and advice in order to minimize boredom through work and practical affairs. Originally written *c.* 49–62.

Solomon. “Ecclesiastes.” In *The Bible, Authorized King James Version*. Translated by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, 751–760. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. [ISBN: 9780191611360]

A state like boredom or *taedium vitae* is for the first time explicated as a depression-like condition. In this text, both a partial identification of boredom’s causes (mainly lack of satisfaction with life and sameness) and pieces of advice concerning how to alleviate boredom (enjoy what you do) are presented. Originally written *c.* 450–200 BCE.

Toohey, Peter. “Plutarch, Pyrrh. 13: ἄλγος ναντιώδης.” *Glotta* 64.3–4 (1987): 199–202.

By focusing on Plutarch’s *Life of Pyrrhus* 13, Toohey argues that Pyrrhus suffered from boredom (*ἄλγος*) to the point of nausea (*ναντιώδης*) during his retirement. Boredom is presented as a motivating force in Pyrrhus’s life, since he finally launched himself into a new round of military activities to alleviate boredom.

Toohey, Peter. “Some Ancient Notions of Boredom.” *Illinois Classical Studies* 13.1 (1988): 151–164.

A comprehensive analysis of boredom in antiquity. Toohey argues that the ancients were subject to boredom in its simplest form during the Hellenistic period, and to its more spiritual, complex form during the 1st and 2nd centuries in Rome. He explores the terms used to describe boredom in ancient Greek and Latin texts and analyzes many relevant passages.

Toohey, Peter. *Melancholy, Love, and Time: Boundaries of the Self in Ancient Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004. [ISBN: 9780472113026]

Throughout the chapters of this book, Toohey examines representations of boredom, among some other emotional states, in the Classical, Hellenistic, and especially the Roman imperial periods. He discusses the works of authors such as Aristophanes, Euripides, Plato, Lucretius, Horace, and Plutarch.

Acedia in the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages, and under the adoption of Christianity, spiritual boredom (*acedia*) was considered to be a disease of the soul. The word *acedia*, present in almost all Christian writings of this period, is the Latinization of the Greek word *ἀκηδία* and means “lack of care.” It refers to a state of apathy or listlessness experienced by individuals of faith devoted to God in monasteries. Specifically, *acedia* is a kind of boredom resulting from the satiety, weariness, and perceived monotony of having to spend all of one’s time doing the same religious task over and over. Until the 10th century, boredom of this sort was thought to be a sin or at least a condemnable vice. In the 11th century, *acedia* was related to drowsiness and leisure. In the next century, it was understood as a lack of fervor. And with the beginning of the 13th century, *acedia* was considered to be akin to depressive sadness, as Peretó Rivas 2010 argues. From the Septuagint to the works of the great philosophers and theologians of the time, such as Evagrius 1972, Augustine 1946, Cassian 2000, and Aquinas 2014, to name a few, *acedia* was condemned for distracting individuals (typically, men) from contemplation and their religious devotion. Wenzel 1967 offers a thorough and scholarly account of the history of the concept of *acedia*. Agamben 1992, but also Wenzel 1967, shows that *acedia*’s scope extended beyond the clergy, and the experience of *acedia* was thought to have gone through three phases under the pressures of Christian morality: the monastic, the scholastic, and the popular one. In contrast, McAllister 2020 argues that it is a mistake to associate *acedia* with contemporary boredom, since the former was only experienced within the walls of

monasteries. Regardless of how this debate is settled, the discourse on acedia is important. Even if acedia is not a precursor of contemporary boredom, works on acedia offer a fascinating window into how religious practices and norms were affected by the psychology of the clergy. Moreover, Agamben 1992 makes a case that the discourse on acedia has influenced contemporary psychology of boredom.

Agamben, Giorgio. “The Noonday Demon.” In *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Translated by Ronald L. Martinez, 3–10. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992. [ISBN: 9780816620371]

In his attempt to rethink the epistemological foundation of Western culture, Agamben includes a chapter devoted to the study of acedia. In this chapter, he goes from the words of the church fathers to the scholasticism of Saint Thomas to conclude that this kind of religious boredom was a plague that infested the castles, villas, palaces, and monasteries. He also remarks on the influence of acedia in contemporary psychology. Originally published 1977 as “Il demone meridiano,” in *Stanze: La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi).

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae: Secunda secundae*. In *Summa Theologiae*. Translated by Brian Davies. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. [ISBN: 9780521029353]

Far from being a deadly sin or a special vice, acedia is described in this treatise as a distortion of man’s relationship with God. It is not its sinfulness, but its closeness to sadness, as a form of spiritual disorder caused by the absence of love or the inability to love, that makes boredom worth studying for the Doctor Humanitatis. Originally written in 1485.

Augustine, Saint. *De Catechizandis Rudibus*. In *The First Catechetical Instruction*.

Translated by Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1946.

The bishop of Hippo mentions acedia in his *Confessions*. However, it is in this manual (especially in books 1, 10–11, and 14) for the catechist and the prospective catechumen, written to his friend Deogratias, that he develops an account of boredom and offers a series of remedies against concrete cases of *taedium* experienced as part of the catechetical instruction. Originally written *c.* 405.

Cassian, John. *Instituta coenobiorum*. In *The Institutes*. Translated by Boniface Ramsey.

New York: Newman Press, 2000. [ISBN: 9780809105229]

Book 10 of *Instituta coenobiorum* describes boredom as a state resulting from the routine of monastic tasks and reintroduces the earlier concept of *horror loci* as weariness of the monastery. Cassian presents acedia as a feeling of apathy toward monastic life that hinders men of faith from achieving their monastic and religious goals. He proposed asceticism as a response to spiritual boredom. Originally written *c.* 420.

Evagrius. *Praktikós (The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer)*. Cistercian Studies Series 4.

Translated and edited by Eudes Bamberger. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1972.

Chapter 12 of *The Praktikos* is considered to be one of the earliest studies of religious boredom. Acedia is described as a “demon” that attacks the monk at noon, prompting him to abandon his place and contemplative obligations. Evagrius was the first to rank boredom among the eight deadly sins (*logismoi*), deeming it to be, in fact, the most dangerous of all. Originally written 4th century CE.

McAllister, Derek. “*Acedia and Its Relation to Depression*.” In *The Faces of Depression in*

***Literature*. Edited by Josefa Ros Velasco, 3–26. New York: Peter Lang, 2020. [ISBN:**

9781433165979]

McAllister compares and contrasts the concept of acedia as found in medieval authors such as Evagrius Ponticus, Cassian, Pope Gregory, and Thomas Aquinas, to depression. The chapter offers a definition of boredom in the Middle Ages, arguing that acedia is not the same as depression, nor even a predecessor of depression. Rather, acedia is a way of being in a spiritual relationship with God.

Peretó Rivas, Rubén. “El itinerario medieval de la acedia.” *Intus-Legere Historia* 4.1 (2010): 33–48. [doi:10.15691/%25x]

Title translates as “The medieval itinerary of acedia.” Among the many papers Peretó Rivas has written on acedia in the Middle Ages, and on its relation to depression and anguish, this one considers its complicated history and presents the many transformations that it has undergone until it turned into melancholy. The work also highlights the centrality of acedia in the spirituality of the desert fathers.

Wenzel, Siegfried. “‘Acedia’ 700–1200.” *Traditio* 22 (1966): 73–102.

