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# When Existence Grows Heavy: Existential Boredom and the Flight from Ourselves

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Abstract: This paper presents a theoretical investigation of existential boredom as a fundamental attunement through which key aspects of the human condition are disclosed—namely, the absence of ultimate meaning, ontological freedom, and finitude. Far from being a fleeting emotion or trivial discomfort, boredom is treated here as a mood with ontological significance, capable of revealing our evasive relationship with our own condition as existing beings. By drawing on philosophical reflections ranging from Seneca's notion of *taedium vitae* to modern and existential thinkers such as Pascal, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, the study outlines how boredom emerges not merely as a symptom of malaise, but as a privileged site for encountering the burden of existence. Our conclusion is that existential boredom exposes the tension between our structural openness to being and our recurring tendency to flee from this openness, revealing the weight—and the truth—of human finitude.

Keywords: existential boredom, ontological attunement, human condition, *taedium vitae*, philosophical psychology.



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## 1. Introduction

This study aims to explore the attunement of boredom and its essential role in understanding the human condition. Boredom, usually perceived as a fleeting annoyance or emotion, is understood here as a fundamental attunement[1] that can simultaneously expose the absence of an ultimate meaning for existence, our inescapable finitude, and our ontological freedom. For this reason, the present work addresses its deeper version, the so-called 'existential boredom' (also known as 'life's boredom' or 'weariness of life'). Our reflections are guided by the following central question: how does the experience of existential boredom—across both ancient and modern philosophical contexts—reveal the fundamental structures of human existence, and in what way does it unmask our flight from ourselves, that is, from our proper condition as existing beings? Through a theoretical reflection on how this attunement emerges in key philosophical sources. —from the Stoic figure of Seneca to the existential analyses of Pascal, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger—we aim to clarify how boredom, in its existential presentation and far from being trivial, constitutes a privileged lens through which to apprehend the human being's relation to time, meaning, and being itself—while also revealing our finitude and the evasive tendency to flee from the burden imposed by recognizing our own condition as existing beings.

This work aims to highlight not only boredom's undeniable philosophical relevance, but also its association with concrete and intense forms of existential malaise—an association that justifies the interest of phenomenological-existential-oriented psychology in understanding this phenomenon. Our paper begins with a presentation of 'life's boredom,' tracing it back to the phenomenon of *taedium vitae* as described by Seneca. The Roman philosopher highlighted *taedium vitae* as an experience of weariness, annoyance, and restlessness, imposing upon individuals a life marked by unease and senseless attitudes. In Seneca's writings, however, the understanding of *taedium vitae* remains linked to the domain of ethics, developed in epistles of an exhortative and moralizing nature.

We then move on to a reflection on existential boredom within the meaningful horizon of modernity. In this part of the study, we aim to provide a panoramic discussion of the subject, engaging in dialogue with key thinkers of existential philosophy—such as Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, among others. We seek to demonstrate that, beginning with modernity, boredom became the subject of frequent existential reflections, which acknowledge the close connection between it and the human condition as such. From this point onward, boredom is no longer seen merely as a symptom of idleness, a vice, or psychological fatigue, but as an existential attunement that unveils the structural features of being human: the awareness of time, the confrontation with the lack of ultimate meaning, and the tension of freedom. In thinkers like Pascal and Heidegger, boredom is not only a moment of revelation but also the stage for a

[1] The term *fundamental attunement* (*Grundstimmung*, in Heidegger's terminology) refers to a primordial affective structure through which human existence (*Dasein*) discloses its relation to being as a whole. Unlike ordinary emotions or psychological states, these attunements are existential in nature: they reveal the ontological condition of the human being, grounding how the world and meaning are disclosed. In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1995), Heidegger shows how moods like boredom disrupt our everyday absorption and open the possibility for confronting the question of Being itself. Building on this perspective, Medeiros (2023) argues that fundamental attunements should not be reduced to inner states, but understood as modes of existential openness in which *Dasein* finds itself affectively tuned to its thrownness, finitude, and world. Such attunements are not optional embellishments of existence, but structures that permeate and condition all concrete emotional experience.

dramatic reaction:[2] the human being, faced with its own naked condition, turns away—something that, to some extent, was already perceived by Seneca in his descriptions of spiritual restlessness, flight, and dissatisfaction in the face of one's own life. What boredom brings to light is not only the weight of existence, but our deep-rooted tendency to flee from ourselves—that is, from the very condition of being finite, exposed, and responsible for our own being.[3] Ultimately, we argue that existential boredom discloses a fundamental structure of the human being—one in which the very possibility of authenticity is entangled with the temptation of evasion. In revealing this, boredom proves not merely to be a symptom of existential malaise, but a privileged site for confronting the meaning—and burden—of existence itself.

But why boredom, after all? Perhaps the first thing we might think about this phenomenon is that it constitutes something that happens to us. At first glance, boredom could be thought of as a fleeting state or sensation, always tied to a particular subject in an unengaged relation with their environment, whether due to a lack of attention (Eastwood et al., 2012) or, as more recently suggested (Eastwood and Gorelik, 2019), by under-utilization of cognitive capacities. From this perspective, as pointed out by Ros Velasco (2020, p. 3), "the most widespread belief is that boredom arises from a discontinued relationship between the subject and the environment caused by some kind of individual disorder." This includes, as the author also noted in specialized literature, the alleged pathology of "chronic boredom" (Ros Velasco, 2020, p. 3). Finkielsztein, in his attempt to conceptualize the situational aspect of the phenomenon, states that:

> Boredom is a transient, negatively perceived, transitional emotion or feeling of listless and restless inattention to and engagement withdrawal from interacting with one's social and/or physical environment caused distinctively by an atrophy of personally-valued meaning, the frustrated need for meaning (2024, p. 24).

