

# Boredom as a Possible Point of Departure for Meditation: Silence, Attention and Access to Being in Pablo D'Ors

Javier S. Castresana

University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain  
Email: [jscastresana@unav.es](mailto:jscastresana@unav.es)

**How to cite this paper:** Castresana, J. S. (2022). Boredom as a Possible Point of Departure for Meditation: Silence, Attention and Access to Being in Pablo D'Ors. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 12, 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2022.121002>

**Received:** January 2, 2022

**Accepted:** February 7, 2022

**Published:** February 10, 2022

Copyright © 2022 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

Boredom is a characteristic of today's society. At the individual level and at the social level, the Western countries suffer from boredom. There are extrinsic and intrinsic causes that can lead to boredom. In general, the state of boredom is reached when there are no problems to solve, when the profession does not demand our actions, or when we feel disappointed in realizing that the achievements of life do not give us sustained satisfaction over time. Boredom, especially if it becomes chronic, can be considered a negative thing. But it can also have something positive. The silence, stillness and inaction that define boredom are also characteristics that define the initial state of the person before meditation. This study aims to reflect the possibility of getting out of boredom through meditation. We can abandon boredom if we start a path of personal growth through increasing attention and perception; coming out of ourselves, leaving our own reflections and thoughts, reaching personal emptying and a voluntary impoverishment of our exteriority, which opens the door to us to encounter with being.

## Keywords

Boredom, Silence, Attention, Perception, Meditation, Contemplation, Being, Poverty, Love, Truth

---

## 1. Introduction

Boredom (IEP, 2021; Svendsen, 2005) is today a reality in the western world, the developed world. It deserves a philosophical reflection, on its own definition, whether or not it is a problem to be solved, on its causes and on the possible solutions to the problem, if it really is a problem.

While we are busy, solving pressing problems, we do not seem to get bored.

The times of war in societies have been, depending on their duration, times of dedication to a cause, times of attack and defense, times, in short, of occupation of our powers. Life's problems, therefore, keep us busy. Problems do not let us get bored. They demand answers from us; they make us take action.

But what if there are no problems to solve? What if nobody pulls us and forces us to action? "When there are no problems in life, it is life itself that becomes a problem" (Alvira, 1999: p. 60). What to do if no one demands our attention, if we don't have a job to do, if we don't have friends to share with? In short, what to do if we have nothing to do? The Western society is bored. Our developed society has a high rate of boredom because it is a society that gives us what we need to live. It even gives us leisure time to rest and entertain ourselves or have fun. But it happens that sometimes we are not able to open ourselves to leisure for that fun or entertainment that we think awaits us in that leisure time. We arrive at leisure after an exuberance of noise and action and if we have no claim from anyone or anything, we feel empty, silent, inactive out of obligation, in short, bored.

The manuscript is organized as follows: first, a small bibliographic review of some philosophers who have dealt with the subject of boredom is presented. Secondly, the circumstances that can lead us to boredom are presented, these corresponding as a whole, to the chronic excess of external activity to which we are subjected in Western societies, an activity that disables us for serene and silent reflection when it itself ceases.

Thirdly, a possible definition of boredom is presented, typified as a situation of stillness, silence and inaction on our part; and the extrinsic and intrinsic causes of it in the different ages of life are reviewed.

Fourthly, an attempt is made to show that boredom, which is often chronic, does not always have to be judged as something negative, as something that needs to be left. Rather, it can be considered a point of arrival with the possibility of departure and even ascent to something higher. Specifically, it is shown that access to meditation, something that can make us grow, be more, needs a starting point also characterized by a state of stillness, silence and inaction on our part, features similar to those of boredom.

Fifthly, two important characteristics that develop through meditation are described: attention and perception. Attention, as opposed to the dispersion in which we live, shows us what we truly love. Perception is sharpened in meditation, helping us to get out of ourselves, our own reflections and thoughts that lead us to self-centeredness.

Finally, meditation is presented as a possible way of access to being through a personal emptying and a voluntary impoverishment of our exteriority.

## **2. Boredom in Philosophy**

Boredom is today a phenomenon to avoid at all costs. In some instances, it is even considered a psychopathological entity (Ros Velasco, 2018: p. 13). We de-

dicating most of our lives to work and we do not manage leisure time well, since the hyperactivity to which we are subjected in our professional work does not allow us to be creative in our free time. It is not easy to dissociate work and leisure. There were times in history when working time filled many more hours of the day than today, but people worked in a different way, without so much tension or so much demand at all times, with less stress, so we may say that work was more contemplative than what it currently is. And leisure time, accordingly, too. Heidegger's example of people waiting for the train at the station, which served to flee from everyday reality and dive into thoughts about one's own existence, is famous (Heidegger, 2007: p. 187).