This paper explores how the understanding of acedia, including its nature, meanings, and implications, changed through the centuries of medieval thought. Unlike other states that were also considered to be sins, the paper shows that the psychological and philosophical roots of acedia were modified over its medieval lifetime and the state changed from a form of spiritual dryness to something akin to ordinary sloth.

Wenzel, Siegfried. *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1967. [ISBN: 9780807810217]

In what is perhaps the most thorough investigation of acedia, Wenzel offers an exhaustive chronological exposition of the concept by presenting both its history and progression from its origins among the Egyptian desert monks through the Middle Ages. Wenzel also highlights the religious and moral issues that the experience of acedia gives rise to, especially when experienced by individuals of faith.

Melancholy in the Renaissance

The Renaissance is one of the most challenging periods for discussion about boredom. What partly explains this difficulty is the fact that this period marked an important change in the experience and understanding of boredom. Although originally conceived as a state with an essential spiritual and religious dimension, *acedia* underwent during this period a series of important changes that eventually transformed it into melancholy. Such a transformation was in part a result of the valorization of scientific knowledge, especially of medicine, and also partly due to the increasing contempt for the religious canon. Lepenies 1992 argues that the experience of boredom began to be considered and understood in light of its physicality and in relationship to psychopathological states such as depression and sadness. In other words, while *acedia* affected primarily the soul, melancholy was concerned with the body. All the same, Klibansky 1964 shows that both *acedia* and melancholy continued to be present in Renaissance writings—sometimes authors would privilege one understanding over the other, but sometimes the two would become mixed together. The continued influence of *acedia* and melancholy is evidenced in Dante 2008, Petrarch 2002, Ficino 1989, Ignatius of Loyola 1951, John of the Cross 1959, and Burton 2001. Lastly, boredom, either as a spiritual state or a physical one, was seen in a more positive light. As Solomon 2001 and Cucci 2008 argue, it was understood to be a condition proper to intriguing, thoughtful, and talented personalities and was considered part of the process of self-affirmation of intellectuals during the Reformation.

Burton, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. New York: New York Review Books, 2001. [ISBN: 9780940322660]

An astounding achievement that synthesizes a millennium of thought. Inter alia, the work attempts to reconcile Aristotle and Ficino, Hippocrates' and Galen's views on medicine, Middle Age descriptions of

acedia, Renaissance approaches to melancholy, and the personal experiences of Burton. It is divided into three parts: the first addresses the nature and causes of melancholy, the second considers melancholy's cures, and the third focuses on love melancholy and religious melancholy. Originally written 1621.

Cucci, Giovanni. "Accidia." In *Il fascino del male: I vizi capitali*. Rome: Apostolato della Preghiera, 2008. [ISBN: 9788873574576]

The chapter is devoted to the exposition of the history of the concept of acedia from its monastic beginnings to its transformation and revalorization in the Renaissance. With reference to the latter period, acedia is defined as a painful but well-known way of interpreting and dealing with life's difficulties and displeasures. It is experienced either as apathy or as an inability to relax without doing anything.

Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Translated by Charles H. Sisson. Oxford World's Classics. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. [ISBN: 978-0199535644]

Translation of *Divina Commedia*. The epic poem contains well-known references to profound boredom or acedia. Although the picture of acedia offered in the poem matches the medieval understanding of this state as a sin, one can still discover in Dante precursors of ideas found in contemporary psychoanalytic discourse on boredom and in even aesthetic approaches to boredom. Originally written 1321.

Ficino, Marsilio. *Three Books on Life*. Translated by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark. New York: Medieval and Renaissance Text and Studies, 1989. [ISBN: 9780866980418]

Translation of *De triplici vita*. In this astrological-medical treatise on healthy living, the founder of the Platonic Academy of Florence describes the role of melancholy in becoming a genius. Ficino states that philosophers must be susceptible to the overabundance of black bile, since it incites in them a desire to investigate the reality of things. However, Ficino warns that an excess of melancholy can cause a state of chronic boredom. Originally written 1489.

Ignatius of Loyola. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Translated by Louis J. Puhl. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951.

Translation of *Exercitia spiritualia*. The former Spanish soldier and founder of the Society of Jesus describes boredom in this work as desolation, “darkness of the soul,” or restlessness resulting from the separation from God. Curiously, Loyola explains that boredom can serve a religious function by making individuals feel uncomfortable from time to time. Originally written 1548.

John of the Cross. *Dark Night of the Soul*. Translated by Allison Peers. New York: Image Books, 1959.

Translation of *Noche oscura del alma*. A poetic description of the soul’s journey toward its union with God. It discusses the nature of spiritual sloth and how it can affect individuals who are new to spiritual life. Acedia is a sign of weakness and lukewarmness. But it can also arise due to some bad humor or a bodily disease. Either way, its experience brings temporary fatigue, exhaustion, and disgust toward spirituality. Originally written 1578.

Klibansky, Raymond. *Saturn and Melancholy*. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964.

An iconic text in art history, intellectual history, and the study of culture. It is an inquiry into the origin and evolution of the philosophical and medical theories on melancholy. It also traces representations of melancholy in literature and the arts up to the 16th century.

Lepenies, Wolf. *Melancholy and Society*. Translated by Jeremy Gaines. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992. [ISBN: 9780674564688]

Lepenies explores European leading intellectuals’ manifestations of melancholy as a psychological and sociocultural phenomenon to better understand modernity. He also devotes a large part of his text to the experience of melancholy in the Renaissance. Ultimately, the book aims to examine the origin and spread of melancholy by looking at a variety of historical periods. Melancholy is a condition closely related to

apathy, boredom, powerlessness, and failure of purposeful efforts. Originally published in 1969 as *Melancholie und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp).

Petrarch. *My Secret Book*. Translated by John G. Nichols. London: Hesperus Press, 2002.

[ISBN: 9781843910268]

Translation of *Secretum*. A trilogy of dialogues in which Petrarch examines his faith with the help of Saint Augustine. Boredom is stripped away of all of its religious connotations and instead is considered to be a kind of existential, philosophical state—a “sickness of the soul.” Such a state has to do with both the soul and the body, and relates to anxiety, despondency, or paralysis of the will. Originally written 1378.

Solomon, Andrew. “History.” In *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression*, 285–334.

New York: Scribner, 2001. [ISBN: 9780684854663]

The book examines depression in personal, cultural, and scientific terms. Chapter 8 pays particular attention to the history of melancholy, and especially to the fact that boredom was glamorized during the Renaissance.

***Langeweile* in Modern German Thought**

Modernity is a period in which intellectuals were especially receptive to the problem of empty time. Through their works they turned their attention to the experience of the passage of time, and such a focus paved the way for an understanding of the experience of boredom as *Langeweile* (literally, “long while”). The notion of *Langeweile* was popularized at the end of the 18th century. Yet Völker 1975 shows that even before this period, writers and philosophers often used variants of this notion (*lange Weile*, *langer Zeit*, or *lange Warten*) to record the experience they had when they felt that time passed too slowly or became empty of sensations and discernible characteristics. While “boredom” and “ennui” denote primarily affective experiences, the term *Langeweile* is concerned with capturing

a feeling of temporal length: the consciousness that, for whatever reason, time has become protracted and empty of characteristics. Kessel 2001 shows that such an experience of the lengthening of time was symptomatic of one's experience of the world becoming indifferent or alien to one's interests. Kant 2006, Hamann 1967, Fichte 1999, Hegel 2018, Schelling 2020, and Goethe 2005 offer reflections both on the slow passing of time inherent in the experience of boredom and on the potential intellectual and social use of boredom. Schopenhauer 2014 and Nietzsche 1990 also discuss the issue of boredom: the former text addresses the inevitable role that boredom plays in human existence, whereas the latter speculates about its creative potential.