[2] Heidegger's notion of *the One* (*das Man*) (2015) designates the anonymous, impersonal mode of being through which *Dasein* evades its ownmost possibilities by conforming to social norms, expectations, and idle talk. It represents a form of everyday self-loss in which existence is leveled down and responsibility is displaced. Immersion in the One is a paradigmatic way through which Dasein flees from the anxiety and burden of its own freedom and finitude. This evasive dynamic is suggested in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1995), particularly in Heidegger's analysis of the second form of boredom—*being bored with something*—where *Dasein* seeks relief from discomfort by turning toward distraction, such as that offered by a dinner party or social gathering, "away from ourselves toward whatever is happening" (p. 118). In this sense, boredom—as an attunement that disrupts everydayness—can unmask the evasive pull of *das Man* and expose a deeper relation to being itself.

[3] Although, as Goodstein (2005) highlights in *Experience without Qualities*, even Heidegger's (1995) ontological analysis depends on certain configurations specific to the modern era—such as the rationalization of time. His perspective, while sustaining the idea of boredom as a fundamental attunement of our current philosophizing, that is, of modernity, remains committed to certain premises about the nature of human experience that are incompatible with a socially and historically informed view of the phenomenon. As Goodstein reiterates later, "boredom needs to be thought of in relation to the technologically mediated revolutionary transformations in everyday life in modernity" (2020, p. 24). For our part, we acknowledge this objection. However, from an ontological and hermeneutical perspective, we also believe it is not incompatible to view historicity and facticity themselves as structural constituents of human existence alongside fundamental attunements that reveal and, at the same time, are shaped by them. Boredom, understood as a fundamental attunement, is not only ontologically constitutive of the human mode of being but also closely tied to historicity itself—so closely, in fact, that Casanova (2021) affirms that boredom possesses an inherent ontological and factical character, serving as a fundamental attunement grounded in facticity. We would also like to add that, taken as a whole—including his contributions regarding the very nature of technology (Heidegger, 1977)—Heidegger does provide an account that accommodates the technologically mediated transformations of everyday life in modernity.

Be that as it may, at certain moments in our lives something occurs in such a way that we experience weariness, nausea, annoyance, disgust, or fatigue with the situation in which we find ourselves—an experience commonly accompanied by restlessness, unease, or 'inconstancy of spirit,' among other feelings. On such occasions, our relationship with time changes. Whereas before, in our immersion and daily dealings with entities, time was fluid and imperceptible, it now presents itself in a much closer, slower, and generally uncomfortable manner.

In the state of boredom—if we may designate it as such—one usually experiences the slow passage of time accompanied by a sense of emptiness and the lack of fulfillment provided by the entities around us (or the absence of satisfaction in our relationship with them). When this experience becomes deeper and more prolonged, it tends to transcend specific situations and extend to broader contexts. Thus, what we might initially call 'situational,' 'simple/ordinary' or 'transient' boredom may transform into 'existential,' 'complex' or 'profound' boredom (Elpidorou, 2021; Ros Velasco, 2022, 2025; Svendsen, 2005; Toohey, 2011). In such circumstances, what bores is existence itself, in its entirety, and the sense of emptiness and indifference becomes widespread. Kuhn attempts to summarize what he understands by *ennui*[4] in the following way:

> The state of emptiness that the soul feels when it is deprived of interest in action, life, and the world (be it this world or another), a condition that is the immediate consequence of the encounter with nothingness, and has as an immediate effect a disaffection with reality (Kuhn, 1976, p. 13).

In his work *Philosophy of Boredom*, Svendsen (2005, p. 7) states that "to investigate the problem of boredom is to attempt to understand who we are and how we fit into the world at this particular point in time." For the philosopher, boredom presents itself as a fundamental existential experience. Such experiences bring our very existence into focus as a question. For Svendsen (2005), the problem of boredom (which refers to a fundamental existential experience) is one of the great questions of philosophy. Beyond a philosophical problem, however (at least in Western culture), boredom has been perceived as a sickness from the very beginning, frequently held responsible for our hardships, viewed as a form of punishment for humanity, and treated as a condition to be eliminated (Ros Velasco, 2022, 2024, 2025). Considered shameful in ancient Greece, a capital sin in the Middle Ages, a product of alienation brought about by modern times, or a mental health issue delegated to clinical psychologists and psychiatrists, boredom today has become a phenomenon of interest across various disciplines (Ros Velasco, 2021). Indeed, in recent years, considerable efforts have been made to ensure that this phenomenon is studied from a truly interdisciplinary perspective (Goodstein, 2005, 2020; Ros Velasco, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2025).

Returning to philosophy and the 20th century, Heidegger (1995), in turn, offers one of the most detailed philosophical studies on boredom in his time, pointing to the privileged opening of the world made possible by the fundamental attunement of profound boredom.[5] His description

[4] Term used by the author to refer to what we understand here as 'existential boredom.' The French word *ennui* derives from the Latin word *inodiare*, meaning approximately 'hatred of life itself' (Martin et al., 2006; Meyer Spacks, 1995).

[5] In his lecture from the winter semester of 1929/1930, titled *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, Heidegger (1995) describes boredom as a fundamental attunement of our current philosophizing, that is, of our own facticity (Casanova, 2021).

of the 'moment of vision' (*Augenblick*), far from being a mere sublimation of boredom, identifies in the total and absolute indifferentiation brought about by profound boredom the possibility of a unique moment of understanding for *Dasein* about itself and existence as such. This is because:

> Fundamental attunements are characterized precisely by the suspension of absorption in the world amid the radical emptying of all ostensibly positive meanings available in everydayness, by the consequent transformation of the surrounding world as a totality of sedimented meanings into an insignificant world, by the confrontation of Dasein with the world as world, as well as by the redirection of Dasein to its structural nothingness (Casanova, 2021, p. 33).

Despite being an essential philosophical problem or, possibly, an inherent condition of existence, boredom is a phenomenon that, historically, has been constantly associated with concrete and intense forms of suffering, such as melancholy, acedia, and depression (Bargdill, 2000; Dutra, 2018; Klibansky et al., 2019; Mattar, 2020a, 2020b; Ros Velasco, 2021, 2022, 2025).

