

EATING A KINDER BUENO TO SHIFT FOCUS AWAY FROM DISCONTENTS

RADU NEDESCU¹

Abstract: Drawing on both Anglo-Saxon and continental phenomenology, this text analyzes the impact of affordances and sensorial content on sub-doxastic processes by investigating the experience of eating a kinder bueno in order to distract oneself from one's discontent(s). More specifically, I provide an analysis of how the perceived kinder bueno's impoverished content—nonconceptual and sensory—are used in order to generate conscious perceptual content that redirects one's attention away from one's discontent(s) and toward the pleasure of tasting and consuming the kinder bueno.

Keywords: self-awareness, self-image, affordances, emotional eating.

1. Proposal for a dialogue

My analysis is solely concerned with cases when one eats a treat, e.g., a kinder bueno, in order to temporarily redirect one's attention away from one's discontent(s); I limit my analysis to emotional eating so as to reach a wider audience concerned with the perception-self relationship. Also,

¹ Radu Nedescu has received a Master degree from KU Leuven, Institute of Philosophy. His research focuses on phenomenology and autism.

my focus is only on one's experience of eating rather than on the hedonic consequences that occur after the treat's consumption.

No matter if one explicitly or implicitly intends to redirect one's attention away from discontent(s) by consuming something delicious, if one intends to do so, then one executes the following: when eating something with the aforementioned intent, one places one's attention on that something because it is pleasant and, thereby, it makes it easier to keep one's attention averted away from discontent(s) and it also, simply by being pleasant, decreases the intensity of recently occurred unpleasant experiences. If diverting one's attention is successful, this modification of one's lived experience need not itself be consciously generated. However, one can consciously intend its occurrence and facilitate it by buying the kinder bueno and redirecting one's attention.

In diverting attention away from one's discontents, with the intention to no longer experience them, one tacitly edits one's lived experience such that one deceives oneself that one's discontent(s) no longer occur, or perhaps had never even occurred. This is much like self-deceiving that you are a confident person, i.e., you feel and believes that you are confident without being able to be so and, thereby, you miserably fail when trying to showcase your confidence. In this article, I analyze the process of editing one's lived experience by using Susanna Siegel's concepts of impoverished contents and rich contents.

In point of content, my analysis is not interested in the precise duration and intensity of the lived experience of eating a kinder bueno in order to redirect one's attention away from one's discontent(s). Instead, I am interested in the process that enables one to temporarily alleviate discontent(s) by or in disregarding them. The pleasant object available to redirect one's attention towards does not have to be something to eat; it can be a classical song or the activity of swimming; the core features of the general process do not change depending on what pleasant object is chosen. Therefore, my analysis would not be substantially affected by choosing another example than that of a kinder bueno. The reason for focusing on one example and for choosing that of the kinder bueno is that

emotional eating provides a fairly simply example of a lived experience that is directly accessible to me because I experienced it. In some cases, redirecting attention fails; such cases are irrelevant here, since this article aims to analyze the process when it does unfold, editing one's lived experience.

In point of method, I compare and synthesize Siegel's (2010, 87-96) method of phenomenal contrast by which one abductively chooses between multiple hypotheses that explain phenomenal differences (e.g. between a kinder bueno experienced as blissful and one that is not), and Husserl's (2012, 51-61, 190-138) method of phenomenological reduction and analysis of essences, of meticulously analyzing the phenomenal contents of a blissfully experienced kinder bueno without falling into unwarranted assertions regarding its phenomenal and ontological contents.

2. The kinder bueno's rich and impoverished contents

In reference to perception, the term rich contents denotes those contents that are not "spatial properties, color, shape, motion, and illumination" (Siegel 2010, 3), which usually feature among impoverished contents. I will use the term impoverished contents to denote those contents that belong to an object's perception but originate exclusively from the perceived object itself. If perception has rich contents, then abstract contents such as "personal identity, causation, and kinds of objects" are not external to perception (Siegel 2010, 3), but part and parcel of perception as such. In contrast, as Siegel writes: "If the Rich Content View is false, then the contents of associative agnosics' visual experiences may be no more impoverished than those of the rest of us" (Siegel 2010, 13).

The term affordance, as I understand it in its most general sense, denotes all the properties of an object that allows any agent to interact with that object in certain manners (e.g., motor, sensory, affective, intellectual, etc.). In the kinder bueno case, I will apply the term

affordances only to those properties of the kinder bueno that allow humans to consume it (e.g., grabbing, eating, feeling pleasure, feeling beatitude).