Fichte, Johann G. *Characteristics of the Present Age*, vol. 2. In *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*. Translated and edited by William Smith, 1-271. Bristol, UK: Thoemes Press, 1999. [ISBN: 9781855067059]

Fichte argues that boredom is infinite emptiness that can never be thoroughly removed. A reflection on boredom indicates that the feeling of repetition is caused by the absence of one's engagement with Platonic ideas. Fichte comments that although his contemporaries turn to meaningless pastimes to alleviate boredom, such a strategy cannot be successful. Only by renouncing individualism and submitting oneself to universal reason can one alleviate boredom. Originally published as *Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1806).

Goethe, Johann W. von. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Translated by Burton Pike. New York: Modern Library, 2005. [ISBN: 9780760768334]

In his epistolary novel, Goethe offers a romantic presentation of the consequences of life boredom—an existential condition characterized by hopelessness, emptiness, and despair. The protagonist of the book, Werther, comes to experience an intense dissatisfaction with life when his demands and ideals cannot be met by the reality of life. Originally published as *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (Leipzig: Weygand, 1774).

Hamann, Johann G. *Socratic Memorabilia*. Translated by James C. O’Flaherty. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967. [ISBN: 9780801804939]

Dedicated to Kant, the book describes boredom as a condition that allows movement toward introspection through which truth is manifested. Hamann confesses to being a lover of boredom, since it helped him to understand better both history and he himself. Originally published as *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten für die lange Weile des Publicums zusammengetragen von einem Liebhaber der langen Weile* (Amsterdam: Hartung, 1759).

Hegel, Georg W. F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Michael Inwood. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. [ISBN: 9780198790624]

Hegel reflects on melancholy as an individual mood capable of fighting against “Die Langeweile der Welt,” the boredom of the world. Boredom is described as a social illness and melancholy as a tool to re-sacralize the world through a new philosophical system, the third religion beyond Catholicism and Protestantism. The boredom of the world is the dramatic starting point of gestation of a revolution thanks to the melancholic mood. Originally published as *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Bamberg/Würzburg: Joseph Anton Goebhardt, 1807).

Kant, Immanuel. “On Boredom and Amusement.” In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Translated and edited by Robert B. Louden, 128-131. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006. [ISBN: 9780521671651]

Kant addresses boredom in his study of the sensory displeasures that people suffer. Boredom, *horror vacui*, is a negative pain resulting from the inertia caused by free time that does not allow the movement from pain to pleasure. It is a cultural condition that arises from educated individuals’ need to constantly find new forms of pleasure. His proposed remedy against boredom is hard work. Originally published as “Von

der langen Weile und dem Kurzweil” (AA 07, Anth: 233–239), in *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1798).

Kessel, Martina. *Langeweile: Zum Umgang mit Zeit und Gefühlen in Deutschland vom späten 18. bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen, Germany: Wallstein, 2001. [ISBN: 9783892443827]

English title: *Boredom: Facing Time and Feelings in Germany from 17th century to the beginning of 20th century*. A study devoted to boredom as a modern phenomenon. For Kessell, boredom is more than empty time. It is instead symptomatic of individually and socially repressed passions and interests. The book is a cultural study of boredom in 17th- through 20th-century Germany and engages with the philosophical debates on identity, time, and the nature of feelings.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*. Translated by Reginald J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin Books, 1990. [ISBN: 9780140445145]

In *The Anti-Christ*, boredom is presented as the driving force behind creation through the pagan idea—first suggested in Søren Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*—that boredom was that which pushed God to create the world and humans. Boredom is also the starting point for all creations in us: myths, songs, dances, art, and religion. Originally published as *Der Antichrist* (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1895).

Schelling, Friedrich W. J. *Philosophy of Revelation (1841–42) and Related Texts*. Translated by Klaus Ottmann. Thompson, CT: Spring Publications, 2020. [ISBN: 9780882140667]

In this book, Schelling discusses melancholy (*Schwermuth*) as the result of the realization of a metaphysical fact: namely, our finitude and limited freedom. Such an awareness allows us to understand the nature of things but also reveals a negativity (or lack) that needs to be addressed. As such, melancholy can promote thought, self-consciousness, and even action. Originally published as *Philosophie der Offenbarung* (Darmstadt: Carl W. Leske, 1841–1842).

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014. [ISBN: 9781107414778]

Schopenhauer explains how the experience of boredom is the inevitable consequence of human beings' continuous will to live. Boredom arises when we achieve a goal and leads us to formulate and desire a new one. Thus, life oscillates, according to Schopenhauer, between wanting and achieving, or between the pain of not having what we desire and the boredom of having achieved what we wanted. Originally published as *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus 1819).

Völker, Ludwig. *Langeweile: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte eines literarischen Motivs*. Munich, Germany: Fink, 1975. [ISBN: 9783770511709]

English title: *Boredom: Investigations into the History of a Literary Motif*. This book combines a philosophical, sociological, and literary approach in order to analyze boredom in German modernity in the 18th and 19th centuries. Völker provides a chronological exposition of a great variety of philosophical texts of the time in which both boredom and melancholy figure prominently and explains how they assumed historical and cultural significance.

Ennui as the *Mal du Siècle*

Although the term “ennui” entered the French language in the 12th century and denoted the experience of grief and pain associated with the loss of a loved one, it was only in the 17th century that the phenomenon expressed by the term began to resemble boredom. It was then that it was associated with a spiritual disinclination and lassitude, as can be seen in Pascal 2008. Later on, in the 18th century, ennui was understood to be a malaise of the soul that was, on the one hand, difficult to explicate precisely, and, on the other hand, related to the privation of pleasures. Attempts to characterize and define ennui are found in Diderot and d’Alembert 1751–1772 and

Vernier 1807. Ennui comes from the Latin *enodiare*, which means hatred of life, an expression related to Renaissance sadness and melancholy. From our contemporary perspective, we may define ennui as a type of pervasive or profound boredom with one's life. Philosophical approaches to this condition are usually mixed with or represented in literature instead of in purely philosophical treatises. Chateaubriand 1952 and Senancour 2016 use fictional characters in order to explicate the nature and effects of ennui. Moreover, both the experience of ennui and theoretical attempts to articulate and understand its character are intimately related to the social conditions prevailing in 17th- and 18th-century France. Such a claim is made evident in Du Deffand 1810, La Rochefoucauld 2007, and Staël 1995. Although Pascal 2008 and Vernier 1807 present ennui as a serious and bothersome condition that involves suffering, there are occasional mentions of a brighter (perhaps even beneficial) side to ennui. The more positive side is presented briefly in Voltaire 2009. Brierre de Boismont 1850 is a seminal study of the relationship between ennui and suicide. Leconte 1995 offers a helpful overview of ennui in French thought from the Middle Ages to the 19th century.

Brierre de Boismont, Alexander. "De l'ennui (Tædium vitae)." *Les Annales Médico-Psychologiques* 2.28 (1850): 545–585.