Today, immersed in jobs with excess demand and stress, it is difficult for us to carry out any contemplative act during leisure time, which lasts longer than in past times. Our leisure time is fully covered, if we allow it, by television, internet, social networks, etc.; an entire industry that has previously designed how to fill our free time with content, which perpetuates in us the state of continuous excitement to which we are delivered in the hours of labor production. So, free time is not full of reflective or contemplative acts: we do not think of our existence as such in leisure times; we just fill them with entertainment, which impoverishes us. And if we are not able to fill leisure time with the existing offer designed to fill it, boredom overtakes us, because we no longer know how to reflect, we are not able to contemplate.

This has been a problem treated by different philosophers. "Each one precipitates his life and is tormented by the desire for the future and the boredom of the present" (Seneca, 2013: p. 23). This author even links boredom with suicidal behavior. Later, in the Middle Ages, they speak of *acedia* in monastic life, as that type of boredom that is reached by spiritual laziness (Ros Velasco, 2018: p. 196), even considering it as a sin at the beginning, and being *acedia* linked to melancholy later, that is, transferring it to the body, rather than to the soul (Márquez Romero, 2021: p. 19).

Pascal tells us about the moments of stillness in the human being in his *Thoughts*: "having not been able to cure death, misery, ignorance, men have concentrated, to make themselves happy, on not thinking about it" (Pascal, 2018: p. 132). For this reason, human beings have invented hobbies, games and distractions so as not to think about their unfortunate condition (Márquez Romero, 2021: p. 75). But "a life that is too full of excitement is an exhausting life, in which stronger and stronger stimuli are continually needed to obtain the excitement that has come to be considered an essential part of pleasure" (Russell, 2020: p. 61). Certainly, today we are witnesses to what Pascal points out: "I have frequently said that all the misery of men comes from a single thing, which is not knowing how to remain at rest in a room" (Pascal, 2018: p. 133).

"Everything in life announces that earthly happiness is destined to vanish or to be recognized as an illusion" (Schopenhauer, 2009b: p. 627). For Schopenhauer, master of existential pessimism, life moves between pain and boredom (Márquez Romero, 2021: p. 79): "...externally, need and deprivation produce

pain; security and abundance, on the other hand, boredom. Accordingly, we see the lower class of the people in a continuous struggle against necessity, that is, against pain; and to the rich and distinguished world, on the contrary, in a continuous and often really desperate struggle against boredom” (Schopenhauer, 2014: pp. 364-367). On the need for hobbies to fill leisure time, this author tells us: “What occupies and keeps every living being in motion is the desire for existence. But once existence is assured to them, they do not know what to do with it: that is why the second thing that sets them in motion is the desire to get rid of the burden of existence, to make it insensitive, to “kill time”, that is, to run away from boredom” (Schopenhauer, 2009a: p. 410).

Boredom is treated by Heidegger in a very particular way, by not making a distinction between what is boring and who is bored, through the German expression “es ist einem langweilig”—“one gets bored”: the subject disappears in that “one”, becoming an indifferent nobody. The German expression is totally impersonal: one does not get bored with this or that, not even with oneself, but boredom simply ensues, swallows the self (Lesmes González, 2009).

What can this Western society that aspires to personal projects, professional success and self-enhancement do? It is a society incapable of feeling satisfaction. Always looking for a summit to conquer and always noting that, after the conquest, if it occurs, there is no lasting satisfaction. It seems that Western society needs more spirituality, more thought, more silence, more contemplation. Modernity has fallen; it does not fill internally; it does not help to grow.

### 3. Circumstance and Boredom

Sometimes there is a great change in the circumstances of life, even on a social level, which makes life evolve from being a problematic life to a life devoid of problems. It is the historical case of the wars that end and that bring with them a return to normality after having fought on the front or outside of it: we can then fall into boredom, due to sudden and forced inactivity, since we are not required to respond to the external demands we were used to. It would be a case of social boredom. Another example, more current nowadays, might be the covid-19 pandemic, which confines us, isolates us, forces us to stop professionally in some way—some people completely, others partially—submitting to a regime daily life that has little to do with what we are used to living. And we get bored; and we have to invent that chore that pulls us out of boredom.

But a great change in daily life is not needed to notice that we have gone from a problematic situation to a situation without problems. This can happen from one day to the next, in any person, at any age, even in full youth when there are many things to do and problems to solve. In a world like today, with so much professional demand, it is easy to fall into boredom due to a lack of external stimulus. It would be the case of a very demanding job that, when it goes through periods of less or no demand at the level of delivery dates, for example, makes us lose tension and personal involvement. And we fall into boredom. Or the case of

a teenager frantically connected with his mobile for hours and hours who, suddenly, is silent and lonely because the mobile does not work. If the situation continues, the young man, at the very least, gets bored -for not entering to assess the possibility of suffering an anxiety attack.