In other words, existential boredom profoundly affects the human experience of the world and the quality of life, playing a prominent role in states of psychic malaise that accompany the experience of meaninglessness. Its corrosive effect has the power to significantly undermine a person's joy in living. It is precisely due to its connection with severe forms of existential malaise, as well as its unique attunement to existence, that we believe it offers a valuable lens for understanding the structures of human existence across different historical horizons, including ours. Before engaging more directly with the existential analyses of this phenomenon in modern philosophy, however, it is important to consider how similar experiences were articulated in earlier traditions of thought. By comparing distinct historical expressions of this malaise, we may clarify the essential elements that recur across time. We will begin, therefore, by addressing a historical precursor of this condition, namely, the phenomenon of *taedium vitae*. We believe that the description of this experience offered by Seneca (2020a, 2020b) provides essential insights into the affective and ethical dimensions of the phenomenon, including some of the culturally sedimented ways of responding to it (such as the attempt to flee from ourselves through many types of diversions).

## 2. Seneca's Description of *taedium vitae*

The Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca was the first thinker to write more seriously about boredom in antiquity (Kuhn, 1976). His reflections on the so-called *taedium vitae* can be found especially in the dialogues *Of Peace of Mind* (2020a) and *Letters from a Stoic* (2020b) —although elements pointing to a similar phenomenon can also be identified in *On the Shortness of Life* (2020c).[6] This is not to say that the subject was not addressed by other Roman authors (Toohey, 1988, 2011) or, earlier, by the Greeks—it was, although indirectly and in a less profound and systematic manner.[7]

[6] The original Latin titles, respectively, are *De Tranquillitate Animi*, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, and *De Brevitate Vitae*.

[7] On this matter, Toohey points that "Greek literature down to the Hellenistic period lacks reference to anything more than the simplest form of boredom" (1988, p. 163).

In the *Letters*, Seneca writes to Lucilius about the question of contempt for death. Nearing the end of the epistle, and faithful to his friend's request to send him some useful precept, the philosopher chooses to cite the following passage, which he attributes to Epicurus: "It is absurd to run towards death because you are *tired of life*,[8] when it is your manner of life that has made you run towards death" (2020b, pp. 61–62 [XXIV, 22]). In this way, for Seneca, many hasten toward death (an allusion to suicide) due to their weariness or boredom with life. The 'thoughtless' tendency toward death also afflicts men simply because of the contempt they feel for life. There is also, according to the philosopher, the case of those who find themselves in a state of boredom with seeing and doing the same things repeatedly—not because they hate or despise life, but because they are 'disgusted' with it. Such individuals, Seneca exemplifies, impelled by their own reflections on their condition, say:

> 'How long must I endure *the same things*?'[9] Shall I continue to wake and sleep, be hungry and be cloyed, shiver and perspire? There is an end to nothing; all things are connected in a sort of circle; they flee and they are pursued. Night is close at the heels of day, day at the heels of night; summer ends in autumn, winter rushes after autumn, and winter softens into spring; all nature in this way passes, only to return. I do nothing new; I see nothing new; sooner or later *one sickens of this*, also." There are many who think that living is not painful, but superfluous (2020b, p. 62, emphasis added [XXIV, 26]).

In this passage, we encounter Seneca's observation of the weariness reported by some toward existence itself (considering that the repetitions mentioned are inherent to life and, so to speak, inescapable for any being that exists). Repetition, monotony, weariness, fatigue... *Taedium vitae*, that is, life's boredom, weariness of living. Thus, Seneca shows us that, for some, existence appears repetitive and insipid. An empty, superficial, burdensome journey: difficult to endure.

Another important point to highlight concerns the nausea that accompanies the phenomenon of life's boredom, in a reference to navigation.[10] The experience of existential disgust described by Seneca can be compared to the nausea of a sailor (*nauta*) who, compelled to navigate, must endure the inevitable discomfort of the journey. Serenus, another of Seneca's friends, mentions this feeling in the dialogue *Of Peace of Mind* when attempting to describe, in his own way, the affliction that troubles him: "I am not suffering from a storm, but from seasickness" (2020a, p. 8 [I, 17]). Viewing navigation as a metaphor for existence, nausea here reveals itself as an existential malaise, perhaps not so distant from what Antoine Roquentin experiences centuries later in *Nausea* (Sartre, 2013)—although, in Seneca, the word's connection remains much closer to its literal sense.

At the beginning of the dialogue *Of Peace of Mind*, Serenus turns to Seneca as if addressing a physician. Seeking relief from an ailment he is unable to name, the philosopher's friend finds himself in an uncomfortable state that, according to him, while not a disease, cannot

[8] In the original, it reads: "ridiculum est currere ad mortem *taedio vitae*..." (1965, p. 71, emphasis added [XXIV, 22]). That is, "...because of the *weariness of life*..." or "...due to the *weariness of life*...". In our view, a more impersonal translation/reading of the expression *taedio vitae* in this phrase better captures the phenomenon described by the philosopher.

[9] The expression "the same things" is noteworthy. It appears here very close to that of the author of Ecclesiastes when, questioning the meaning of existence, stated that "there is no new thing under the sun" (King James Bible, 2017, Ecc. 1:1–3, 9).

[10] In the original Latin text, the term used is *nausia* (1965, p. 72 [XXIV, 26]), a word of Greek origin that refers to the unpleasant sensation of queasiness experienced while navigating—specifically, seasickness.

be considered health either (2020a [I, 2]).[11] Among the symptoms, it is possible to highlight inconstancy of spirit, restlessness, the inability to be alone with oneself, and the desire for glory (or to leave a legacy)—in this case, to be remembered through writing, that is, to produce something 'significant' for posterity. Without delay, Seneca responds: what Serenus needs is tranquility,[12] understood as the state in which one: "may always pursue a steady, unruffled course, may be pleased with itself, and look with pleasure upon its surroundings, and experience no interruption of this joy, but abide in a peaceful condition without being ever either elated or depressed" (2020a, p. 11 [II, 4]).

For many people, however, existence is usually quite different—that is, far more unpleasant. But what exactly afflicts them? What 'ailment' is this?[13] To understand the phenomenon, Seneca relies on examples. People afflicted by *taedium vitae* are tormented by disturbances of spirit, mood swings, an inconsistency of purpose, inability to endure solitude, and, of course, weariness—with their daily tasks, with themselves, with their lives, and, ultimately, with their very existence as such. Such individuals always end up preferring what they have already given up on doing—that is, complaining about what they have abandoned. They are constantly starting new projects only to abandon them shortly afterward. At the same time, they are yawning with inertia yet restless at their core, carrying on their existence in a state of stagnation, "continuing to live not in the way they want, but [simply] in the way they began" ["*et uiuunt non quomodo uolunt, sed quomodo coeperunt*"] (2020a [II, 6]). Such an existence places them in a kind of 'state of suspension.'

