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The Moral Significance of Boredom: An Introduction

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“Oh! Ennui! Ennui! What an answer to everything,” wrote French author Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly (quoted in Kuhn 1976, 332). In a sense, d’Aurevilly was right. Boredom can be thought to be an answer to everything because it arises in response to almost any situation. Given enough repetition or exposure, nearly everything can strike us as boring—even our dearest possessions, activities, ideas, or relations. But d’Aurevilly was also, in an important sense, wrong: although boredom can be a response to almost any situation, it is not necessarily a solution. In its wake, boredom leaves behind both beneficial and harmful outcomes. On the positive side, new habits, opportunities, and careers often start with the thought “I am bored.” The realization that we are bored can move us to form prosocial intentions and to find meaning in our situations. It can even be the spur we need in order to engage in creative acts. “I painted because I was bored,” G. W. Bush admitted in an interview (Bush 2017); “Perhaps some of the greatest masterpieces were written while yawning,” Marcel Proust (1982, 866) writes in his *Remembrance*. All the same, boredom has a darker side. Unhealthy eating habits, binge drinking, drug use, arson, the theft of a military tank, sadistic behavior, mass killings—all have been attributed to boredom. “I guess I was just bored,” Keith Eugene Mann said explaining why he scorched 16 acres of wild forests in North Carolina (Washburn and David 2016). “Fact is I had no reason to do it, I just thought ... fuck it, life is boring so

why not?”, a gunman who killed twelve people posted on social media during the time of his despicable act (Baer 2018).

Is boredom morally significant? It’s complicated. To be in a position to answer the question properly, we need to know what boredom is and what it means to say that a psychological phenomenon is morally significant. Yet, for some, the answer was always clear. Decades ago, Bertrand Russell (2006 [1930], 38) declared that “[b]oredom is a vital problem for the moralist since half the sins of mankind are caused by it.” Russell’s claim is, of course, an exaggeration (but see Fromm 1973). Nonetheless, his hyperbole is instructive. In trying to understand better our own psychology and role in our social context, we cannot afford to ignore boredom’s force. Indeed, Russell’s claim is a useful reminder of Søren Kierkegaard’s astute observation that despite its “calm and sedate nature,” boredom has a remarkable “capacity to initiate motion” (1987 [1843], 285). It is perhaps in its capacity to move us in various ways that we can discern most clearly boredom’s moral colors.

Indeed, when thinking of boredom’s potential role in our moral existence, it is natural to focus on whether boredom can move us to act in moral or immoral ways. Yet there are additional ways of determining whether a psychological state or a personality trait carries moral significance. A psychological state or trait can be morally significant if any of the following theses is true:

ACTION THESIS:

The psychological state/personality trait can motivate prosocial or antisocial behavior.

JUDGMENT THESIS:

The psychological state/personality trait can influence moral judgment.

PERCEPTION THESIS:

The psychological state/personality trait can facilitate (or hinder) moral perception—the state or trait makes it more likely (or less likely) for the agent to perceive morally relevant situations and facts.

FLOURISHING THESIS:

The psychological state/personality trait can promote (or hinder) flourishing or the achievement of the good life.

APPROPRIATENESS THESIS:

The experience of the psychological state or the presence of the personality trait is morally inappropriate (or appropriate) insofar as one is, morally speaking, worse off (or better off) when experiencing the state or possessing the trait.

The aim of this introduction is to discuss the ways in which boredom is morally significant. An additional but equally important aim is to introduce briefly the nature of boredom. This latter aim takes priority. Only once we have familiarized ourselves with the character of boredom, we can properly articulate boredom's moral character.

1. *Acedia* as a Moral Precursor

Traces of what we now call “boredom” can be found in ancient Greek and Roman thought (Kuhn 1976; O’Brien 2018; Toohey 1988, 2011). Plutarch, Lucretius, Horace, and Seneca give voice to this phenomenon, but the history of boredom, because of boredom’s relationship to sloth and idleness, can be traced even further back in time and outside of the Western civilization (Raposa 1999; Wishnitzer 2021).

All the same, commentators often begin to document the history of boredom with a discussion of *acedia*, a type of religious boredom experienced, moralized, and, in some cases, literally demonized by the early Christian Fathers (Cassian 2000; Evagrius in Sinkewicz 2003; Jütte 2020; Wenzel 1967). Such a beginning point is, in a sense, a natural one. Within the Western tradition, the religious discourse on *acedia* is the first sustained discussion of the nature of boredom, including its effects, antecedents, and its relationship to other emotional and physical states. It is sophisticated, develops over centuries, and exposes plainly the moral significance of this type of boredom. For the founders of Christian monasticism and the third and fourth century hermits and cenobites of northern Egypt, *acedia* was a vice (or sin) and a threat to monastic life (Wenzel 1967; Bloomfield 1952). To be sieged by *acedia* (“the noonday demon” as it was then known) was a felt indication of one’s failure to perform one’s religious duties (Evagrius in Sinkewicz 2003, 102). When one contemplates and devotes oneself to God, one should not be bored with God; one ought not to be distracted, listless, slothful, never mind wishing for an alternative engagement. Hence, to be bored with, unexcited by, or even indifferent to God can mean only one thing: that one is failing to perform properly one’s religious duties. Worse, *acedia* was thought to be a condition that pervades all of monastic life. This demon “enveloping the entire soul and strangling the mind” (Evagrius

in Sinkewicz 2003, 104). It does not merely distract the monk temporarily; it tempts and tests the monk. It may even be the reason why the monk gives up the monastic life.

Thus, the discourse on *acedia* reveals to us the fact that *acedia* (and thus spiritual or religious boredom) was a morally significant affective state. Although common enough in monastic circles, it was an inappropriate experience, not befitting of one's role as a monk. And it was problematic because of its potential effects on the agent experiencing or besieged by *acedia*. Both its likening to a demon and its later transformation into a disease or a disorder underline the fact that *acedia* was conceived of as a threat to one's self.

The moral inappropriateness of the experience of *acedia* and its harmful or untoward consequences illustrate that this precursor of contemporary boredom is a morally significant phenomenon: both the ACTION THESIS and the APPROPRIATE THESIS are true for *acedia*. Hence, reflecting on the nature of *acedia* shows that we ought to take boredom seriously as a moral phenomenon. At the very least, the discourse on *acedia* reveals that the history of boredom involves a moral phenomenon. But the assessment that boredom is a morally significant phenomenon does not rest solely on boredom's history and its presumed relation to *acedia*. Conceptual and empirical investigations into the nature of boredom also highlight its moral importance.