A discussion of ennui informed by his study of notes, poems, or letters left behind by hundreds of individuals who committed suicide out of a "distaste for life." Brierre considers ennui to be a social malady that may lead to suicide.

Chateaubriand, François-René d. *Rene*. Translated by Irving Putter. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952.

Rich with reflections on the nature of boredom, this short novella tells the story of René, a profoundly unhappy young man. Presented as *le mal du siècle*, boredom is a state of mind close to melancholy, apathy, anger without cause, disgust for life, and morbid sadness—it is, in other words, a kind of relentless restlessness experienced by individuals who cannot find satisfaction either within or outside society. Originally published as “René,” in *Génie du Christianisme* (London: Dulau, 1802).

Diderot, Denis, and Jean le Rond d’Alembert. “Ennui.” In *Encyclopédie*. Paris: Chez Braisson, 1751–1772.

The entry of the famous encyclopedia by Diderot and d’Alembert on ennui analyzes this condition from the point of view of modern philosophy and morality. Described as an undefinable kind of unpleasantness, neither sorrow nor sadness, but perhaps a deprivation of all pleasure. The authors explain the experience of ennui in relation to different occupations and affairs and suggest ways to avoid it.

Du Deffand, Marie de Vichy. *Letters of the Marquise Du Deffand to the Hon. Horace Walpole, afterwards Earl of Orford, from the year 1766 to the year 1780. To which are added letters of Madame Du Deffand to Voltaire, from the year 1759 to the year 1775. Published from the originals at Strawberry-Hill. 4 vols. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810.*

Although not a philosophical text, Du Deffand’s correspondence offers glimpses into the causes and character of ennui. Du Deffand was a leading figure in 18th-century French intellectual society, and her letters constitute an important source of a contextualized (both in terms of social status and gender) articulation of the experience of boredom.

La Rochefoucauld, Francois duc de. *Collected Maxims and Other Reflections*. Translated with an introduction and notes by E. H. Blackmore, Amanda M. Blackmore, and Francin Giguère. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. [ISBN: 9780192806499]

In his *Maxims*, which is a collection of hundreds of epigrammatic reflections on human nature and behavior, La Rochefoucauld discusses ennui. The maxims offer a historical insight into his experiences with 17th-century French aristocracy and The Fronde. Originally published 1665 and 1678.

Leconte, Frantz-Antoine. *La tradition de l'ennui splénétique en France de Christine de Pisan à Baudelaire*. New York: Peter Lang, 1995. [ISBN: 9780820424989]

Analyzes philosophical and literary examples of boredom by French thinkers from the Renaissance to the 19th century. Leconte's conclusion is that boredom is a metaphysical disease of human existence.

Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées and Other Writings*. Oxford World's Classics. Translated by Honor Levi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. [ISBN: 9780192836557]

Pascal comments that boredom (or weariness) naturally springs from the depth of one's "heart" when the obstacles of life have been overcome and rest becomes hateful. In fact, for Pascal, boredom appears to be part of the human condition. We experience it when we are no longer distracted with life's tasks and it reveals to us our limitations and dependency. Originally published as *Pensées sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets* (Paris: Guillaume Desprez, 1670).

Senancour, Étienne P. de. *Obermann*. Translated by Arthur E. Waite. London: Forgotten Books, 2016. [ISBN: 9781332721030]

An epistolary novel that offers a philosophical exposition of modern noblemen's profound, existential boredom and disillusionment. *Ennui profond* is described as a state of despair in the face of events that repeat themselves or fail to satisfy the agent, and which may lead to transgressive behaviors and suicidal ideation. Obermann, the character, was taken as a case study of boredom by French physicians and philosophers of this period. Originally published as *Obermann* (Paris: Cérioux, 1804).

Staël, Madame. *Delphine*. Translated by Avriel H. Goldberger. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995. [ISBN: 9780875805672]

An epistolary novel of interconnected stories that advances a critique of the social expectations placed upon women and the institutionalized patriarchal power that was present at the time. Staël introduces female boredom to showcase the limits of women's freedom in aristocratic society. The experience of boredom informs Staël's critique of female education, marital relationships, and social conventions. Originally published as *Delphine* (Geneva: J. J. Paschoud, 1802).

Voltaire. *Letters Concerning the English Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. [ISBN: 9780199555321]

Voltaire offers a brief but positive assessment of boredom and judges it to be a beneficial characteristic of human life. Boredom is linked to (and arises out of) inaction and prompts us to become useful to ourselves and others. In some of his other works (e.g., *Candide*), one finds a very different, and less optimistic, take on boredom. Originally published 1733.

Vernier, Theodore. "De l'ennui." In *Caractère des passions, au physique et au moral*, 118–128. Paris: Clavelin, 1807.

Chapter 9 of this book is a description of modern boredom as a state of indifference, anxiety, or disgust, and as that which does not allow the bored person to focus on any object. Vernier comments that this "deadly poison of the soul" paralyzes the subject and impedes movement.

Psychoanalytical, Phenomenological, and Existentialist Approaches to Boredom

Three important approaches to the study of boredom were introduced and articulated in the 20th century. First, Lipps 1906, Fenichel 1951, and Greenson 1953 advanced the psychoanalytical (or psychodynamic) account of boredom, which treats boredom either as an inner tension (often one

involving conflicting desires) or as the product of regression. Second, Heidegger 1995 initiated a phenomenological investigation of boredom and argued that boredom is a fundamental mode of existing in the world that is revealing of key characteristics of human existence. Heidegger 1995 also distinguished between simple and profound forms of boredom—a distinction advanced earlier in Valéry 1951. Third, in different ways, Beckett 2006, Moravia 2011, and Sartre 1965 articulated the existentialist approach on boredom. Such texts focus on what the experience of boredom can tell us about ourselves, the world, and others; examine the ability or inability to find personal and objective meaning in the world; and consider the ways in which boredom may relate to the pursuit of an authentic life. A precursor of the existentialist approach can be found in Kierkegaard 1988. Bardgill 2000 offers an empirically informed extension of both the existentialist and phenomenological approaches.

Bardgill, Richard. “The Study of Life Boredom.” *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 31.2 (2000): 145–158. [doi:10.1163/15691620051090979]

An empirical investigation of the experience of “life boredom” on the basis of the authors’ interviews with six participants. What is notable about this study is the application of the resources of existentialism and phenomenology in interpreting the interviews and in drawing conclusions about the character and outcomes of life boredom.

Beckett, Samuel. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006. [ISBN: 9780571229154]

With the exception of his essay on Proust, boredom is rarely explicitly discussed by Beckett. Still, the issue of boredom is central to many of his dramatic and nondramatic (e.g., *Malone Dies*) works. Boredom appears to be an unavoidable condition of human existence that reflects one’s difficulty, perhaps even the

impossibility, of discovering meaning. *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* are two plays that exemplify and investigate this feature of human existence.

Fenichel, Otto. “On the Psychology of Boredom.” In *Organization and Pathology of Thought: Selected Sources*. Edited by David Rapaport, 349–361. New York: Columbia University Press, 1951.

Boredom is described as the inability to become stimulated. This inability is explained by an act of repression that inhibits the bored individual’s desire and ability to be active. Moreover, the bored individual is made aware of this inability and thus comes to experience both the inhibition and the need for stimulation. Originally published as “Zur Psychologie der Langeweile,” *Imago* 20 (1934): 270–281.