As Seneca observes, the characteristics of this ailment are numerous, but the effect is always the same: dissatisfaction with oneself. This state of suspension and accumulation of disappointments tends to worsen during idleness or in moments of solitude. Unable to find satisfaction within themselves or pleasure in the typical activities of busy people—activities they nonetheless seek as a way to escape from themselves—those affected by weariness of living can no longer endure "their home, solitude, or the walls" ["*domum, solitudinem, parietes non fert*"] (2020a [II, 9]): their own company thus becomes aversive. From this, the philosopher writes, "arises that weariness and dissatisfaction with oneself, that tossing to and fro of a mind which

[11] The expression in the original is "*nec aegroto nec ualeo*," that is, "I am neither ill nor well" in A. Stewart's translation (2020a, p. 3 [I, 2]).

[12] The Greek term that Seneca refers to in this passage is *εὐθυμία* (*euthymia*), which he intentionally translates into Latin as *tranquillitatem* (2020a [II, 3]), a term we prefer to render here as 'tranquility' instead of the objectifying expression 'peace of mind,' as used by A. Stewart.

[13] In the original text, the word initially used by Serenus in the first letter is *vitia* ('vices,' in the plural), giving the word *mali*—'evil,' which appears later in I, 17—the moral connotation characteristic of it in this dialogue. However, there is also a psychopathological connotation, as evidenced, for instance, in Serenus's own description in I, 4: "*Dicam quae accidant mihi: tu morbo nomen invenies*" (in a free translation, "I will tell you what happens to me; you will find a name for the illness") (2020a [I, 4]). This distinction is crucial, as it establishes a clear boundary between the phenomenon of *taedium vitae*, as understood by Seneca, and existential boredom in the modern era. In the latter—at least between existential philosophers—the malaise brought to light by boredom cannot be reduced to an issue of character or a psychopathological condition: it is an inherent condition of existence and evidence that existence itself, in and of itself, lacks any predetermined meaning or purpose. In other words, it is an experience that is simultaneously a recognition of the absence of a pre-existing meaning prior to the very fact of 'being-thrown' (*Geworfen*) into the world—to use a Heideggerian term (2015).

can nowhere find rest, that unhappy and unwilling endurance of enforced leisure" (2020a, p. 13 [II, 10]).

To the aversion to idleness and solitude is added the accumulation of disappointments from failed attempts. The same applies to frustration over unmet expectations. The sorrowful and embittered soul of those affected by *taedium vitae* despises their idleness and laments having nothing to do. This aversive mode of being also extends to others. For the person afflicted by *taedium vitae* also views "the progress of others with the bitterest jealousy" (2020a, p. 14 [II, 10]). The philosopher adds that "an unhappy sloth favours the growth of envy, and men who cannot succeed themselves wish everyone else to be ruined" (2020a, p. 14 [II, 10]). In his presentation of the phenomenon of *taedium vitae*, Seneca describes a profoundly corrosive process. Indolence and inertia not only affect the well-being of those who suffer from this ailment but also their character. As one grows weary or dissatisfied with oneself, hatred for the progress of others, as well as disappointment with one's (perceived) failures, positions the weary individual even against the era in which they live. Anything else, whatever it may be, begins to seem better than what one actually has.

In a desperate attempt to rid themselves of this malaise, individuals afflicted by life's boredom undertake successive random journeys, the ultimate purpose of which is to flee from themselves—a remedy that ultimately proves ineffective. Seneca refers to Lucretius, citing his famous allusion to the phenomenon of *horror loci*:[14] "Thus every mortal from himself doth flee" (2020a, p. 15 [II, 14]).[15] A truly futile escape, as each person must inevitably carry themselves as a companion throughout their existence. This burdensome, exhausting, and unbearable companionship is also inescapable. And when everything appears empty, unbearable, and unavoidable, the possibility of suicide emerges on the horizon for those who experience life's boredom. The philosopher writes:

> This has driven some men to death, because by frequently altering their purpose they were always brought back to the same point, and had left themselves no room for anything new. They had become sick of life and of the world itself, and as all indulgences palled upon them they began to ask themselves the question, "How long are we to go on *doing the same thing*?" (2020a, p. 16, emphasis added [II, 15]).

In summary, the phenomenon of *taedium vitae*, as described by Seneca, is a condition that is not only profound but also as complex as it is destructive, encompassing both an affective

[14] The aversion, dread, or horror of place (in Latin, *horror loci*) appears here as a symptom of *taedium vitae*. The affected individual detests the place they are in, whether it is their home, workplace, city, country, etc. Anything different from what they currently have would supposedly be better. In an attempt to alleviate discomfort and stave off the feeling of emptiness, a great deal of energy and resources is spent trying to escape such a situation. The compulsion for travel—and, more generally, for change and variation—emerges here as a possible manifestation of this phenomenon. As Toohey (2011) notes, there is a small body of literature (mostly concentrated between the late 19th and early 20th centuries) on what was then referred to in European psychiatry as 'dromomania' or 'pathological tourism.' Those afflicted by this condition displayed a persistent and uncontrollable desire to leave for some distant place. Hacking (1999) characterized dromomania as an exemplary case of 'transient mental illness,' that is, a phenomenon confined to a specific historical time and place—in this case, 19th- and early 20th-century Europe, particularly in France.

[15] In Latin, "*Hoc se quisque modo fugit*" (Lucretius, III, 1068). This verse appears in Lucretius' poem *On the Nature of Things* (*De rerum natura*). In this work, the writer comments on the case of a man who cannot bear to stay in the same place. In his restlessness, he constantly travels—from the city to the countryside and back—in an attempt both to alleviate the burden he is to himself and to find something he cannot identify. Far from being an isolated case, Lucretius assures us, this condition affects us all.

and an ethical dimension. As has been shown, this phenomenon seems to be something that can manifest in anyone—even in those who, like Serenus, are seriously committed to the cultivation of virtues or the combat against vices; who are engaged in the daily activities of private life or participation in public life; who seek studies as a means of self-improvement; who possess the financial resources to enjoy luxury or undertake numerous trips to exotic places at their whim.