2. Varieties of Boredom

What is boredom? The term "boredom" is polysemic: the same term names and picks out many different phenomena. The polysemic character of "boredom" and the confusion that

it may engender have been noted in the literature before. Adams Phillips (1994) wrote that we should not speak of boredom but of “boredoms.” Otto Fenichel warned “that the conditions and forms of behavior called ‘boredom’ are psychologically quite heterogeneous” (Fenichel, 1951, p. 349). And others have distinguished between different types of boredom (see, e.g., Doehlemann 1991; Goetz et al. 2014; Healy 1984; Heidegger 1995; Neu 2000; O’Brien this volume; Svendsen 2005). What is more, a look at the history of boredom shows that there exists a family of terms and phenomena that are either loosely or tightly connected to our concept of *boredom*. These include: *horror loci*, *fastidium*, *acedia*, *tedium vitae*, sloth, *mal du siècle*, melancholy, *ennui*, spleen, *noia*, monotony, and listlessness (Elpidorou and Ros Velasco in press). So, where does one begin with boredom? For present purposes, difficult questions concerning the history of this phenomenon and our linguistic practices about “boredom” and other semantically related terms will be put aside (see instead Goodstein 2005; Kuhn 1976; Petro 1993; Spacks 1995).

This introduction does not address whether “boredom” means different things, nor does it consider the history and historicity of the phenomenon of boredom (see instead Ros Velasco this volume). Rather, the introduction sets to explore the moral nature of boredom as it is currently and widely experienced. Consequently, the introduction is tasked with explaining what our (contemporary) boredom is: What does it feel like? How does it affect us? Is it morally significant?

Given the task at hand, it seems proper to start with the boredom with which we are most familiar: the everyday experience of boredom; our “ordinary” or “simple” boredom. This is the sort of experience that we undergo when, in our everyday dealings,

we engage with the uninteresting, mundane, meaningless, or repetitive. We experience it, for instance, when we wait in a doctor's office to be seen, when our flight is delayed, when we have to endure the same conversation for the umpteenth time, when we watch the same old rerun, when we scroll through our social media feed without purpose, or when we are forced to complete a mind-numbing task. Not only are most of us well acquainted with this type of boredom, it has also been the focus of a wave of a recent and historical experimental studies. For the most part, the type of boredom that psychologists induce in experimental settings and study either in such settings or in the wild is this simple or everyday boredom. Following common practice, I call this type of boredom "state boredom," and I understand it to be a temporary affective state that is largely (but neither entirely nor invariably) dependent on external conditions.

Alongside this familiar notion or understanding of boredom, others lurk in the offing. In particular, boredom researchers often talk of a different, more profound, type of boredom. Unfortunately, the label "profound boredom" has come to designate different affective phenomena, and discussions of boredom do not always keep those apart. For that reason, it is important to disambiguate between them (see also O'Brien this volume). Here I note six possible articulations of the notion of profound boredom.

Type A: Profound because of its object. Boredom might turn profound depending on what bores us. We are often bored by events, tasks, or situations that do not hold any moral weight: a song, an outfit, a homework assignment, a work presentation, a bad comedy routine, a terrible book, or an unreadable introductory chapter. Sometimes, however, the object of our boredom can change into

something much more important. Indeed, we could become bored with something that we think should not bore us. Imagine, for instance, a judge bored with justice, a doctor bored with caring for patients, a parent bored with the well-being of their children, or a monk bored with prayer. We might be quick to note that such feelings of boredom are not, morally speaking, on par with our ordinary experiences of boredom. What the judge, doctor, or parent are feeling are instead indications that a more serious boredom is present. Depending on their particular circumstances, their boredom might be morally inappropriate or even grounds for the assignment of blame.

Type B: Profound because of its scope. Boredom becomes profound when its scope turns expansive. Whereas we are usually bored with particular things and activities, it is possible to become bored with something much broader: ourselves, life, or the world itself (see Maltzberger, Sakinofsky, and Jha 2000). This notion of boredom might be related to perceived life boredom (see Tam, Van Tilburg, and Chan 2021) and could indicate an inability to find sources of engagement, interest, or meaning in many domains of our life (see also Heidegger 1995).

Type C: Profound because of its frequency. A different type of profound boredom might arise when we experience state boredom often. Regardless of its cause, such an increase in the frequency of the experience of boredom can bring about important changes in the manner in which we experience ourselves and the world

(see Elpidorou this volume) and can have problematic consequences for our well-being (Elpidorou 2017; Vodanovich and Watt 2016; cf. Williams 1973).

Type D: Profound because of its duration. Whereas frequent boredom is worrisome or potentially problematic because we experience state boredom frequently, there can be a different type of profound boredom which gains its gravity from the fact that it lasts much longer than state boredom. Such type of boredom might be the affective “soundtrack” of our lives—we almost always experience it, or, if it is not constantly present, its experience, whenever it arises, lasts for an extended period of time. Such a chronic affective condition pervades and affects many of our everyday dealings.

Type E: Profound because of its intensity. Boredom may become profound when the intensity of the experience of boredom increases. It might still be the case that we are bored infrequently, and that boredom has not become a chronic condition. Nonetheless, when we experience this type of boredom, we find it, because of its intensity, overwhelming.

Type F: Profound because of its cause. Boredom could become profound because of its cause. If the cause of boredom lies in us or in our social or environmental conditions, boredom has the potential to transform our lives. It is a part of who we are (either personally or socially), and thus escape from this type of boredom becomes exceedingly hard.

Although I presented the above types of profound boredom as separate subtypes, they often co-exist and interact with each other. For instance, profound boredom caused by environmental conditions that are resistant to change will likely give rise to frequent, and perhaps even chronic, boredom. The same could hold for a type of boredom that is expansive in terms of its scope: if life itself bores us, then we should expect that we will be bored most of the time (see, e.g., Bargdill 2000; Maltzberger, Sakinofsky, and Jha 2000; Moravia 2011 [1960]).

