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THE ANIMAL THAT GETS BORED:

PARADOXES OF THE HUMAN/ANIMAL DIVIDE

Definitions of the “human” usually postulate an animal substratum or foundation (*zoon*, animal) to which a certain quality *x* is added: *anthropos* = *zoon* + *x*. This quality ranges from the traditional Aristotelian *logos* and “political character” to the Platonic “featherless biped,” and has known a number of variations in time, such as “man is the only animal who can laugh” or “man is the only animal who can blush”.

A recurrent designation for this quality is boredom: for a number of authors, what differentiates humans from animals is the capacity to get bored. And it is noteworthy that most literature on boredom bumps against this definition and the question of the animal. In dealing with this question, however, the literature on boredom gets caught in a paradox: on the one hand, the animal is exiled into a purely mechanical world of stimuli and responses and a temporal dimension limited to the “present” (it is “animalized”), in which the “truly human” experience of time called “boredom” is completely absent; on the other hand, the experience of boredom “animalizes” human beings, reducing them to their mechanical, instinctual, “animal” substratum, and erasing thus, in a sense, the difference that separates them from animals. Boredom seems simultaneously to separate and unite humans and animals.

The paper explores this paradox in a number of authors, focusing in particular on Heidegger’s treatment of the question.