## 3. Existential Boredom and the Human Condition: The Emergence of Boredom in the Modern Era

The phenomenon described by Seneca does not appear as something structural to human existence—that is, as stemming from our very condition as existing beings. There is no mention here of what Holzhey-Kunz (2018) calls a 'fundamental philosophical experience,' nor anything that alludes to an encounter with our 'ontological truth.' In Seneca's *taedium vitae*—and, more broadly, in the ancient Romans—we do not find the notion that boredom arises from humanity's recognition of its own condition in the world. Thus, the notion of boredom as a 'realization' to our most intrinsic condition is absent. Similarly, the phenomenon of *taedium vitae* is not attributed the revelatory character of boredom, nor the privileged opening of the world that this fundamental attunement affords.

It is only from modernity onward that boredom becomes an object of reflection to a considerable extent (Svendsen, 2005), epitomizing "the dilemma of the autonomous modern subject" (Goodstein, 2005, p. 3), and generally being associated with existential reflections. In Pascal, the close connection between boredom and the human condition is already apparent. For the philosopher, boredom is a fundamental indicator of our condition in this world—a malaise that bears the distinctive mark of our 'natural unhappiness,' that is, the inherent misery in which we all find ourselves. Pascal's ennui manifests itself particularly in failed attempts to escape the recognition of this condition, yet it remains ever-present, driving our immersion in daily activities. In *Pensées*, for example, Pascal writes:

> But when I thought more closely about it, and, having found the cause of all our unhappiness, wanted to discover the reason, I found that there was a truly powerful one which lies in the natural unhappiness of our feeble, mortal condition, so wretched that nothing can console us when we think about it closely (1995, pp. 44–45, *Fragment* 168).

The philosopher further states that "If our condition were truly happy we would not have to take our minds off thinking about it in order to make ourselves happy" (1995, p. 105, *Fragment* 446). For the only way to escape such terrible misfortune and provide ourselves with some relief is to think no more about it, which we attempt to achieve through the compulsive pursuit of endless forms of *diversion*.[16] As previously mentioned, boredom arises precisely when such forms of diversion prove unsuccessful, and the void of existence reveals itself to man in its full magnitude.

[16] In French, *divertissement*. Within the context of Pascal's thought, the term can be understood as any form of human activity aimed at distracting oneself from our natural condition of unhappiness.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant, on the other hand, associates boredom with cultural development (Svendsen, 2005).[17] For Kant, human beings, in their natural state, remain in a harmonious cycle of alternation between the emergence and satisfaction of their needs—an alternation of sensations to which they are naturally accustomed. "People of culture," on the other hand, "mindful of their lives and of time," are constantly oppressed by the "arduousness of boredom" (2006, §61, pp. 128–129, adapted). For, always needing to experience new forms of pleasure, they feel constantly compelled to move away from the present moment toward the next. Boredom, which for the philosopher is perceived as the "*void* of sensation" (2006, §60, p. 128]), awakens in man both dread[18] and a "disgust for his own existence" (2006, §14, p. 43, adapted]).

While in Pascal the so-called miserable condition of man still allows for a return to God through the grace of redemption, in Schopenhauer, the understanding of the "misery of our existence" (2010, §58, p. 348) seems to take a more pessimistic turn. For the German philosopher, it is precisely the recognition of emptiness (mediated by boredom) and the superficiality of existence that drives men to sociability (2010, §57), the creation of all kinds of entertainment (such as playing with animals, card games, etc.), and the elaboration of mythologies and superstitions (2010, §58).

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer (2010) argues that all things constitute objectifications of the *will*,[19] engaged in a constant and meaningless cycle. The struggle for survival and the maintenance of life, including all the natural processes associated with it, are thus manifestations of a "blind, hungry, and insatiable will" (Chevitarese, 2014, p. 22). But, as Schopenhauer states, "the basis of all willing is need, lack, and thus pain, which is its primordial destiny by virtue of its essence" (2010, §57, p. 338). Life consists of desiring, yearning, and pursuing what is lacking—and, in this sense, it is suffering, pain. The satisfaction of a desire driven by the will provides only momentary relief, for another desire soon arises, revealing a new state of lack—and, once again, of pain. All happiness is, therefore, fleeting, constituted from negativity, that is, from the mere absence of pain. In the absence of a new object to satisfy the will's demands, boredom, "opposite pole of human misery" (Schopenhauer, 2018, p. 613), reveals itself in full force:

> If on the other hand it lacks objects to will, its former objects having been quickly dispelled as too easily achieved, it is seized with a terrible emptiness and boredom: i.e. its essence and its being itself become an intolerable burden to it. Thus, its life swings back and forth like a pendulum between pain and boredom; in fact, these are the ingredients out of which it is ultimately composed (Schopenhauer, 2010, §57, p. 338).

[17] An interesting detail to note, however, concerns the specific use of the expression "weariness/boredom with life" (*Überdruß des Lebens*) by the philosopher (Kant, 2005, p. 118), associating it with a form of severe existential suffering. Han points out Kant's "unusual confession" about his hypochondria in *The Conflict of the Faculties*: "Because of my flat and narrow chest, which leaves little room for the movement of the heart and lungs, I have a natural predisposition to hypochondria, which in earlier years bordered on *weariness with life*" (Kant, 1966, p. 379, quoted in Han, 2023, p. 8, emphasis added).

[18] Kant here employs the well-established Latin expression *horror vacui*, that is, *horror* or *dread of the void* (2006, §61, p. 129).

[19] *Will* is a fundamental concept in Schopenhauer's philosophy, alongside 'representation.' Broadly speaking, it constitutes a kind of fundamental driving force of existence that governs everything, lacking any ultimate purpose or goal beyond the realization of itself.