#### 4. Defining Boredom

So how to define boredom? We could say that boredom is that inner emptiness that we feel when, being alone and in the midst of outer silence, we find ourselves incapable of action because simply no one needs or demands that we be active. That could be a boredom due to extrinsic causes: nothing and no one requires us; after excess activity (activism sometimes), calm comes and we feel bored. But there are also intrinsic causes, such as boredom due to disappointment, which can occur after verifying that personal achievements do not fill us as much as we thought. Over a lifetime that would add up to disappointments.

We must not necessarily associate boredom with old age, when it seems that life is resolved and there are fewer or no professional problems to attend to, and children—if any—have already made their own way. Boredom can appear at any age. What seems to determine its appearance is the lack of problems to solve, the lack of professional or other people’s requirements, the lack of personal action due to not having a personal circumstance that demands our action, the disappointment of life...

We can therefore set up that boredom is a situation that is reached by various causes, extrinsic or intrinsic. But you don’t live well in it. Therefore, it constitutes a problem in itself, despite the fact that it has been reached, mainly, for lack of problems. “When there are no problems in life, it is life itself that becomes a problem” (Alvira, 1999: p. 60). And certainly you can get out of it, sometimes with ease; it is enough to place oneself back in an environment in which we are asked and have to respond: our own mobile that already works, a conversation that someone starts with us, or our own profession that requires our action or response. But we can ask ourselves if anything can be built out of boredom. It seems that to build something from boredom you would have to get out of inaction. But to put ourselves into action is to abandon boredom, if we stick to its definition as the state of discomfort in the midst of stillness, silence, and inaction due to lack of circumstances that demand a response on our part. Therefore, how to take advantage of boredom? How to take advantage of stillness, silence, inaction, in our favor?

#### 5. Meditation

Pablo D’Ors, born in Madrid in 1963, author of *Biografía del silencio* (D’Ors, 2012, Siruela; D’Ors, 2020, Galaxia Gutenberg) presents us with the possibility of improving our lives through silence and attention, through meditation. D’Ors tells us that “to meditate is not to reflect; to meditate is to make inner silence and outer silence; meditate is a Latin word that means to stay in the center. When we

meditate we make a pilgrimage to our center, to avoid dispersion and achieve greater concentration, greater unification” (D’Ors, 2014). Thus, meditating is not an exercise of intelligence, it does not require activating this faculty, since meditating is not equivalent to reflecting. Meditation only requires—with all the difficulty that this implies—being in silence, both externally and internally. Thus we focus, we avoid dispersion and we manage to unify.

Meditation can thus develop within the state of boredom in which we sometimes find ourselves. Boredom can be a starting point for meditation. This can, on the other hand, be more or less boring, even, but according to D’Ors (2014) “meditation always comes out”, since it is not necessary to conform to an ideal of how it should come out; it simply consists of becoming silent and paying attention. Meditation is awareness of the body and mind (D’Ors, 2020). It scares us all, because the truth scares us, seeing ourselves as we are.

## 6. Attention and Perception

“Our main evil is dispersion because being in so many things we are not in any. Meditation encourages attention span” (D’Ors, 2014). The author proposes that while you are attentive, reality gives you back what it can give you back, and quotes Simone Weil with her *love is as much as being attentive* (D’Ors, 2014) (D’Ors, 2020). Therefore, asking ourselves what we are attentive to, we will know what we love. Meditating then leads me to be attentive or what is the same to be able to love, which is nothing else than knowing how to give and receive, help and allow oneself to be helped, love and let oneself be loved. Meditation in this way serves to combat self-centeredness, even though it has otherwise been branded as promoting self-centeredness.

Meditation puts the accent or focus on perception (D’Ors, 2014). When we reflect, we are in our ideas, in our thoughts, in our world. While with perception we are in what is heard, felt, perceived. And therefore we are outside of ourselves. Thus, meditating is a way to get out of yourself and be in reality. The disease consists in being too much in ourselves, living at the same time in a certain ignorance of ourselves. The quintessential question of any religious or non-religious tradition (religion does not have the copyright of spirituality) is “who am I”. Meditation leads to a more radical approach to your identity.

“Noise is the real terrorism we live in” (D’Ors, 2014). Silence is therapeutic, helps to find oneself and transforms reality. We think that silence prepares us to later change reality, but silence by itself changes reality, as when we face a sick person and our loving and attentive presence changes him and whoever accompanies him. It is a saving presence.