The Kinder Bueno, a hazelnut filled wafer biscuit, affords a perceptual experience with both impoverished contents, such as color, shape, taste, texture, etc., and rich contents. Such rich contents include: the tacit ascription of this set of impoverished contents as constituting a unitary object named "kinder bueno", the kinder bueno's ability to be situated in cause-effect relationships, the tacit ascription of categories to it (such as being tasty, sugary, or being a snack). For the relevant rich contents to be generated, raw sensory experience needs to be incorporated into a rich, conceptualized perception.

Rich contents of the experience of eating a kinder bueno often include, in turn, several of the following: 1. one's sensory-physiological appraisal of the kinder bueno as relaxing, 2. one's hedonic appraisal of the kinder bueno as tasty, pleasant, and as an object to be sought for, and 3. one's affective appraisal of the kinder bueno as soothing and bliss inducing. I will focus only on aspects of how eating a kinder bueno helps one forget one's discontent(s).

3. What is the conscious experience of eating a kinder bueno?

In order to have a unitary flux of conscious experience, a subject of experience must be able to unify previous mental states (objects of retention) with its present contents (primary impressions) and with one's anticipation of what shall soon arrive (protention). This enables a subject's experience to persist in time as one's total lived experience (Husserl 2012; Zahavi 2010).

How to separate eating a kinder bueno from experiences that co-occur? Consider sneezing while eating the kinder bueno. The eating experience is briefly interrupted by the sneeze. However, if one is not interested in the experience of eating it per se, but in the entire series of

events that shape how one feels while eating it, then one can include the sneezing experience as belonging to the kinder bueno eating experience. Hence, one can distinguish in the flux of conscious experience between experiences that co-occur with other experiences, cause the occurrence of other experiences, or are constitutive contents of other experiences. Depending on one's specific object of analysis, one will have to consider different portions of one's flux of consciousness as co-occurring, causing, or constitutive. This is not to say that anything goes in the metaphysics of phenomenal parthood. That methodology drives metametaphysics' borders on platitude: different analyses will carve the same total phenomenal experience differently.

In my analysis of the kinder bueno experience, I will consider, as constitutive to it those sensory and affective contents that are about the kinder bueno (e.g., its taste and texture, the hedonic enjoyment). I will furthermore consider causally relevant conscious states such as, e.g., the intention to buy a kinder bueno and the first motor movements that materialise one's intent of buying it). And I will leave aside co-occurring mental states that are neither constitutive nor causally relevant, e.g., sneezing while eating the kinder bueno or solving a mathematical equation while eating it. The motivation for which one eats a kinder bueno (e.g., you are worried about an exam or you do not afford anything else to eat) determines whether that kinder bueno eating experience falls within the scope of my analysis or not. For instance, the experience of eating a kinder bueno because you do not afford anything else to eat is irrelevant here because I am concerned only with cases in which one eats a kinder bueno in order to temporarily redirect one's attention away from one's discontent(s).

4. The method of phenomenological reduction

I will use Husserl's (2012) method of phenomenological reduction and analysis of essences. This involves 1. the suspension (epoche) of any

ontological assertions regarding the mind-independent existence of oneself and objects (transcendental reduction), 2. the selection of that quale to be analyzed, and 3. the identification of those properties that make that quale be itself and no other, i.e., the detection and analysis of a quale's traits. The first step is key; if one introspects or analyses without suspending such ascriptions, then one could infer at least one false conclusion in analyzing or introspecting a conscious experience (Husserl 2012, 51-61, 110-138). Without the epoche, one's access to phenomena is tainted by implicit ontological ascriptions.

Husserl's method is similar to Siegel's (2010, 87-96) phenomenal contrast method. Both arrive at descriptions of conscious experience through conceptual analyses grounded on an experience's phenomenal traits, and they do so without being grounded in introspection (Siegel 2010; Husserl 2012). The phenomenological analysis of essences does not ground its results in introspection, but on meticulous analyses and the identification of those phenomenal contents and dynamics that are both necessary and sufficient for these phenomena to be the very phenomena that they are. Phenomenology, so conceived, does not require an intense focus on what content is introspectively available, but the identification of those consciously experienced contents that are indubitably true for any mind that has sufficiently analyzed it.