Such is our condition. As Danckert and Eastwood state, "we are faced with two miserable choices: the pain of not yet fulfilling a desire or the boredom of not yet having a desire to pursue" (2020, p. 10). However, perhaps one of the most emblematic characterizations of boredom provided by Schopenhauer is found in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (Schopenhauer, 1974), where boredom, instead of being a mere experience, is described as "a consequence of the fact that life has no genuine intrinsic worth" or as "a positive proof that, in itself, existence has no value; for boredom is just that feeling of its emptiness" (§146, p. 287). For this reason, as Woods observes, boredom is for Schopenhauer "truly an objective, albeit introspective, *sensation*, and not a mere subjective feeling; it is a source of *proof*, no less, of the valuelessness of existence" (2018, p. 966). Expanding the German philosopher's vocabulary, it might be possible to assert that, for Schopenhauer, boredom constitutes a structuring component of the givenness of existence as such.

Alongside Schopenhauer and Pascal, Kierkegaard also significantly contributed to an existential understanding of the phenomenon of boredom. Ferro notes, for instance, that for Kierkegaard, boredom "never appears as a simple and ordinary annoyance, but rather as a disposition that profoundly affects the execution and the overall aspect of existence" (2008, p. 945). It is also noticeable that, in Kierkegaard, the fundamental attunement of boredom is closely linked to the fundamental attunement of anxiety. Judging from his writings, both anxiety and boredom invite individuals to gaze into the depths of their own existence. Both attunements can be associated with a sense of vertigo, nausea, or dizziness—a notable feature also present in *taedium vitae*, it must be said. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard writes:

> Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down (1980, p. 61).

In *Rotation of Crops* (*Either/Or*) the philosopher writes that "boredom rests upon the nothingness that interlaces existence; its dizziness is infinite, like that which comes from gazing into a bottomless abyss" (Kierkegaard, 1987, p. 291). In boredom, the vertigo of the existential abyss is equally present precisely because, as with anxiety, the radical freedom of the human being once again announces itself. Unlike anxiety, however, in boredom the radical possibility (freedom) and nothingness that permeate existence are denied—a movement that confines the bored individual in the hermeticism typical of those who, in their extreme self-assertion, reject possibility. They do so through an insatiable craving for *anything other than this* (that which is effectively available as possible)—that is, a craving for nothing. In a state of boredom, nothing seems possible, as if possibility itself has been canceled for the bored individual. Or, one could say that possibility itself is being denied. One experiences, with great discomfort, a recalcitrant emptiness accompanied by an implacable and also empty yearning (since it has no object).

If the exposition provided above seems quite suitable for an ontological delimitation of the phenomenon of boredom, the description offered by Kierkegaard in *Diapsalmata* (*Either/Or*) (1987) takes on a more concrete, vivid, and introspective character. Vivid images of boredom and its subsequent numbing effect on the human spirit are presented there. Some of these effects are well known, such as the banal 'will-paralysis.' Kierkegaard writes:

> I don't feel like doing anything. I don't feel like riding the—motion is too powerful; I don't feel like walking—it is too tiring; I don't feel like lying down, for either I would have to stay down, and I don't feel like doing that, or I would have to get up again, and I don't feel like doing that, either. *Summa Summarum*: I don't feel like doing anything (1987, p. 20).

However, as previously noted, the state of boredom does not properly manifest without that impatience or restlessness of spirit, the constant discomfort caused by an insatiable hunger to do *anything but this*—that is, the unattainable desire for fulfillment. In a simple and relatable way, deeply connected to everyday experience, Kierkegaard writes: "On the whole, I lack the patience to live. [...] It is said that our Lord satisfies the stomach before the eyes. That is not what I find: my eyes are surfeited and bored with everything, and yet I hunger" (1987, p. 25). If the impatient desire to do anything but this is a familiar experience for those who are bored, the relationship between boredom and monotony is equally well known. Uniformity, repetition, and the absence of change are elements that, although not decisive, certainly contribute to the experience of boredom (Danckert and Eastwood, 2020). However, in Kierkegaard, such elements take on a deeper connotation, as the discussion is not about this or that monotonous activity or this or that tedious task. In existential boredom, it is existence itself that is repetitive and monotonous, as can be observed in *Diapsalmata*: "Wretched fate! [...] You bore me; it is still the same, an *idem per idem*. No variation, always a rehash" (Kierkegaard, 1987, pp. 29–30). No new thing under the sun indeed!

In Nietzsche, the existential version of the phenomenon of boredom seems to gain more space in his reflections on the will to power and the nihilistic malaise—though several mentions of boredom are present in many of his writings. In *Human, All Too Human* (Part II), Nietzsche speaks of a "spiritual strengthening, [...] an increasing pleasure and abundance of health" following a long war he waged "against the *pessimism of weariness with life*" ["Pessimismus der lebensmüdigkeit"] (2012, p. 9, 1988, p. 375, emphasis added). Again here (as in Kant), the phenomenon of weariness with life denotes a kind of illness (De Carvalho, 2014)—an illness stemming from nihilism, which, in its initial form, could be characterized as the psychological state that occurs when "we have sought a 'meaning' in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 12). In such an atmosphere, the feeling of wasted strength befalls man, the "agony of 'in vain'" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 12), that is, the confrontation with meaninglessness. In his writings, we also find several sporadic (and specific) mentions of boredom, which, as Svendsen (2005) observes, are often marked by a certain elitist element—for us, this appears as a somewhat expected consequence of Kant's idea of boredom as a product of culture and, therefore, as something more commonly experienced by the so-called 'people of culture.' Nietzsche writes:

> The machine [of culture], itself a product of the highest power of thought, sets in motion almost exclusively the lower, thoughtless energies of the persons who operate it. [...] It makes people active and uniform-but this produces in the long run a countereffect, a despairing boredom of the soul, which learns from it to thirst for a variable idleness (2012, p. 249).

For the philosopher, avoiding boredom at all costs would be something typically vulgar. "For the thinker and all inventive spirits, boredom is that disagreeable 'lull' of the soul that precedes a happy journey and cheerful winds [...]—precisely *that* is what lesser natures are totally unable to achieve!" (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 57). The discussion of boredom in Nietzsche is complex

and requires a more thorough examination, something we cannot provide in this space. As Svendsen (2005) observes, we do not find in Nietzsche anything that could be considered 'a theory of boredom.' Instead, his thoughts on the phenomenon are scattered among various aphorisms and texts throughout his extensive writings.