Knowing the various types of boredom is important. It allows us to better understand the history of boredom and the various discourses concerning boredom; it also safeguards us from conceptual errors when discussing boredom. What is more, the aforementioned taxonomy permits us to mark properly the present object of inquiry. When considering whether boredom is morally significant, I shall focus on two types of boredom: (1) the simple, everyday boredom (i.e., boredom as a transient affective state that is largely situation dependent, or “state boredom”) and (2) the type of boredom that is due to lasting personality characteristics (“trait boredom”). There are two main reasons for this decision. First, these two types of boredom, *state* boredom and *trait* boredom, are the focus of many contemporary analyses and empirical studies of boredom. As a result, we are, I believe, in a good position to articulate their moral significance. Second, the other types of boredom that I delineated, are, of course, important, yet it is unclear that they are not in some sense reducible to state boredom, trait boredom, or their combination. A straightforward case can be made about Type A, C, and E: all of them appear to be forms of state boredom. Type A is state boredom that is about specific

objects or situations; Type B is frequent state boredom; and Type E is intense state boredom. If Type F is due to individual psychological characteristics, then it is trait boredom. If it arises instead because of stable material, social, or environmental conditions, then it could be thought to be a form of state boredom that is due to some inescapable eliciting conditions. Type B and D are harder to reduce to state and trait boredom. Regarding Type B, it is unclear whether one's boredom with life or the world is a form of state boredom. The intelligibility of this proposed identification will depend, among other things, on whether the subject of this type of boredom also experiences a desire to find activities that are stimulating, meaningful, or interesting to the subject—I take this desire to be a necessary component of state boredom (see section 4). Regarding Type D, the duration of this type of profound boredom rules out an identification with state boredom. Nonetheless, it could still be a form of trait boredom, especially if it involves the perception that one's life is boring (see Tam, Van Tilburg, and Chan 2021).

Having said that, I do not insist that all forms of boredom reduce, one way or another, to state boredom or trait boredom. It is possible that there are forms of boredom that are genuine types of boredom (not varieties of depression or apathy) and which cannot be explained in terms of state boredom or trait boredom. This potential concession does not take away from what the rest of the introduction has to offer—it simply entails that there is more to be said about possible varieties of boredom and their moral significance.

Before concluding this section, I would like to raise one last issue. Is state boredom an emotion or not? Several chapters in this volume address this question. Contributions by Meagher and Robbins, Bortoloti and Allifi, and Yucel and Westgate all

provide reasons to think that state boredom should be taken to be an emotion. On the contrary, in her chapter, Yao offers an alternative conceptualization of state boredom, arguing that it ought to be understood as a cognitive appetite. Additionally, it has also been suggested that state boredom is (or can be) a mood insofar as it is a psychological state that lacks (or can lack) a specific intentional object (e.g., Feldges and Pieczenko 2020; Heidegger 1995). The question of whether state boredom is an emotion or not is undoubtedly of great theoretical and practical importance. For the purposes of the introduction, I operate under the assumption that state boredom is an emotion. (I defend this view in Elpidorou 2018b and in press.) All the same, the claims that I advance concerning state boredom's relation to morality hold (more or less) regardless of whether state boredom is ultimately an emotion, a mood, a cognitive attitude, or some other kind of psychological state.

3. Boredom as a Personality Trait

What does it mean to say that boredom is a personality trait? Putting aside general skepticism concerning the existence of personality traits, a personality trait, if it exists, must be (i) *enduring*, (ii) *measurable*, and (iii) a *causally relevant* characteristic of an individual's behavior. First, it is enduring both insofar as it is long lasting and insofar as it cannot be induced or alleviated by limited exposure to some endogenous or exogenous condition. In other words, a personality trait can neither be too easily acquired nor too easily dispensed with, and once possessed, it is thought to be a stable characteristic of the individual. Second, a trait must be measurable in some way—otherwise we will not be able to ascertain its existence and the extent to which an individual possesses it. Third, a

trait must be causally relevant insofar as observed outcomes can be attributed to the presence (or lack) of the trait. Such a requirement is important for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the requirement entails that a personality trait is something over and above the set of occurrences of its corresponding state, when such a state exists. In the case of boredom, to possess the trait of boredom it is not sufficient to experience state boredom frequently. The experience of boredom (or our responses to it) must be, at least partly, due to some psychological characteristic that we possess. On the other hand, the requirement allows us to account for observed interpersonal differences. The existence of a trait helps us to explain why different individuals may behave differently when faced with similar situations.

There have been several attempts to operationalize and assess the presence of trait boredom (Vodanovich 2003; Vodanovich and Watt 2016). Amongst them, the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) (Farmer and Sundberg 1986), a multi-item self-report scale, has been the most widely used measure of trait boredom. It was devised with the aim of measuring boredom proneness: an individual's "tendency toward experiencing boredom" (1986, 5). The original format of BPS consisted of 28 items that were marked either as true or false. It was later revised to be scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (Vodanovich and Kass 1990).

Despite its use in numerous studies, there are known issues with BPS and subsequent attempts to revise this measure (see also Gana, Broc, and Bailly 2019; Mercer-Lynn, Bar, and Eastwood 2014; Struck et al. 2017). Here I mention two. First, there is no consensus regarding the factorial structure of BPS (Ahmed 1990; Gana and Akremi 1998; Struck et al. 2017; Vodanovich and Kass 1990; Vodanovich, Wallace, and

Kass 2005) and some have even reported that the original BPS lacks a replicable factorial structure (Melton and Schulenberg 2009). Second, boredom researchers have voiced concerns regarding the theoretical underpinnings of BPS and its external validity. For one, it has been suggested that, as a measure, BPS fails to distinguish between frequency of the occurrence of boredom and one's inability to cope with the experience of boredom when that arises (Mercer-Lynn, Bar, and Eastwood 2014; Danckert et al. 2018). In addition, work by Tam, Van Tilburg, and Chan (2020) has shown that there are at least three distinct characterizations of boredom proneness (boredom frequency, boredom intensity, and perception of life boredom), each of which represents some aspect of boredom proneness.

There are important psychometric and conceptual issues with existing measures of trait boredom (see Gana, Broc, and Bailly 2019). Such issues emphasize the pressing need for conceptual clarity when it comes to the very notion of trait boredom and for improved instruments to assess its presence. Nonetheless, measures of trait boredom (specifically BPS and shorter forms of BPS) have yielded consistent results. Specifically, available research reveals that trait boredom is a reliable indicator of poorer well-being, at-risk behavior and impulsivity, depression, difficulties in sustaining attention, and decreased purpose in life (for reviews, see Elpidorou 2017; Vodanovich 2003; Vodanovich and Watt 2016). These known and robust associations between trait boredom, on the one hand, and mental health issues and problematic behavior, on the other hand, demonstrate both the clinical significance of trait boredom and its relevance in understanding a host of behaviors. In turn, the value and need of a better understanding of trait boredom is dictated by theoretical positions that take characteristics of individuals

to be important determinants of their experience of boredom (Mercer-Lynn, Bar, and Eastwood 2014; see also Fisher 1993; Hamilton 1981; Neu 2000). In sum, trait boredom is an important theoretical construct that demands our attention. As a consequence, the moral significance of trait boredom ought to be considered.