Greenson, Ralph R. “On Boredom.” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 1 (1953): 7–21. [doi:10.1177/000306515300100102]

A psychoanalytic examination of boredom. Greenson describes boredom as a state characterized by feelings of emptiness, a sense of longing, and the absence of (or reduction in) thoughts and fantasies. Following Fenichel 1951, the presence of boredom is attributed to a tension: the bored individual comes to inhibit certain thoughts and fantasies and because of that inhibition the agent experiences a feeling of emptiness.

Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by William McNeil and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. [ISBN: 9780253214294]

Heidegger provides detailed analyses of three distinct forms of boredom (*Langeweile*): (1) becoming bored by something (*Gelangweiltwerden von etwas*), (2) being bored with something (*Sichlangweilen bei etwas*), and (3) profound boredom (*tiefe Langeweile*). Each form of boredom is distinguished from the others in terms of its relation to how time passes, and each form becomes existentially more fundamental with regard to what

it is capable of revealing to us. Originally published as *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit* (GA 29/30) (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983).

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or, Part I*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. [ISBN: 9780691020419]

The first volume of this work is written from the perspective of “A,” an aesthete whose primary purpose in life is the pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment. In this context, Kierkegaard advances some of his most important comments about boredom. For the aesthete, boredom is an existential condition (and not a transient psychological state), the product of the realization that life is pointless, and something that demands a response. Originally published as *Enten-Eller* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1843).

Lipps, Theodor. “Arten den Gefühlen.” In *Leitfaden der Psychologie*. By Theodor Lipps, 294–304. Leipzig, Germany: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1906.

English title: “Kind of Feelings.” In chapter 20, Lipps introduces one of the first psychodynamic definitions of boredom as a feeling of displeasure caused by an internal conflict between, on the one hand, the need for intense mental activity and, on the other hand, either the lack of such stimulation or the inability to be stimulated in such a fashion.

Moravia, Alberto. *Boredom*. Translated by William Weaver. New York: New York Review Books, 2011. [ISBN: 9788845250477]

A novel addressing primarily the theme of alienation. Dino, the protagonist of the novel and a young middle-class man who strives to become an artist, offers both a history of boredom (*noia*) and a definition of this state. He declares that boredom is a “kind of insufficiency, or inadequacy.” Originally published as *La Noia* (Milan: Valentino Bompiani & Co, 1960).

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Nausea*. Translated by Robert Baldick. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1965.

Although a novel and not a philosophical text, Sartre's *Nausea* offers an account of existential boredom. Antonin Roquentin the protagonist and diarist of *Nausea*, describes his experiences with a profound type of boredom that permeates his existence and that is revealing of the ungroundedness of human existence. Originally published as *La nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

Valéry, Paul. *Dance and the Soul*. Translated by Dorothy Bussy. London: J. Lehmann Limited, 1951.

A poetic Socratic dialogue by Valéry that offers a reflection on boredom through the fictional characters of Socrates and Eryximachus and distinguishes between simple boredom (*l'ennui passager*) and absolute boredom (*l'ennui de vivre*). Socrates uses the metaphor of poison to refer to absolute boredom, one that is not possible to cure because it is life itself. Originally published as "L'Âme et la danse," in *Le Ballet au XIX siècle*, edited by Henry Prunières (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1921).

Boredom in 20th-Century European Thought

The 20th century brought important sociological, political, technological, and scientific changes. Tardieu 1903, Simmel 1978, and Lefebvre 2020 argue that such changes have caused a transformation in the everyday experiences of individuals, who have found themselves often unhappy and alienated because of their participation in a capitalist economy that, on the one hand, valorizes consumption, overproduction, and busyness, and, on the other hand, leaves individuals with little free time and an inability to find meaning in their activities. Fromm 1973 raises important worries about the possibility of a chronic boredom and its many maladaptive outcomes due to sociological changes. Blumenberg 2006 and Kracauer 1995 provide more optimistic descriptions of boredom and note the potential of boredom to bring about positive change and to

restructure one's life in positive ways. Benjamin 1999 offers insightful reflections about boredom's connection to repetition, mechanized labor, and urbanized social life. Influenced by psychoanalysis, Phillips 1998 discusses the developmental value of boredom.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. [ISBN: 9780674043268]

Boredom is discussed in Convolute "D" as the widespread malady of his time. In this difficult and suggestive part of the text, Benjamin focuses on boredom's relationship to waiting and exposes how the new and the boring are linked together. Benjamin describes boredom as a "threshold of great deeds," thus suggesting the possibility that boredom may be socially and personally productive. Originally published as *Das Passagen Werk* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983).

Blumenberg, Hans. "Leib und Wirklichkeitsbewußtsein." In *Beschreibung des Menschen*. By Hans Blumenberg, 656–776. Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 2006. [ISBN: 9783518584675]

English title: "Body and Consciousness of Reality." Chapter 10 of this posthumous work consists of an anthropological description of boredom as an adaptive emotion selected at some point in our evolutionary history for its potential to make creatures react and search for novelty, to avoid extreme adaptation, and to prevent excessive stillness.

Fromm, Erich. *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973. [ISBN: 9780030075964]

A discussion of the nature of chronic boredom. Fromm links it to depression and asserts that it is both a pathology rooted in a “technotropic” society and the cause of maladaptive behaviors (e.g., drug use, aggression, or destructiveness). He distinguishes between different types of bored individuals, depending on how they are able to respond to boredom. Such a taxonomy permits Fromm to distinguish between functional (“productive”) and dysfunctional responses to boredom.

Kracauer, Siegfried. “Boredom.” In *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin, 331–334. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. [ISBN: 9780674551633]

Kracauer writes about boredom as a way of resisting constant distraction caused by the availability of commodities at the very beginning of the 20th century. Boredom is not conceived as a failure of the individual but as a powerful state in which one can authentically explore oneself in opposition to mass trends and social demands. Originally published as “Langeweile,” in *Das Ornament der Masse* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1924 and 1963).

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, The City and Urban Society*. Translated by Michael E. Leary-Owhin and John P. McCarthy. New York: Routledge, 2020. [ISBN: 9781138290051]

Lefebvre explores boredom as a central experience when the countryside is absorbed into the urban fabric. Boredom is the plague of the modern world, resulting from the monotonous and repetitive tasks in factories and the lifestyle of the metropolis. Originally published as *Du rural à l'urbain* (Paris: Anthropos, 1970).

Phillips, Adam. *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998. [ISBN: 9780674634633]

In his essay on boredom (chapter 7), Phillips makes a case for the developmental value of boredom and suggests that children should be allowed to experience boredom. The experience of boredom, he writes, is “integral to the process of taking one’s time,” for it teaches one how to wait for something, though one does not know what exactly that something is.

Simmel, Georg. *The Philosophy of Money*. Edited by David Frisby. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978. [ISBN: 9780710092052]

A key text in the sociology of boredom. It treats boredom as a symptom of socially induced busyness, overstimulation, and overconsumption, all of which are the byproducts of a capitalist economy. Originally published as *Philosophie des Geldes* (Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker and Humblot, 1900).

Tardieu, Émile. *L’ennui: Étude psychologique*. Paris: F. Alcan, 1903.