The divergence between Siegel's and Husserl's method is that Husserl's method, unlike Siegel's phenomenal contrast method, does not involve a competition between hypotheses and does not require the selection of a contrast experience (Siegel 2010, 87-96). The dilemma between the introspectionist and the phenomenal contrast view posed by Siegel might be a false dilemma. For the risk of giving conceptual primacy to introspection in content identification is to focus, in a naïve manner, on phenomenal qualities that do not warrant intersubjectively relevant conclusions. However, introspection plays a positive role in phenomenal analysis when used as a supplement to conceptual analysis; it is crucial for this conceptual analysis to be grounded in phenomenal contents without being diverted away by assumptions regarding the ontological

status of phenomena. Methodologically, the phenomenological tradition provides a way out of Siegel's dilemma by fine tuning the proportion between increasing one's conscious access to phenomena and inferring descriptions by analyzing the accessed phenomena.

5. Correlations between the kinder bueno's impoverished and rich contents

Phenomenological reduction brackets what is inaccessible in conscious experience. Phenomenally accessible contents thus become more salient. Attention to them more easily lumps them into a whole, a unitary experience that is part of one's total flux of consciousness. This also applies to the experience of eating a kinder bueno.

Impoverished contents of the experience of eating a kinder bueno always include the following:

- a. its color: a brown or white external coating and brown or white cream,
- b. its shape: two sticks segmented into distinct sections,
- c. its motor contents: easy to carry, grab, and chew,
- d. its gustatory contents: sweet and permeated by aromas that correspond to those of hazelnut and milk or of white chocolate and milk,
- e. its texture: slightly crunchy at the exterior, but creamy on the interior. The kinder bueno's creamy texture leads to a more intense gustatory experience since the cream fills one's mouth. The intensity of the creaminess impacts its hedonic appraisal if (and, I suggest, only if) one enjoys that creaminess degree more than another person. Because it depends on one's preferences, there is no objective correlation-rule between creaminess and enjoyment. The impact of the absence, intermittence or continuous presence of its creaminess can impact the kinder

bueno eating experience differently depending on one's tastes. Often, the creaminess of one kinder bueno bite can fill your mouth and this filling's impact depends on one's subjective appraisal. The perceptually given kinder bueno has rich contents too: tasty, sugary, relatively cheap, and so on. These rich contents depend on one's subjective appraisal of the kinder bueno's impoverished contents. Therefore, the specification of rich contents below is not applicable to all people, but only to those that experience the kinder bueno as an object that elicits pleasure.

However, I limit the scope of my analysis to the following:

- i. its gustatory sensory contents that induce relaxation,
- ii. its hedonic contents that are experienced as pleasant and sought for,
- iii. its affective contents that are experienced as joyful or blissful.

The kinder bueno's impoverished and rich contents interact in many ways. One's appraisal of the kinder bueno as relaxing is motivated by impoverished contents such as its taste and texture and by rich contents such as those originating in the hedonic appraisal of the kinder bueno as tasty, pleasant, and as an object to be sought for, sought partly by anticipating it to lead to a lived experience of bliss. Anticipation is prompted by previous experience; the current experience reinforces it.

In the experience of eating a kinder bueno to temporarily redirect one's attention away from one's discontent(s), sensory and affective mental states feed on each other: the felt pleasure increases one's joyous mood and one's joyous mood intensifies the felt pleasure. A feeling can trigger a mood and then subside leaving the mood take over. The impoverished contents comprising the perceived kinder bueno influence the intensity and quality of one's affective and mental state. For instance, if the kinder bueno lacks (enough) cream, then the desired sensory and affective mental states might not form. Whether affective intensity is proportional to creaminess depends on one's subjective tastes. For some people, maybe it is not the cream, but crunchiness that affective intensity

is commensurate to. The precise properties of the kinder bueno that elicit a specific person to bestow on it a positive appraisal are irrelevant because, for each person, different properties of the kinder bueno elicit pleasure.

External factors such as hunger, sadness, and being in a hurry can impact the enjoyment derived from eating a kinder bueno. Such factors can either hinder one's enjoyment or potentiate it. Being hungry or sad might make one feel a more intense release from negative mental states when eating it and, hence, a higher increase in hedonic appraisal than if one ate it while calm and not hungry. However, if sadness temporarily diminishes one's ability to derive pleasure from food, then that lived experience is no longer within the scope of my analysis.