4. Boredom as an Affective State

As a transient affective state, state boredom is a major part of human existence. It is experienced often and widely (Chin et al. 2017; Goetz et al. 2014; Larson and Richards 1991; Smith et al. 2015), by individuals of all genders and ages, and by members of different cultures (Gana and Akremi 1998; Musharbash 2007; Ng et al. 2015; Sundberg et al. 1991; Vodanovich, Watt, and Piotrowski 1997). It typically arises in situations that are perceived to be monotonous or lacking in novelty or meaning (Thackray, Bailey, and Touchstone 1977; Van Tilburg and Igou 2012), that cannot grasp our attention (Hunter and Eastwood 2018), that fail to engage sufficiently or optimally our cognitive resources (Csikszentmihalyi 1975), or that are low in perceived autonomy (van Hooft and van Hooft 2018; Fisher 1993; cf. Fenichel 1953).

Most of us have little trouble recognizing boredom and distinguishing it from other related affective experiences (Goldberg et al. 2011; Van Tilburg and Igou 2012; but see Svendsen 2005). First and foremost, boredom is a felt psychological state characterized by its aversive phenomenology (Harris 2000; Hartocollis 1972; Mikulas and Vodanovich 1993; Pekrun et al. 2010; Todman 2003; Vogel-Walcutt et al. 2012). Although the felt unpleasantness of boredom is perhaps its most obvious feature, its phenomenology carries a complexity that is often underappreciated. Boredom is reported

to be experienced both as an apathetic and as an agitated state and co-occurs with other negative emotions and affective states (Chin et al. 2017; Goetz et al. 2014; Harris 2000; Martin, Sadlo, and Stew 2006; Steinberger, Moeller, and Schroeter 2016). It involves feelings of apathy, weariness, listlessness, but also of aggravation and frustration (Fahlman et al. 2013; Harris, 2000; Martin, Sadlo, and Stew 2006; O'Brien 2014). Moreover, the phenomenological character of the experience of boredom is neither stable over time nor invariable through situations—it appears to change depending on endogenous or exogenous factors (Eastwood et al. 2012; Danckert et al. 2018; Elpidorou 2020a; Mills and Christoff 2018; van Hooft and van Hooff, 2018; Westgate 2020; Westgate and Wilson 2018).

Boredom is also characterized by its volitional character. It is crucial to note that boredom is not apathy (Goldberg et al., 2011; Nisbet 1982): only the former involves a desire for alternative engagement (Fahlman et al. 2013). Indeed, boredom can be separated from other negative emotions in terms of its volitional content and action-tendencies (Van Tilburg and Igou 2012, 2017a). In particular, the experience of boredom is not exhausted by its associated phenomenology. When one is bored, one also itches to escape one's situation.

In terms of its cognitive elements or characteristics, boredom has been associated with attentional difficulties, negative appraisals regarding one's situation, the perception of a slower passage of time, and mind wandering (for a review, see Elpidorou 2018a). The first two characteristics deserve further mention. On the one hand, attentional difficulties have long been implicated in the experience of boredom and have been used either to define boredom (i.e., boredom is characterized *essentially* by an inability to pay

attention) (Damrad-Frye and Laird 1989; Hamilton 1981; Leary et al. 1986), or to explain how and why it arises (attentional difficulties are the necessary or sufficient conditions of the experience of boredom) (Hunter and Eastwood 2018; Tam et al. in press; Westgate and Wilson 2018), or to account for its experiential profile (boredom's different characteristics—e.g., its phenomenology or volitional component—can be explained in terms of attentional mechanisms; see, e.g., Eastwood et al. 2012). On the other hand, researchers have also implicated the presence of negative appraisals in the experience of boredom. Again, similarly to attentional difficulties, the hypothesized role of these negative appraisals varies. Sometimes negative appraisals are thought to be the psychological or cognitive antecedents of boredom. That is, boredom arises because we have appraised our situation to be monotonous, repetitive, lacking in meaning, lacking in novelty, involving no control, or being non-optimally engaging. Alternatively, negative appraisals have been thought to be a key characteristic of the very experience of boredom. For instance, some accounts of boredom hold that it is a state of perceived meaninglessness and an attempt to reestablish a sense of meaningfulness (Van Tilburg and Igou 2012, 2017a). It is worth noting that the presence of negative appraisals could be a consequence of attentional difficulties: we come to appraise our situation negatively because it cannot sufficiently engage our attention. But negative appraisals regarding one's situation could also be the cause of attentional difficulties: we cannot pay attention to our situation precisely because we deem it to be meaningless, monotonous, repetitive, or uninteresting.

The presence of some kind of negative appraisal about our situation appears to be a necessary part of the experience of boredom. In the same way that it is hard to imagine

a state of boredom that is not aversive, it is hard to imagine someone being bored and being satisfied with one's situation. All this is to say that boredom is a state of discontent—indeed, it is one that we readily recognize as such. Furthermore, we typically attribute our felt discontent to our situation and not to our own inability to satisfactorily engage with the situation (Eastwood et al. 2012).

Boredom is also partly characterized by its physiological and neurological correlates, and by its motor and expressive features. Having said that, it is unclear as to whether or not these features are able to distinguish boredom from other affective states. Experimental work has not yet revealed a pattern of physiological activation (or deactivation) that is characteristic of boredom. In fact, a review of the literature yields findings that suggest that boredom is a low arousal state, a high arousal state, or a state of mixed arousal (for a review, see Elpidorou 2020a). This lack of consensus could mean that, even though boredom has a specific pattern of physiological activation (or deactivation) associated with its experience, we have not yet discovered it. Alternatively, the lack of consensus could mean that the experience of boredom does not give rise to any particular pattern of physiological arousal—perhaps, there are many patterns of physiological arousal that accompany the experience of boredom. Some have even argued that boredom should not be characterized in terms of its physiological arousal (Hill and Perkins 1985; Elpidorou 2020a). Regardless of how we settle this issue, extant findings regarding boredom's physiological character indicate that during an experience of boredom we are disengaging from the task or situation at hand, preparing for an escape from the boring situation, or both (for more see, Elpidorou 2020a).

The neurological correlates of boredom are the subject of an open and active investigation. Research has found boredom to be correlated with lower beta activity in the left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (Tabatabaie et al., 2014) and with the presence of alpha waves (Oswald 1962). Perone, Anderson and Weybright (2020) reported that the theta/beta ratio was lower during an easy (and thus boring) condition compared to an optimal condition—an indication that subjects experienced difficulties maintaining their attention in the former condition. Moreover, Perone and colleagues observed frontal alpha asymmetry, a measure of the presence of self-regulatory processes, and found that when the easy condition followed the optimal condition there was an increase in right frontal activity. The researchers interpret this finding as a sign that self-regulatory processes were engaged during the easy/boring condition (when the optimal condition preceded it). Other studies reported activation of parts of the default mode network during boredom (Danckert and Merrifield 2018; Ulrich et al. 2014), a finding that suggests that one's attention is directed toward inner thoughts (Raffaelli, Mills, and Christoff 2018). These and other findings allow us to gain a better understanding of the neurological correlates of boredom. Importantly, they also pave the road for further investigations and permit us to test hypotheses regarding the relationship between, on the one hand, the experience of boredom, and, on the other hand, attention, mental effort, self-regulation, and mind wandering.