English title: *Boredom: A Psychological Study*. A philosophical treatise devoted to the study of ennui’s character and to a taxonomy of its varieties. For Tardieu, ennui can be experienced in different ways (as, e.g., disgust, discouragement, helplessness, or anger) and can be prompted by various factors (e.g., monotony, satiation, or age). Ultimately, ennui is a symptom of exhaustion or fatigue and its cause is either physiological (bodily exhaustion) or metaphysical (the groundlessness and meaningless of existence).

Boredom in Contemporary Anglo-American Philosophy

Anglo-American philosophy of boredom begins with Russell 2006 (first published 1930)—an investigation into boredom’s motivating power and an examination of the value of enduring boredom. Four decades later, Williams 1973 sparked a lively debate within analytic philosophy by arguing that an immortal life would be necessarily boring. Despite these two well-known investigations of boredom, analytic philosophers have, for the most part, neglected boredom. It isn’t until recently that one can find works that have taken up the topic of boredom. Neu 2000, O’Brien 2014, and Elpidorou 2018 focus on defining and delineating the character of boredom. Elpidorou 2020 explicates boredom’s relationship to well-being. Calhoun 2011 and Millgram 2004 are concerned with boredom’s relationship to instrumental rationality. Finally, Frankfurt 1999 takes up the issue of boredom’s connection to meaningfulness.

Calhoun, Cheshire. “Living with Boredom.” *Sophia* 50.2 (2011): 269–279.
[doi:10.1007/s11841-011-0239-3]

An insightful analysis of boredom’s relationship to the various (moral or nonmoral) normative constraints that govern our lives. The paper argues that boredom arises out of the realization that our current activities do not live up to our evaluative standards for taking an interest in such activities. Calhoun also offers an explanation as to why repetition tends to bore by arguing that value-qualities are consumable items that may become exhausted.

Elpidorou, Andreas. “The Bored Mind Is a Guiding Mind: Toward a Regulatory Theory of Boredom.” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 17.3 (2018): 455–484.
[doi:10.1007/s11097-017-9515-1]

The essay synthesizes extant findings on the antecedents, concomitants, and outcomes of boredom, and advances a detailed characterization of the experiential and physiological signature of boredom.

Moreover, it argues that the state of boredom should be understood as a functional emotion that is both informative and regulatory of one's behavior.

Elpidorou, Andreas. *Propelled: How Boredom, Frustration, and Anticipation Lead Us to the Good Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. [ISBN: 9780190912963]

An examination of the ways in which boredom can contribute to the good life. The book argues that boredom is a functional emotion that promotes our well-being insofar as it acts as a regulatory state that helps us to promote our interests and contributes to the achievement of our goals.

Frankfurt, Harry. "On the Usefulness of Final Ends." *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*/רבעון פילוסופי כרך 41 (1999): 3–19.

Frankfurt describes boredom as necessarily involving an "attenuation of psychic liveness" and considers, briefly, its relationship to final ends and meaningfulness.

Millgram, Elijah. "On Being Bored Out of Your Mind." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104 (2004): 163–184. [doi:10.1111/j.0066-7373.2004.00087.x]

An exploration of boredom's role in practical rationality. It is argued that boredom is a constructive experience that allows us to examine and review our final ends. In doing so, boredom plays a crucial role in human life.

Neu, Jerome. *A Tear Is an Intellectual Thing: The Meanings of Emotion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. [ISBN: 9780195123371]

Chapter 6 provides an extended discussion of the nature of boredom by critically assessing the psychoanalytic approach to boredom and by distinguishing between two types of boredom: "endogenous" and "reactive." Endogenous boredom arises "from within" and changes one's entire experience of the world, whereas reactive boredom is boredom experienced as a response to some particular object.

O'Brien, Wendell. "Boredom." *Analysis* 74.2 (2014): 236–244.
[doi:10.1093/analys/anu041]

A brief, conceptual articulation of the character of boredom. Boredom is described as an unpleasant state characterized by restlessness, weariness, and lack of interest.

Russell, Bertrand. "Boredom and Excitement." In *The Conquest of Happiness*. By Bertrand Russell, 35–43. London: Routledge, 2006. [ISBN: 9780415378475]

In this rich and suggestive chapter, Russell discusses the character of boredom. He offers a definition of boredom as a "thwarted desire for events," distinguishes between two kinds of boredom, and asserts that the opposite of boredom is excitement. Importantly, Russell highlights the motivating power of boredom and holds that the capacity to endure boredom may be necessary in order to live a happy life. Originally published 1930.

Williams, Bernard. "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality." In *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972*. By Bernard Williams, 82–100. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1973. [ISBN: 9780521202251]

The essay argues that, given basic facts about human psychology and what it means to remain the same person, an immortal life would be intolerable because it would be profoundly boring. Boredom's relationship to perceived meaningfulness and life-defining and motivating desires is also examined.

Early Empirical Research on Boredom

Empirical interest on boredom can be traced back at least to Brierre de Boismont 1850, a seminal study on suicide. Yet it wasn't until the mid-20th century that psychologists took a serious interest in boredom as a phenomenon that deserves empirical attention. In addition to the psychoanalytical

works surveyed above, there are a number of important early explorations of boredom that helped to pave the way for contemporary scientific study of boredom. Bexton, et al. 1954 and Karsten 1928 investigate the relationship between boredom and repetition or monotony. Barmack 1938 and Berlyne 1960 define boredom, respectively, as a state of conflict and as a state of non-optimal arousal. Fisher 1993 and O’Hanlon 1981 study the causes and antecedents of boredom, especially within the context of work. Farmer and Sundberg 1986 describes the creation of a measure of one’s proneness toward experiencing boredom. Lastly, Smith 1981 provides a detailed review of empirical studies published between 1926 and 1981.

Barmack, Joseph E. “The Effect of Benzedrine Sulfate (Benzyl Methyl Carbinamine) upon the Report of Boredom and Other Factors.” *Journal of Psychology* 5.1 (1938): 125–133. [doi:10.1080/00223980.1938.9917557]

A study arguing that boredom should be understood as a state of conflict between two opposing tendencies: the tendency to persist in engaging with a situation, and the tendency to move away from a situation that is unpleasant to us.

Berlyne, Daniel E. *Conflict, Arousal and Curiosity*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960. [ISBN: 978-0070048751]

In chapter 7, boredom is discussed and understood to be a drive for exploration that arises when there is a perceived scarcity of stimuli or the presence of an excessively monotonous situation. Boredom as a drive is a state of non-optimal arousal, and specifically one of high arousal.

Bexton, William H., Woodburn Heron, and Thomas H. Scott. “Effects of Decreased Variation in the Sensory Environment.” *Canadian Journal of Psychology/Revue Canadienne de Psychologie* 8.2 (1954): 70–76. [doi:10.1037/h0083596]

An investigation into the relationship between the experience of boredom and sensory deprivation.

Farmer, Richard, and Norman D. Sundberg. “Boredom Proneness: The Development and Correlates of a New Scale.” *Journal of Personality Assessment* 50.1 (1986): 4–17. [doi:10.1207/s15327752jpa5001_2]

A tremendously influential paper that describes the development and validation of a self-report measure (Boredom Proneness Scale) for assessing one’s tendency to experience boredom (boredom proneness). Since the publication of this paper, the Boredom Proneness Scale has been used by hundreds (if not thousand) of studies.