Concluding this section on existential boredom in modernity, it is also fitting to briefly mention the fundamental contribution of philosopher Martin Heidegger to this subject. Grounded in an ontology rooted in the analytic of *Dasein*,[20] Heidegger offers indispensable insights into the epochal dimension of boredom. In his studies on Heidegger, particularly in his work titled *Tédio e tempo*, Casanova (2021) observes that this specific fundamental attunement possesses a determined connection to our historical moment. Through the phenomenological unveiling of a fundamental attunement of our current *Dasein*, for instance, it becomes possible to access the phenomenon of existential boredom in its epochality.

In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Heidegger, 1995), the task of delimiting the essence of boredom is part of a broader project, namely, the delimitation of the essence of metaphysics itself. For Heidegger, metaphysical questions require an appropriate mode of approach, which includes, according to the philosopher, the "awakening of a fundamental attunement" (1995, p. 59). This fundamental attunement is boredom. Heidegger observes that it is only possible to awaken something that is already there, lying dormant in the radicality of *Dasein* itself. If this is the case, such an attunement, as a fundamental constituent of *Dasein*—and, therefore, of existence itself—manifests across a wide variety of situations (ranging from the most everyday and mundane experiences to those that are deeply reflective or properly philosophical). Starting from more superficial manifestations and then moving toward more primordial or 'fundamental' forms of boredom (Freeman and Elpidorou, 2015), Heidegger (1995) identifies three modes (types, or figures) of this phenomenon: (1) becoming bored *by* something, (2) becoming bored *with* something, and (3) *profound boredom*.

In *becoming bored by* something, *Dasein* is exposed to boredom through a certain forced relation with intraworldly entities (the example Heidegger provides is the long wait for a train at an isolated station, without any effective options for entertainment or distraction). In such a circumstance, Dasein is "*held in limbo* by time as it drags" and "*left empty* by the refusal of things" (Heidegger, 1995, pp. 98, 100, emphasis added). That is, due to the forced situation of waiting, *Dasein* is left unfulfilled by the intraworldly entities around it—these entities refuse to provide meaning. Similarly, there is a slowing down of time. In this mode of boredom, the impoverishment of *Dasein*'s factical possibilities of being falls upon it as something external. Pastime manifests itself as attempts by *Dasein* to extract fulfillment from entities and, through this, to stimulate time, which hesitates to pass. Here, boredom does not originate from *Dasein*

[20] In *Being and Time* (2015), grounded in a hermeneutic phenomenology, Heidegger inquires into the meaning of being (a movement that consists of revisiting an ancient question of philosophy, but this time under a radically different foundation). The initial question about the meaning of being unfolds in the development of an analytic of the existence of the human being, phenomenologically unveiled through the description of the structures that constitute the very givenness of this existence. *Dasein* (the only being privileged with the understanding of being and to whom the question about the meaning of this being is addressed) is a phenomenon that reveals itself in the very givenness of its occurrence. As pointed out by Elpidorou and Freeman, "Dasein is the kind of being whose Being is disclosed (*Erschlossen*) to it in a manifold of ways" (2015, p. 662).

itself but from the situation at hand—hence, in this mode of boredom, we speak of becoming bored *by* something. This, according to Heidegger, is the most superficial form of boredom. As can be observed, it aligns with what we have referred to as *simple*, *situational* or *transient boredom*—that is, boredom arising from a specific and contingent situation.

In *becoming bored with something*, boredom deepens. To illustrate this mode of the phenomenon, Heidegger invites us to imagine a situation involving both an invitation to and active participation in some social event—for instance, a dinner party or a festive gathering, which he uses as an example. During the occasion, there is no apparent sign of boredom; yet, upon returning home, *Dasein* realizes that it has been bored with the party. What happened?

Notice that the party emerges as an opportunity for fulfillment against the emptiness of boredom, which initially appears as an 'I don't know what,'[21] but in its unfolding reveals itself as arising from *Dasein* itself when left to its own devices. The act of setting aside free time in one's schedule for the party reflects that boredom is already present as the motivator of the invitation itself. Heidegger writes, "we are bored with… This indicates that the boredom in this being there alongside beings as part of a situation comes *from us*" (1995, p. 118). *Dasein*'s total surrender to pastime, therefore, its letting-things-unfold, appears here as an escape route from boredom, "*away from ourselves* toward whatever is happening" (Heidegger, 1995, p. 118). In other words, the party appears as an attempt by *Dasein* to flee from itself. Sound familiar?

In the third form of the manifestation of boredom—*profound boredom*—there are no intraworldly entities that bore us, nor is there the experience of being held in limbo by time as it drags due to something external, such as the imposition of a forced situation of waiting. This is not, then, a contingent and specific circumstance in which entities refuse to provide meaning because of some accidental disruption in the usual rhythm of one's engagements with the world. Nor is it the case of *Dasein* becoming bored with itself, striving to forget itself through empty immersion in a party—a carefully planned and pleasant pastime intended to free it from the burden of having to be itself. In profound boredom, it is not possible to identify what causes boredom. When profound boredom descends upon us, it envelops us all at once in an atmosphere of total and complete indifference, for "beings as a whole" have become indifferent (Heidegger, 1995, p. 138). In this state, the emptiness that encompasses us is absolute, for the refusal to provide meaning does not stem from any particular entity, any specific situation, or even from *Dasein* itself, but from beings as a whole—affecting all possibilities of being and, therefore, of temporalization.

Here, *being left empty* is characterized as *Dasein*'s being "delivered over to beings' telling refusal of themselves as a whole" (Heidegger, 1995, p. 139). *Being held in limbo*, on the other hand, manifests as "being impelled toward the originary making-possible of Dasein as such" (Heidegger, 1995, p. 144), which, in turn, inevitably holds *Dasein* in a *moment of vision* (*Augenblick*) where its proper condition of ontological freedom—its potentiality-for-being—is revealed. In the moment of vision, *Dasein* discovers itself in its original openness, as possibility—that is, as (ontological) freedom. As Feijoo and Costa point out, "the moment of vision is linked to the experience and freedom that constitutes Dasein" (2020, p. 324; see also

[21] Heidegger writes, "What is boring us: not this and not that, but an 'know not what'" (1995, p. 116).