Different movements and bodily postures have been associated with the experience boredom. For instance, it has been reported that during boredom there is an attenuation of movement (Walbott 1998). Furthermore, the upper body of bored subjects tends to collapse, and they raise their chin and lean their head backwards (Walbott 1998;

see also Bull 1987). Other studies reported that bored individuals tend to fidget (Martin, Sadlo, and Stew 2006), and even though they do not move a lot, they tend to perform sudden movements when they do move (Kroes 2005). Studies of the facial expressions of boredom are currently inconclusive—although some studies have associated boredom with specific action units, others have failed to find any significant and reliable associations (see Craig et al. 2008; Kroes 2005; Scherer and Ellgring 2007; McDaniel et al. 2007). Lastly, investigations into the speech of bored individuals reveal that it tends to be slow and soft, with a low and narrow pitch range (Johnstone and Scherer 2000; Scherer 2013).

In sum, state boredom is a transient, unpleasant experience that involves both an awareness of the presence of a situation that fails to sufficiently cognitively engage us (because it is not interesting, novel, exciting, or meaningful) and a strong desire for alternative and more fulfilling engagement. Due to its affective, volitional, cognitive, and physiological characteristics, boredom is a sign that we are facing a situation that is uninteresting, unengaging, or meaningless to us and a drive to seek escape from such a situation, when escape is possible.

5. The Morality of Boredom

What then can we say about the moral character of boredom—understood either as state or trait boredom? To address this question, we should consider whether the five theses that are meant to capture the moral significance of a psychological state or personality trait (ACTION THESIS, JUDGMENT THESIS, PERCEPTION THESIS, FLOURISHING THESIS, and APPROPRIATENESS THESIS) are true for boredom.

ACTION THESIS: Does boredom promote prosocial or antisocial conduct? The possibility that something like trait boredom can lead to destructive and antisocial behavior has been explored in detail by Eric Fromm (1973) who theorized that the pervasive or frequent experience of boredom can become intolerable, so much so that often times one can only escape it by harming oneself or others (see also Pfattheicher et al. 2020; Danckert this volume; Igou and Van Tilburg this volume). Fromm's pessimistic outlook regarding the possible outcomes of trait boredom has found some empirical support. Correlational studies investigating individual differences in trait boredom report that trait boredom is related to maladaptive or antisocial tendencies and behaviors (e.g., sadistic tendencies, aggression, narcissism) and to actions indicative of low self-control and impulsiveness. (Dahlen et al. 2004; Isacescu and Danckert 2018; Mercer-Lynn et al. 2013; Moynihan, Igou, Van Tilburg 2017; Pfattheicher et al. 2020; Struk, Scholer, and Danckert 2016; Vodanovich and Watt 2016; Watt and Vodanovich 1992; Wink and Donahue 1997). Because of their correlational nature, these findings are incapable of proving the existence of a causal relationship between trait boredom and morally untoward behaviors. However, they suggest the possibility that trait boredom could be a morally significant personality trait insofar as it could lead to antisocial behavior.

The role of trait boredom can be discerned perhaps more clearly when we consider specific examples of how the frequent experience of boredom can affect the behavior of an individual. Consider, for instance, the example of Niels Hoegel, a German nurse who has been convicted for killing of eighty-five patients, but who might have killed many more (Eddy 2017; Elpidorou 2020b). During his career as a nurse in different

medical institutions, Hoegel injected patients with drugs that caused them heart failure or circulatory collapse so that he could try to revive them. According to his own account, he was bored and was searching for a thrill to escape his tedious routine and an opportunity to impress his colleagues and supervisors. It is not known whether trait boredom (as this is measured by BPS) is a personality characteristic of Hoegel. Still, his case provides an illustration as to how the frequent experience of boredom could lead to antisocial actions (for other examples, see Yucel and Westgate this volume; Danckert this volume). Consistent with the suggestion that trait boredom can lead to harmful behaviors, Pfattheicher and colleagues (2020) have reported that sadistic tendencies were more pronounced among boredom prone individuals compared to those who were less prone to boredom. Indeed, the relationship between boredom proneness and sadistic tendencies was robust and was observed across a variety of contexts (e.g., sadism in the military, online trolling, sadistic fantasies) and across different countries and samples. These findings are once again correlational and thus preclude us from drawing any definitive conclusions regarding boredom's causal role. Nonetheless, the reported association between boredom proneness and sadistic tendencies remained significant even after the researchers controlled for the Big Five and HEXACO personality models. Most importantly, in one of their studies (Study 5), Pfattheicher and colleagues found that experimentally inducing state boredom increased the likelihood that subjects would shred worms for pleasure. Such a finding is preliminary evidence in support of the claim that boredom causes sadistic behavior.

It is crucially important to note that it matters a great deal *why* boredom might lead to these sorts of behavior. If it is because of either a need for excitement or novelty

(Bench and Lench 2019), or a desire to secure or reestablish a sense of meaningfulness (Igou and Van Tilburg this volume; Yucel and Westgate this volume), then boredom's outcomes and action-tendencies are neither inherently moral nor immoral. Boredom motivates behaviors that can help us to alleviate its aversive experience, and although it is possible that some reactions to boredom are immoral, they need not be so. This realization is especially important when we turn our attention to state boredom. Our characterization of state boredom revealed that it is a response to a perceived dissatisfaction with one's situation. Understood in that light, boredom appears to be a self-regulatory state: its aim or function is to resolve a perceived dissatisfaction by promoting change or action. As a result, the action that is born out of the experience of boredom might be immoral (Elpidorou 2020b; Pfattheicher et al. 2020), but it could also be moral (Van Tilburg and Igou 2017b) or, as it is commonly the case, amoral. Such a result does not render boredom (either as a state of trait) morally insignificant. Rather, it forces us to pay attention to the environmental and psychological factors that might facilitate or promote one type of response to boredom over another. It also underlines the need for emotional literacy when it comes to the experience of boredom and for the development of proper and efficient avoidance, mitigation, and response strategies to boredom (see Todman this volume).