## 7. Contemplation as a Way of Access to Being

“The mystical vocation is universal. We are all called to contemplate” (D’Ors, 2014). The author urges us to consider life in the form of addition or subtraction. And he concludes that it is better not to have so many experiences, not to

travel so much. We build our personality by adding readings, knowledge, travel, personal relationships. The subtraction approach is to remove readings, knowledge, travel, not to build an identity but to discover the identity that we are. Thus, meditation is presented as a path of poverty, a process of personal emptying.

“Culture has to do with cultivating yourself” (D’Ors, 2020). If you take care of yourself, you are cultured. It is a new concept of culture. Through the current culture a deep dispersion is reached. It is the attention span that is most threatened. Attention is the same as love as D’Ors underlies from Simone Weil. Anything that is promoting care humanizes.

D’Ors is based on the hope of change of the person throughout the meditation process. And he tells us that “hope is a virtue; nothing to do, therefore, with mere optimism, which is something temperamental, or with the determination for a positive vision” (D’Ors, 2021). And it offers us the possibility of founding hope in something that goes beyond the contingent: in being (or in faith, as a believer would say). In this way, meditation is a process of access to being, through attention, in the midst of silence. It is a process that strips us of having and offers us being. It makes us being more after assuming our personal poverty. Contemplation thus becomes an activity—apparently consisting of doing nothing—that nourishes us for a correct and loving execution of our thinking and our actions. The truth is not simple adaptation of the mind with reality, which supposes a painfully intellectualist vision. The truth is life. The truth is not a possession, but the gift of a dialogue governed by love. The truth will be offered to us through meditation when we are able to reach it, in silence, with attention, with love, in the midst of a voluntary process of impoverishing our exteriority.

## 8. Conclusion

Western societies suffer from boredom, social and personal. Boredom appears when the usual problems we face disappear. It is characterized by a state of stillness, silence, inner emptiness and involuntary inaction, since we are not required for action by institutions or people. Boredom is, therefore, a problem that appears when the problems of life cease; when living becomes a problem. Faced with this situation, it is necessary to resign, try to get out of it, or use its defining features to carry out a process of personal meditation that, through silence, stillness, attention and the dispossession of many of our activities along a path of voluntary poverty, contribute to the access to being and help us to know the truth about ourselves.

## Funding

Financial support for this work was provided by a grant from the Fundación Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, Spain.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.



## References

- Alvira, R. (1999). *Filosofía de la vida cotidiana*. Madrid: Ediciones Rialp. (In Spanish)
- D'Ors, P. (2012). *Biografía del silencio*. Madrid: Siruela. (In Spanish) [(2020). *Biografía del silencio*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg]. (In Spanish)
- D'Ors, P. (2014). *Entrevista a Pablo D'Ors, Biografía del silencio*. (In Spanish) <https://www.rtve.es/play/videos/para-todos-la-2/para-todos-2-entrevista-pablo-dors-biografia-del-silencio/2565414>
- D'Ors, P. (2020). *Entrevista a Pablo D'Ors*. Charlas con alma. (In Spanish) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13pW0tSqds>
- D'Ors, P. (2021). *Entrevista a Pablo D'Ors*. Ethic. (In Spanish) <https://ethic.es/entrevistas/pablo-dors-espiritualidad-pandemia>
- Encyclopedia of Philosophy, IEP (2021). *Boredom: A History of Western Philosophical Perspectives*. <https://iep.utm.edu/boredom>
- Heidegger, M. (2007). *Los conceptos fundamentales de la metafísica: Mundo, finitud, soledad*. Madrid: Alianza.
- Lesmes González, D. (2009). Uno se aburre: Heidegger y la filosofía del tedio. *Bajo Palabra. Revista de Filosofía*, 4, 167-172. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=3176154>
- Márquez Romero, M. Á. (2021). *La filosofía y el aburrimiento: Idilios y desengaños*. Trabajo Fin de Máster, Universidad de Sevilla. <https://idus.us.es/handle/11441/105772>
- Pascal, B. (2018). *Pensamientos*. Madrid: Tecnos.
- Ros Velasco, J. (2018). *El aburrimiento como presión selectiva en Hans Blumenberg* (p. 13). Tesis doctoral, Universidad Complutense de Madrid. <https://eprints.ucm.es/id/eprint/46061>
- Russell, B. (2020). *La conquista de la felicidad*. Madrid: Debolsillo.
- Schopenhauer, A. (2009a). *El mundo como voluntad y representación I*. Madrid: Trotta.
- Schopenhauer, A. (2009b). *El mundo como voluntad y representación II*. Madrid: Trotta.
- Schopenhauer, A. (2014). *Parerga y Paralipómene I*. Madrid: Trotta.
- Seneca (2013). *Sobre la brevedad de la vida, el ocio y la felicidad*. Barcelona: Acantilado.
- Svendsen, L. (2005). *A Philosophy of Boredom, John Irons trans*. Madrid: Reaktion Books.