Feijoo, 2010). Borges-Duarte, in turn, observes that "the depth of this overwhelming boredom thus brings to light the core of the 'being-there' that humanity itself is: a domain of openness for the freeing (there) of being, in its superabundant gift" (2006, p. 316).

If we consider the ontic (or concrete) dimension of such an event—if there can be one[22]—we notice that the possibility of correspondence to the everyday rhythm of engagements and their associated expectations of 'functionality' is rendered almost unviable in the experience of profound boredom. Mattar observes that "profound boredom is a radical and violent upheaval that opens and disposes Dasein as such, casting it out of the impersonal everyday familiarity, which is itself a form of numbing and dulling" (2020a, p. 107). This fundamental attunement is intertwined with certain forms of existential suffering, particularly those closely related to crises of meaning and time—such as depressive experiences, which may represent one of the possible modes through which profound boredom is awakened (Mattar, 2020a).

As a whole, the reflections above reveal that radical indifference—that is, being engulfed by emptiness, meaninglessness, utter weariness, and absolute detachment—is not merely an existential contingency but an essential part of existence itself. Such an experience suggests that existence ultimately lacks any meaning beyond its own unfolding and primordial openness, exposing an open-ended existential framework. No definitive assurance can be given to the existing being. No dwelling will be permanent or secure enough. No model or protocol will offer a definitive solution to the enigma of its own existence. The human being, as an existing entity, carries within its being these ontological truths, and existential boredom is one of the attunements that brings these truths to light. The being of the human entity, structurally constituted by the certainty of its finitude, finds itself, in its finite time of being, inevitably threatened by the pervasive lack of meaning in this entire existential 'game' of having to be itself and toward death.

Faced with the totality of existential possibilities available within its epochal horizon —which, in the event of existential boredom, are already shown as refused or nullified—the ontological truth of the human being's primordial existential freedom appears shrouded in an atmosphere of profound malaise. An atmosphere of weariness, fatigue, and frustration toward these possibilities. Nothing appeals to them, nor does anything seem genuinely achievable in the time that refuses to pass. Even if it were achievable, it would still make no difference, for, in the end, 'everything is absurd, and nothing makes sense'—it could be said. In such an atmosphere, any effort, any project, proves to be superfluous. Everything that is accomplished—or even merely achievable—is thus thought to be in vain. At the same time, an unfulfilled desire remains—a longing for *anything but this*, that is, an empty yearning.

On the other hand, existential boredom also reveals itself as a fundamental philosophical experience that, although unpleasant, rescues us from the everyday self-forgetfulness—a forgetting of our most proper condition, which is that of being existing entities. This self-

[22] According to Elpidorou and Freeman, "it is difficult to make sense of [Heidegger's depiction of] profound boredom within the context of contemporary psychological and philosophical research on boredom, [since] profound boredom does not map neatly onto either our pre-theoretical understanding of boredom or extant psychological accounts of boredom" (2019, pp. 177–178).

forgetfulness manifests itself in our engaged and unreflective immersion in routine tasks.[23] Not infrequently, we seek increasingly intense, creative, or desperate opportunities for occupation —that is, immersion in the everyday. The compulsive filling of time, the inconsistency of purposes, the relentless pursuit of company, intense sporting activities, exotic experiences, self-care, or well-being are all examples of self-forgetfulness. Existential boredom is one of the ways through which this self-forgetfulness is interrupted. To find oneself under the atmosphere of existential boredom is to be susceptible to the unveiling of ontological truths that, understandably, are difficult to bear: we are existentially free, responsible for ourselves, and, of course, finite in time. Hence, from Lucretius to Seneca, from Pascal to Heidegger, the everyday mode of being is that of fleeing from oneself.

## 4. Conclusion

Throughout this work, we have sought to explore the phenomenon of boredom not as a passing psychological irritation, but as a fundamental attunement that discloses essential aspects of the human condition. Drawing on thinkers from antiquity to modernity, we have shown that boredom, in its existential form, unveils our confrontation with finitude, the lack of ultimate meaning, and the burden—and freedom—of having to be ourselves. While in Seneca's *taedium vitae* we find vivid descriptions of the malaise that accompanies weariness with life, it is in the thought of Pascal, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and others that boredom is increasingly revealed as a structural experience that exposes the human being's ontological condition. Rather than being a mere symptom of idleness or cultural decadence, boredom emerges as a revealing mode of disclosure—one that interrupts our ordinary absorption in the world and opens us to the unsettling truths of existence. In this attunement, we are confronted not only with the weight of being but also with our deep-seated tendency to flee from ourselves —that is, to avoid the anxiety of freedom, the demands of being ourselves, and the inescapability of death. What is at stake in existential boredom is not merely a psychological discomfort but the possibility of encountering ourselves as beings thrown into a world without guarantees, condemned to freedom and responsibility. Thus, the study of boredom—especially in its most profound and existential expressions—is not peripheral to philosophy or psychology. It lies at the very heart of our efforts to understand what it means to exist.

[23] This dynamic of self-forgetfulness finds echoes throughout the thinkers engaged in this study. In Seneca, who himself cites Lucretius, we already encounter the idea that each one flees from himself—an insight accompanied by vivid descriptions of restlessness and spiritual dissatisfaction. The theme of evasion from one's own existence appears recurrently across the tradition. In Pascal, it takes the form of *divertissement*; in Schopenhauer, boredom is portrayed as the force that mediates the invention of all forms of entertainment, revealing the human need to escape the suffering of the will's inactivity. In Heidegger, this evasive structure appears as the ontological logic of *das Man*, partially revealed in the second form of boredom—that is, being bored with something. In different ways, all of these concepts name the human tendency to flee from the burden of our own condition. In this light, existential boredom emerges as the attunement that interrupts this evasive movement, confronting us with the very reality we seek to escape.

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