JUDGMENT THESIS: The relationship between emotions (or affective states in general) and moral judgments is a topic that has received a great deal of attention both in the history of philosophy (e.g., Hume 1978 [1740]; Kant 1964 [1785]; Smith 1759) but also in the interdisciplinary field of moral psychology (e.g., Haidt 2001; Nichols 2002; Prinz

2007). Scholars are actively examining whether emotions or affective states are a source or a consequence of moral judgments, whether it is possible to have moral judgments in the absence of emotions, or whether mature moral responses and judgments require the integration of both emotional and cognitive processes in order to best represent information regarding intentions, beliefs, and consequences. It would take us too far afield to try to summarize current debates concerning the potential role of affectivity in moral judgment. Indeed, the relationship between the two is complicated and multifaceted, and many different versions of it have been advanced and defended in the literature. Here, I follow a categorization presented by Avramova and Inbar (2013) and simply note three theses that explicate the possible relationship between emotions and moral judgments:

Thesis 1: Emotions (or affective states) are the consequences of moral judgments.

For instance, moral judgments about the permissibility or impermissibility of an action might give rise to certain emotional states (e.g., anger or disgust).

Thesis 2: Emotions amplify moral judgments. For example, emotions of disgust or anger amplify the wrongness of particular actions; whereas emotions of awe or gratitude amplify the perceived goodness of a person.

Thesis 3: Emotions are necessary for moral judgments. This claim can be split into two:

- a. An emotional reaction is the necessary psychological antecedent for the formation of a moral judgment; or

- b. Emotions ground moral judgments—that is, emotions *moralize* non-moral behaviors and situations insofar as it is on the basis of some emotional experience that we come to perceive certain behaviors or situations as moral or immoral.

Only Thesis 2 and Thesis 3 assign a moral role to emotions. Thesis 1 is consistent with the view that moral judgments are the products of “pure” (non-emotional) cognitive processes. Although numerous experimental findings have been reported in support of either the claim that affective states (emotions, gut feelings, or intuitions of emotional nature) amplify moral judgments (Thesis 2) or the claim that such states play a causal or constitutive role in the formation of moral judgments (Thesis 3), the significance and exact interpretation of these findings remains unclear (Avramova and Inbar 2013; Huebner, Dwyer, and Hauser 2008; May 2018).

In the case of boredom, there is no experimental evidence demonstrating that boredom directly affects moral cognition and judgment. Still, models of boredom that understand it to be a regulatory state that motivates individuals to search for meaning are consistent with the possibility that boredom (either as a trait or state) can indirectly influence moral judgment. Empirical findings in support of this hypothesis are scarce and, at this point, merely suggestive. Nonetheless, two studies are worth mentioning. First, Van Tilburg and Igou (2016) found that experimentally induced boredom leads to more extreme political orientations and that high boredom prone individuals tend to adhere to more extreme political views compared to low boredom prone individuals. Van Tilburg and Igou’s (2016) study does not reveal a relationship between boredom and

morality. Rather, it suggests the possibility that one's political preferences can be influenced by one's experiences of boredom. Although there are connections between our moral beliefs and our political views, these are neither obvious nor direct. Second, in a different set of studies, Van Tilburg and Igou (2011) reported that the onset of state boredom affected subjects' attitudes concerning social identity. Specifically, state boredom was shown to increase valuation of their ingroups (as measured by subjects' preference of an ingroup name over an outgroup name and by their positive evaluations of a symbol associated with their national ingroup) and the devaluation of outgroups (as measured by subjects' willingness to dispense harsher punishment to a hypothetical outgroup offender compared to a hypothetical ingroup offender). Although important, such findings do not demonstrate that boredom causes or grounds moral judgments (Thesis 3). Nonetheless, they might serve as preliminary support for the claim that boredom, through its potential to motivate a search for meaning, amplifies certain pre-existing moral opinions (Thesis 2), insofar as a stronger adherence to or focus on those opinions bolsters a sense of meaningfulness. In sum, the relationship between boredom and moral judgment has not been adequately explored in the literature. As such, this is a topic that deserves future attention.

PERCEPTION THESIS: There is no evidence showing that boredom can affect the perception of morally salient facts. Nonetheless, given boredom's intimate connection to attentional mechanisms, the relationship between boredom and moral perception should be explored further. It is well documented in the empirical literature that both trait and state boredom are linked to attentional difficulties (Eastwood et al. 2012; Hunter and

Eastwood 2018; Tam et al. in press). Indeed, extant research makes it clear that boredom cognitively disengages us from our situation. As a result, it is likely that during the experience of boredom we might miss morally salient facts. Such a conclusion is consistent with the affect-as-information model of emotions (Schwarz and Clore 1983, 1988, 2003) and with reports that emotional states may affect attention (e.g., Gasper and Clore 2002). If boredom's primary informational function is to convey the message that our current situation is uninteresting or meaningless to us, then we might be led to think that we should not pay attention to our situation. In light of its capacity to cognitively disengage us from a situation, boredom appears to be an affective experience that can hinder moral perception. More work, however, is needed in order to confirm or disconfirm this potential aspect of boredom.

FLOURISHING THESIS: A large body of research has consistently found that measures of trait boredom are correlated, on the one hand, with the presence of maladaptive behaviors and, on the other hand, with states or conditions that are potentially harmful or worrisome (e.g., depression, alexithymia, and hopelessness; reduced life satisfaction; reduced meaning in life and self-determination) (see Vodanovich 2003; Vodanovich and Watt 2016). Furthermore, a review of the available correlational data has shown that the presence of trait boredom is negatively related to several measures of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being: e.g., lower levels of subjective well-being, lower reported life-satisfaction, lack of meaning in life, and reduction in autonomy (Elpidorou 2017). On the basis of this review, it was concluded that trait boredom is morally significant insofar as it is a serious impediment to living a flourishing life. Bargdill's (2000) phenomenological

existential analysis of boredom offers complementary evidence insofar as it shows that life boredom, a construct closely related to trait boredom, might be harmful to individuals because it makes it harder for them to care for their projects and to pursue their goals. As such, trait boredom appears to be morally significant in the sense explicated by the FLOURISHING THESIS. Even though we must be mindful of the fact that there is not just one type of life that qualifies as the *good* life, a person that is often bored is likely to experience difficulties in their attempts to pursue a variety of projects that are constitutive of different notions of the good life.