Fisher, Cynthia D. “Boredom at Work: A Neglected Concept.” *Human Relations* 46.3 (1993): 395–417. [doi:10.1177/001872679304600305]

An in-depth examination of the many causes of boredom. The paper also considers how the experience of boredom relates to various personality traits and includes suggestions as to how to alleviate or avoid the experience of boredom in the workplace.

Karsten, Anitra. “Untersuchungen zur Handlungs- und Affektpsychologie.” *Psychologische Forschung* 10 (1928): 142–254. [doi:10.1007/BF00492011]

English title: “Psychological Studies of Action and Affect.” An early empirical investigation of the phenomenon of mental satiation. Karsten explores what happens to subjects when they are asked to persist in completing an uninteresting, repetitive, and monotonous task for as long as possible.

O’Hanlon, James F. “Boredom: Practical Consequences and a Theory.” *Acta Psychologica* 49.1 (1981): 53–82. [doi:10.1016/0001-6918(81)90033-0]

A review of studies on the effects of repetitive tasks on individuals in working environments. The essay provides a definition of boredom and specifies its various cognitive, volitional, and perceptual

concomitants. The relationship between boredom and monotony is emphasized and the latter is considered to be an important aspect of the experience of boredom.

Smith, Richard P. “Boredom: A Review.” *Human Factors* 23.3 (1981): 329–340. [doi:10.1177/001872088102300308]

A very helpful review of psychological and psychiatric studies published between 1926 and 1981. The review discusses what factors might contribute to the experience of boredom, the relationship between boredom and extroversion, and coping strategies.

Recent Empirical and Empirically Informed Work on Boredom

In the last two decades, boredom has become the topic of a tremendously active research program in psychology, the results of which have allowed researchers to better understand boredom’s character and relationship to our mental life. Danckert and Eastwood 2020; Eastwood, et al. 2012; Westgate and Wilson 2018; and Van Tilburg and Igou 2012 present the antecedents, cognitive and perceptual concomitants, affective qualities, neurophysiological correlates, and outcomes of boredom. Mann 2016 discusses boredom’s influence on behavior, Bench and Lench 2013 explores its relationship to self-regulation, Van Tilburg and Igou 2012 defines its connection to other related affective states, and Elpidorou 2018 examines boredom’s potential contributions to the good life. Furthermore, several measures of both trait boredom (the propensity to experience boredom frequently and in a wide range of situations) and state boredom (a transient affective experience) have been established, and are now used to study boredom’s numerous correlates and outcomes. Measures of trait boredom are discussed in Vodanovich 2003. Fahlman, et al. 2013 presents the development of a measure of state boredom. The essays in Ros Velasco 2019 showcase recent

philosophical and theoretical work on boredom and illustrate how such work connects and contributes to psychological approaches to boredom.

Bench, Shane W., and Heather C. Lench. “*On the Function of Boredom[<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4217586/>]*.” *Behavioral Sciences* 3.3 (2013): 459–472. [doi:10.3390/bs3030459]

A clear presentation and defense of the view that boredom is a functional affective state. According to the authors, boredom motivates the pursuit of a new goal when the current goal ceases to be beneficial.

Danckert, James, and John D. Eastwood. *Out of My Skull: The Psychology of Boredom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. [ISBN: 9780674984677]

A rich and very engaging exploration of the character and significance of boredom from a psychological perspective. The authors conceive of boredom as a crisis of agency, and thus our responses to boredom (be it beneficial or harmful, good or bad) have to be understood as ways of reclaiming our agency.

Eastwood, John D., Alexandra Frischen, Mark J. Fenske, and Daniel Smilek. “The Unengaged Mind: Defining Boredom in Terms of Attention.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7.5 (2012): 482–495. [doi:10.1177/1745691612456044]

A defense and presentation of the attentional view of boredom. The authors argue that boredom is intimately related to attentional difficulties. Specifically, it is argued that boredom arises when (a) we cannot engage our attention in a satisfactorily manner, (b) we are aware that we cannot engage our attention in a satisfactorily manner, and (c) we attribute our inability to engage our attention in a satisfactorily manner to the environment.

Elpidorou, Andreas. “The Good of Boredom.” *Philosophical Psychology* 31.3 (2018): 323–351. [doi:10.1080/09515089.2017.1346240]

An argument in support of the claim that boredom is a beneficial regulatory psychological state that can promote our well-being by contributing to personal growth and to the construction of a meaningful life.

Fahlman, Shelley A., Kimberley B. Mercer-Lynn, David B. Flora, and John D. Eastwood. “Development and Validation of the Multidimensional State Boredom Scale.” *Assessment* 20.1 (2013): 68–85. [doi:10.1177/1073191111421303]

The article describes the development and validation of a measure of state boredom.

Mann, Sandi. *The Science of Boredom: The Upside (and Downside) of Downtime*. London: Robinson, 2016. [ISBN: 9781472135988]

An exploration of the causes and outcomes of boredom. The book is especially concerned with describing the ways in which boredom can be potentially beneficial insofar as it acts a catalyst for creativity, thinking, and reflection.

Pekrun, Reinhard, Thomas Goetz, Lia M. Daniels, Robert H. Stupnisky, and Raymond P. Perry. “Boredom in Achievement Settings: Exploring Control-Value Antecedents and Performance Outcomes of a Neglected Emotion.” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 102.3 (2010): 531–549. [doi:10.1037/a0019243]

A series of studies exploring both the appraisals involved in the experience of boredom in achievement settings and boredom’s outcomes. On the basis of their findings, the authors claim that boredom should be understood to be an achievement emotion that is both unpleasant and deactivating.

Ros Velasco, Josefa, ed. *Boredom Is in Your Mind: A Shared Psychological-Philosophical Approach*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019. [ISBN: 9783030263942]

An edited volume that includes chapters by scholars working both in mental health sciences and philosophy. The volume is a multidisciplinary attempt to show that, despite the differences between the disciplines, there are still many shared ideas regarding what a possible definition of boredom could be. Many of the chapters understand boredom to be a reactive emotion that serves some kind of function in those who experience it.

Van Tilburg, Wijnand A. P., and Eric R. Igou. “On Boredom: Lack of Challenge and Meaning as Distinct Boredom Experiences.” *Motivation and Emotion* 36.2 (2012): 181–194. [doi:10.1007/s11031-011-9234-9

Experimental evidence in support of the conclusion that lack of challenge and a perceived meaninglessness are individuating characteristics of the experience of boredom.

Vodanovich, Stephen J. “Psychometric Measures of Boredom: A Review of the Literature.” *Journal of Psychology* 137.6 (2003): 569–595. [doi:10.1080/00223980309600636]

A very useful and thorough overview of the psychometric properties of measures of boredom and a discussion of how scores on those measures relate (or correlate) with scores on measures of other psychological constructs.

Westgate, Erin C., and Timothy D. Wilson. “Boring Thoughts and Bored Minds: The MAC Model of Boredom and Cognitive Engagement.” *Psychological Review* 125.5 (2018): 689–713. [doi:10.1037/rev0000097]

A defense of the MAC model of boredom: the view that attentional difficulties and perceived meaninglessness are both sufficient but not necessary conditions of the experience of boredom. Either one of those conditions can give rise to boredom independently of each other.