This result however does not readily apply to state boredom. Given our characterization of state boredom as largely situationally dependent, the frequency and intensity of the experience of state boredom will differ depending on the subjects' circumstances, way of life, and psychological characteristics. In turn, subjects' response to state boredom will also depend on what type of psychological and material resources are available to them. So, even though the experience of boredom might stand as an obstacle to the achievement of the good life for some, it will not be an obstacle for all. In fact, it seems that what is most important in such cases is not the experience of state boredom as such, but the underlying and often systemic conditions that give rise to boredom frequently and persistently and which make it harder for the experiencing subject to respond to it appropriately (Elpidorou this volume)

Moreover, boredom may turn out to be a beneficial state if experienced infrequently and responded to correctly. For instance, it has been argued that the experience of state boredom can inform us of the presence of an unfulfilling or meaningless situation and, at the same time, can motivate us to escape from such a

situation (Bench and Lench 2013; Elpidorou 2014; Van Tilburg and Igou 2012). On account of that, boredom might contribute to eudaimonic well-being insofar as it propels us into situations that are more in line with our interests and which we find meaningful and important to us (Elpidorou 2018b, 2020a, in press). Others have suggested that boredom can lead to creative outcomes (Gasper and Middlewood 2014; Hunter et al. 2016; Mann and Cadman 2014) and provide important epistemic benefits (Bortolotti and Aliffi this volume). However, it bears repeating that both the range of available responses to boredom and whether or not those would be beneficial to oneself heavily depend on the type of resources that one possesses (Todman this volume). For that reason, our ethical and social theories should consider how distributive and systemic injustices might disproportionately affect certain groups of individuals over others.

APPROPRIATENESS THESIS: Is boredom, either as trait or state, morally appropriate or inappropriate? With regards to trait boredom, high boredom prone individuals experience impulse control deficits (Dahlen et al. 2004; Isacescu and Danckert 2018; Mercer-Lynn et al. 2013; Moynihan, Igou, Van Tilburg 2017; Watt and Vodanovich 1992; Leong and Schneller 1993), are more likely than low boredom prone individuals to engage in risk-taking behavior (Dahlen et al. 2005; Kass, Beede, and Vodanovich 2010; Vodanovich and Watt 2016), and are prone to addictive behavior such as drug and alcohol abuse (Biolcati, Mancini, and Trombini 2018; LePera 2011; cf. Paulson, Coombs, and Richardson 1990), hypersexuality (Reid, Garos, and Carpenter 2011), and problem gambling (Blaszczynski, McConaghy, and Frankova 1990; see though Mercer and Eastwood 2010). If morality involves duties to oneself, in addition to duties to others,

then one could argue that the APPROPRIATENESS THESIS is true for trait boredom: morally speaking, we are better off not possessing this particular trait. This conclusion rests, however, on the rather contentious moral premise that engaging in risk-taking, impulsive, or potentially addictive behaviors is morally inappropriate.

With regards to state boredom, most experiences of state boredom are morally neutral and thus having the affective experience of boredom is neither appropriate nor inappropriate. Still, our brief discussions of *acedia* and Type A profound boredom suggest, strongly I believe, that there are cases of state boredom that ought to be considered morally inappropriate. If we are bored by violations of human rights, the pain and suffering of others, or our own moral responsibilities, then we are the subjects of an experience that appears to be morally inappropriate.

There has been little, if any, discussion as to whether there can be instances of state boredom that are morally appropriate. Is it ever the case that it is good or praiseworthy to be bored by something? It is unclear whether such examples exist. Boredom signals a lack of care with our situation; it is a stance of indifference and disengagement. Unless there are cases in which indifference or lack of care is the right reaction to have (viz., it is a moral and not merely appropriate or beneficial attitude), then state boredom is never a morally *desirable* state.¹ But even if that is the case, it does not mean that state boredom has to be morally inappropriate. State boredom can also be—and indeed it is very often—morally neutral.

Summary

Boredom's moral character lies primarily in its ability to drive moral or immoral behavior, to hinder the pursuit of the good life when it is experienced frequently or chronically, and to potentially promote eudaimonic well-being, when experienced infrequently and responded to appropriately. In turn, boredom is also morally significant insofar as certain experiences of boredom are indicative of moral shortcomings or failures.

6. Summaries of Chapters

The present volume is the outcome of an interdisciplinary collaboration. In an attempt to advance our theoretical understanding of boredom and its relationship to morality, it brings together essays from different perspectives—philosophy; clinical, social, and personality psychology; and animal studies. The chapters that follow this introduction examine the character of boredom, its function and role in our personal and social lives, and its relationship to other emotions and psychological states. By doing so, they explore how the presence of boredom can make a moral difference.

In the volume's opening essay "**From Electric Shocks to the Electoral College: How Boredom Steers Moral Behavior**," Meltem Yucel and Erin C. Westgate draw upon the Meaning and Attentional Components (MAC) model of boredom (Westgate and Wilson 2018) and consider the various causes and outcomes of the experience of boredom. They pay particular attention to how boredom can affect moral decision-making and behavior and to the conditions which are conducive to either prosocial or antisocial behavior. Yucel and Westgate's chapter also provides an informative and helpful overview of the ways in which emotions and affective states may impact moral

attention, decision-making, and conduct. As such, the chapter is an appropriate beginning point for readers interested in how an affective state like boredom may relate to morality.

In “**The Existential Sting of Boredom: Implications for Moral Judgments and Behavior,**” Eric Igou and Wijnand A.P. van Tilburg evaluate the moral character of boredom in light of a meaning-regulatory view of boredom. Such a view conceives of boredom as the signal of a potential or actual lack of meaning and, at the same time, as an attempt to reestablish or bolster a sense of meaningfulness. In previous work, Igou and Van Tilburg have provided theoretical and experimental support for this understanding of boredom (Van Tilburg and Igou 2011, 2012, 2017a). In their contribution to this volume, they consider what such a view of boredom can tell us about its moral character. By presenting different meaning-regulation processes related to the experience of boredom they articulate the conditions under which such processes can give rise to prosocial or antisocial behaviors. Their contribution makes evident both that situational factors can greatly affect the moral character of the outcomes of the experience of boredom and that the meaning-regulatory view carries great promise in elucidating boredom’s complex relationship to morality.

In the next chapter, “**Boredom and the Lost Self,**” Shane W. Bench, Heather C. Lench, Yidou Wan, Kaitlyn Kaiser, and Kenneth A. Perez take up the important question of what happens to us when we are constantly or frequently bored. The authors examine the implications of the presence of trait boredom to the perception and development of our concept of self. They argue that if state boredom is an experiential indication that a goal has lost its value for the experiencing subject, then trait boredom, which is conceptualized as a propensity to experience boredom frequently, is a sign of a poor fit

between the person and the environment. Specifically, trait boredom indicates that there are no rewarding or valuable goals in the subject's environment. Bench and colleagues provide empirical support for this understanding of trait boredom and develop the implications of the presence of trait boredom for our personal existence and well-being.