Relevant Work in Cultural Studies

Boredom studies is a truly multidisciplinary field. In addition to philosophers and psychologists, theorists in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, urban studies, critical theory, geography, history, film studies, and others have made, and continue to make, important contributions to our understanding of boredom. Gardiner and Haladyn 2016 offers a helpful introduction to this field of study, highlighting its multidisciplinary character. This section provides a very small sampling of philosophically relevant and fruitful attempts to explicate boredom in a manner that is not traditionally philosophical. For instance, Klapp 1986 investigates how our experience of boredom has been shaped by the proliferation of information that was brought about by social and technological changes in the 20th century. Barbalet 1999 approaches the issue of boredom through a sociological lens examining its relationship to meaning. O'Neill 2017 examines how geopolitical and urban changes may result in boredom and how boredom relates to issues of homelessness, downward mobility, and alienation. Petro 2002 discusses boredom's relationship to modernity and shows how the visual arts can help us make sense of boredom.

Barbalet, Jack M. "Boredom and Social Meaning." *British Journal of Sociology* 50.4 (1999): 631–646. [doi:10.1111/j.1468-4446.1999.00631.x]

A sociological investigation into the relationship between boredom and social meaning. Barbalet argues that boredom arises out of a perceived meaninglessness and acts as a push to discover lost meaning. This work has proven very influential for recent psychological attempts to understand boredom as a state that is characterized by a lack of, or inability to discover, meaning.

Gardiner, Michael E., and Julian J. Haladyn. *Boredom Studies Reader: Frameworks and perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge, 2016. [ISBN: 9781138927469]

This anthology focuses on the historical and theoretical character of boredom. It highlights the importance of the emergent discipline of boredom studies and addresses boredom from a philosophical

perspective, while also covering relevant discourses present in psychology, sociology, history, cultural studies, and art. In the book, boredom is understood as a response to our highly mechanized and urbanized social life.

Klapp, Orrin. *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Society*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986. [ISBN: 9780313250019]

The book is composed of a series of essays in which the author discusses the impact of information on the quality of our lives. The author argues that boredom is an indicator of an “informational overload.” The proliferation and overload of information has resulted in a decrease of meaning and meaningful experiences.

O’Neill, Bruce. *The Space of Boredom*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017. [ISBN: 9780822363286]

This book explores boredom as an enduring affect of globalization experienced by vulnerable people. O’Neill states that boredom is the consequence of certain practices of consumption that result in downward mobility for those unable to keep up with global changes. The work is a valuable reflection on the politics of alienation and displacement.

Petro, Patrice. *Aftershock of the New: Feminism and Film History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002. [ISBN: 9780813529950]

Boredom is discussed in chapters 4, 5, and 6, all of which consider what Petro calls “the *aftershocks of the new*,” that is, the ways in which the new and extraordinary eventually become prosaic or boring. It is also argued that boredom is an important dimension of women’s experience of modernity.

The Question of Animal Boredom

Nisbet 1982 famously declared that “man is apparently unique in his capacity for boredom.” Such a view about boredom seems to fly in the face of recent findings from studies on captive nonhuman animals. Galef and Whiskin 2003 and Meagher and Mason 2012 report striking similarities between the behavior of captive nonhuman animals and bored humans. Although extant findings might not settle the question of whether captive nonhuman animals experience boredom, they suggest important theoretical possibilities and open up fruitful avenues for future research. First, if there is a form of boredom that we share with nonhuman animals, then it is unlikely to be conceptually demanding. Second, as Svendsen 2019 suggests, the existence of boredom in nonhuman animals could be revealing of the causes (or at least the antecedents) of boredom—*prima facie*, animal boredom highlights the prominence of non-optimal arousal and monotony in eliciting boredom. Third, Burn 2017 argues that animal studies on boredom can shed light on both the ontogeny and phylogeny of boredom. Lastly, Mason and Burn 2017, Wemelsfelder 1984, and Wemelsfelder 2005 show that the question of animal boredom raises important questions regarding our treatment of captive animals.

Burn, Charlotte C. “Bestial Boredom: A Biological Perspective on Animal Boredom and Suggestions for Its Scientific Investigation.” *Animal Behaviour* 130 (2017): 141–151. [doi:10.1016/j.anbehav.2017.06.006]

A useful review of known findings about human boredom and a discussion about the biological plausibility of animal boredom. The article also discusses the ways in which the presence of boredom could be assessed in nonhuman animals.

Galef, Bennett G., Jr., and Elaine E. Whiskin. “Preference for Novel Flavors in Adult Norway Rats (*Rattus norvegicus*).” *Journal of Comparative Psychology* 117.1 (2003): 96–100. [doi:10.1037/0735-7036.117.1.86]

Experimental evidence suggesting that animals develop aversion to a food that was given to them repetitively over a prolonged period of time.

Mason, Georgia J., and Charlotte C. Burn. “Frustration and Boredom in Impoverished Environments.” In *Animal Welfare*. 3d ed. Edited by Michael C. Appleby, Anna S. Olsson, and Francisco Galindo, 114–140. Oxford: Cabi, 2018. [ISBN: 9781786390202]

The chapter offers reasons in support of the claim that nonhuman animals experience boredom by presenting similarities between human and animal responses to repetitive stimuli and monotony. The chapter also argues that boredom should be considered to be an animal welfare problem: captive animals have a behavioral need for stimulation, yet the need is frustrated because of their captivity.

Meagher, Rebecca K., and Georgia J. Mason. “Environmental Enrichment Reduces Signs of Boredom in Caged Mink.” *PLoS One* 7.11 (2012): e49180. [doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0049180]

An important empirical demonstration that when mink are placed in impoverished cages they exhibit behaviors characteristic of boredom.

Nisbet, Robert. *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982. [ISBN: 9780674700659]

Nisbet describes boredom as a universal human experience that has afflicted societies and individuals throughout the ages. He speculates about the evolutionary history and function of boredom, declares that humans are unique in their ability to experience boredom, and offers a number of insightful (although unsupported) remarks about its nature and causes.

Svendsen, Lars. “Animal Boredom.” In *Boredom Is in Your Mind: A Shared Psychological-Philosophical Approach*. Edited by Josefa Ros Velasco, 135–148. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019. [ISBN: 9783030263942]

Svendsen’s chapter defends the claim that boredom occurs in many other species than humans, especially in mammals, birds, and some octopus species. His claim creates problems for theories of boredom that place the concept of meaning at the center of their account and argue that boredom involves a perceived meaninglessness. Svendsen defines animal boredom in terms of being deprived of objects and activities for which they care.

Wemelsfelder, Françoise. “Animal Boredom: Is a Scientific Study of the Subjective Experiences of Animals Possible?” In *Advances in Animal Welfare Science 1984*. Edited by Michael W. Fox and Linda D. Mickley, 115–154. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 1984. [ISBN: 9780898386998]

One of the earliest defenses of the idea that animals do experience boredom, and that boredom is a serious issue for captive nonhuman animals. In addition, the essay explores the difficult issue of how one can scientifically explore the question of animal boredom.

Wemelsfelder, Françoise. “Animal Boredom: Understanding the Tedium of Confined Lives.” In *Mental Health and Well-Being in Animals*. Edited by Franklin D. McMillan, 79–91. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. [ISBN: 9780813804897]

A sustained argument in favor of acknowledging the existence and seriousness of animal boredom. The chapter also contains a detailed discussion of how to recognize the presence of boredom in animals.