The role of agency in boredom is considered in the next two chapters. In “**Rage Spread Thin’: Boredom and Aggression,**” James Danckert examines the relationship between boredom and aggression (see also Igou and Van Tilburg this volume). Specifically, Danckert asks whether there is something inherent in boredom that leads to aggressive acts. Although the two have been linked together, insofar as aggressive acts appear to follow the experience of boredom, Danckert argues that such a link does not demonstrate the immorality of boredom. Instead, the observed association between the two is explained by the fact that during the experience of boredom one's sense of agency is threatened or disrupted. In an attempt to restore their sense of agency, bored individuals might find recourse in acts of aggression: Because of their tangible outcomes, such acts offer the subjects with an efficient way of reclaiming their agency and alleviating boredom. However, as Danckert shows, responding to boredom with aggression is not inevitable. Indeed, a functional account of boredom suggests that adaptive and beneficial responses to boredom are also available to us.

John D. Eastwood and Dana Gorelik zoom in on the nature of the crisis of agency that is characteristic, according to them, of boredom. In their chapter, “**Losing and Finding Agency: The Crisis of Boredom,**” they argue that boredom presents the experiencing agent with a conundrum that is almost impossible to solve: Boredom demands from the agent that they do something, yet it also prevents them from desiring

anything doable. In this way, Eastwood and Gorelik conceive of boredom as simultaneously both an opportunity and a danger. Depending on how one responds to boredom, one might reclaim (and even promote) one's agency or further degrade one's ability to act. The authors suggest ways in which one could effectively respond to the crisis of agency that lies at the heart of boredom. They underline, however, that structural forces can thwart individual agency and thus the task of reclaiming agency in the face of boredom is not merely personal but also social.

The social character of boredom is further highlighted in the two chapters that follow Eastwood and Gorelik's contribution. In "**Boredom Mismanagement and Attributions of Social and Moral Costs**," McWelling Todman considers and evaluates the commonly held belief that healthy adults ought to be able to regulate their experience of boredom in ways that promote group cohesion and minimize the possibility of antisocial or dangerous behavior. In his chapter, he presents different types of boredom management strategies that permit effective self-regulation and discusses how individuals who are not able to make proper use of such strategies are blamed and judged as having done something immoral. Todman cautions that moral judgments about individuals whose problematic behavior might be motivated by (or rooted in) boredom are often unfair. Such judgments may fail to consider how structural inequities in our society make it harder (sometimes even impossible) for socially marginalized individuals to acquire and practice effective boredom management skills in various institutional settings.

In my own contribution to the volume, "**Boredom and Poverty: A Theoretical Model**," I continue the conversation regarding the manner in which social conditions may affect one's experience of and response to boredom. I present and defend a

theoretical account that holds that low SES individuals are disproportionately negatively affected by boredom because of their social standing. The account holds that, compared to individuals of higher SES, individuals of low SES tend to experience boredom more frequently. Furthermore, because of the presence of constraints and of poverty's effects on their psychology, individuals of low SES are placed in a disadvantageous position when dealing with boredom. Overall, their social standing renders them susceptible to the experience of boredom and makes it harder for them to respond to it in adaptive ways.

The question of whether boredom can be a beneficial affective state has been considered before in the literature. Still, boredom's possible connection to knowledge and self-knowledge has received far less. In their contribution, "**The Epistemic Benefits of Irrational Boredom**," Lisa Bortolotti and Matilde Aliffi argue that state boredom can be both epistemically irrational and epistemically beneficial. They usefully explicate the notion of *being epistemically rationally assessable* and argue that boredom is a state that can be epistemically rationally assessable. In fact, they convincingly show that some cases of state boredom may turn to be epistemically irrational insofar as they provide the agent with information that conflicts with available evidence. All the same, the authors argue that even though state boredom may be epistemically irrational it can still offer important epistemic benefits.

The most common conceptualization of state boredom in the relevant literature places it in the category of emotion. Indeed, many of the chapters in this volume make explicit use of this conceptualization. In "**Boredom as Cognitive Appetite**," Vida Yao offers an alternative understanding of boredom. In her contribution, Yao introduces and characterizes the notion of cognitive appetite, distinguishes it from that of emotion, and

argues that boredom should be considered to be a cognitive appetite. Importantly, Yao draws out the benefits of this way of understanding boredom and illustrates how the proposed understanding can make sense of our ethical assessments of boredom and interest.

In “**Boredom, Interest, and Meaning of Life**,” Wendell O’Brien takes a close look at the relationship between boredom and interest. He argues that lack of interest is a necessary condition for boredom (understood either as a temporary affective experience, personality trait, or a chronic, existential condition). In addition, he argues that interest is a necessary component of subjective meaning of life, insofar as a life that is experienced as meaningful has to be also experienced as interesting to the subject. These two conclusions allow O’Brien to clarify the sense of interest that is of relevance to subjective meaning and to explicate boredom’s connection to the meaningful.

In “**Parallels to Boredom in Non-Human Animals**,” Rebecca K. Meagher and Jesse Robbins take up the question of animal boredom. Do non-human animals experience boredom? If so, how can we tell? And what is the relationship between human and animal boredom? In their contribution, the authors provide a helpful review of evidence that shows that animals exhibit signs of boredom in situations that appear to be analogous to ones that induce boredom in humans. They also compare conceptualizations of the human experience of boredom to operational definitions of boredom that are used in the study of animal boredom. The authors argue for the need of a comparative approach to the study of boredom and conclude their chapter by discussing the practical and moral implications of animal boredom as these relate to animal welfare and ethics.

The edited volume concludes with Josefa Ros Velasco's contribution, "**The Long Hard Road Out of Boredom.**" In her chapter, Ros Velasco traces the moral history of boredom and explores the ways in which our attitudes concerning the experience of boredom have been transformed through the centuries and shaped by various cultural forces. One of Ros Velasco's chief aims is to make clear that boredom's relationship to morality has been a topic that received considerable attention in the history of Western tradition. After canvassing the rich history of boredom, Ros Velasco highlights boredom's adaptive function and potential benefits and underscores the dangers of pathologizing it.

It is my hope that the present volume will not only allow readers to become more familiar with boredom and its moral significance but that it will also inspire and inform future research. As the essays clearly demonstrate, the study of boredom has a storied past and lively present. It also has a bright future.²

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NOTES

¹ I suppose one could argue that an appropriate dosage of boredom (with our own skills and abilities or with our social relationships and competencies) might be necessary in order to better oneself. And if bettering oneself is a moral duty, then boredom turns out to be a morally desirable state. A somewhat similar thought is expressed by Williams (1973) who writes: "Just as being bored can be a sign of not noticing, understanding or appreciating enough, so equally not being bored can be a sign of not noticing, or not reflecting, enough" (95). The total absence of boredom might thus indicate a failure to sufficiently attend to oneself.

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