The kinder bueno has affordances that incentivize you to add rich contents to its impoverished contents such that you satisfy your cravings; whether these cravings are satisfied either by mere physiological relaxation or their satisfaction includes a feeling of being special, it is irrelevant, all that matters is that this lived experience redirects one's attention away from discontent(s) by using the kinder bueno's impoverished contents. Examples of such affordances are: being edible, easily grabbable and chewable. Indeed, many edibles have these properties; this only shows that my analysis may generalize. The kinder bueno's affordances, due to its shape, size, and texture incentivize you, in order to gain instant gratification to add more positive hedonic and affective rich contents to the perceived kinder bueno than if the kinder bueno was slippery and dirty. One might get instant gratification and redirect one's attention away from one's discontents in other ways, e.g., drinking coffee, listening to Mozart, or swimming. Unlike these, eating a kinder bueno involves affordances and contents present only in sweet treats. No matter the specific object or activity chosen, if it facilitates redirecting one's attention away from one's discontent(s), then the just analyzed interplay between rich contents and impoverished contents may hold for those lived experiences as well, even if the precise rich contents and impoverished contents differ.

6. Being distracted isn't forgetting oneself

The correlations outlined show that the kinder bueno's impoverished contents (its color, shape, handling, taste, texture) impact its rich contents (its hedonic and affective value); sensory input, via rich contents, changes one's emotional state so as to increase one's felt wellbeing and security.

Eating a kinder bueno involves gratification, which leads to redirecting one's attention away from one's discontents. Eating a kinder bueno brings relaxation to the senses and bliss to one's feelings. Relaxation and bliss are blended in order to produce a gratifying conscious experience. Gratified, you temporarily feel as if your discontents impact you less or not at all. The positive hedonic value of its taste adjoined with having one's attention redirected away from discontents leads to a temporary feeling of wellbeing and security. (This might backfire once the experience is over, but that aftereffect is external to the experience itself.)

The pleasure had in tasting, the feeling of being absorbed by or immersed in the experience of eating a kinder bueno and the feeling of getting what you sought for must be rich contents. This is because, if these were impoverished contents accessible to all people no matter their preferences, then everybody on the planet would love kinder bueno and would eat it to forget their discontents.

While eating a kinder bueno to temporarily feel as if one's discontents impact one's life less, one also feels a temporary decrease in those negative affective or physiological state(s) caused by one's discontent(s), including a decrease in one's implicit negative self-image. For the very experience of having a decreased negative self-image to occur, one has to have a minimal acquaintance with one's self, otherwise, one would not be able to do anything at all; if one literally forgets one's self, then one is no longer, literally, oneself. Therefore, what I describe here is an experience of being distracted, not of literally forgetting oneself. When distracting oneself from a minor inconvenience, for this distraction to be effective, it has to include, a distraction from a specific state that

one's self is in and that concerns one's self-image. This image is part of oneself only if the term "oneself" is used to denote not a first-personal manner in which experiences occur, but rather one's personality, habits, and ambitions.

The mind's subtle contribution to the kinder bueno's perceptual contents occurs by using the kinder bueno's impoverished contents as prompt for the coherent addition of rich contents that ascribe to the perceived kinder bueno a positive gustatory, hedonic, and affective value. The kinder bueno is an object to be bought and eaten so as to secure pleasure – so, rich affective phenomenal contents are grounded in object affordances.

Temporarily decreasing one's negative self-image is possible because pleasure hijacks one's attention away from other concerns. It does so twofold, both because we shift attention to what we find pleasant (which attracts us) and because of the sheer sensory intensity of the pleasure. Both involve self-image because it is the subject of experience who feels intense pleasure, and that same subject who attends to it in enjoyment.

7. A shift in focus

The experience I analyze is one in which one eats a kinder bueno in order to postpone one's concerns by shifting one's focus on something else that is pleasant and which, by its very pleasantness, leads to a brief decrease in or temporary release from unpleasant mental states; this decrease or temporary release can be intermittent while the experience unfolds; this intermittence may be insignificant across the kinder bueno eating experience as long as the shift in focus and distraction persist.

By shifting one's focus, I mean a shift in the content placed in the foreground of one's conscious experience. This shift can occur voluntarily or involuntarily, e.g., the voluntary case of focusing on a math problem

versus the involuntary case of turning one's head due to hearing a loud noise. The latter is the case during the emotional eating of a kinder bueno or whatever object captivates one. The choice to eat the kinder bueno is voluntary, however, the distraction that occurs while eating it is not. When one hears beautiful music, one is drawn towards it because the notes impact one's mind such that it puts the notes in the foreground of one's conscious experience.

Similarly, in emotional eating, the deliciousness of the food makes one's mind to place in the foreground those mental states correlated with the experience of eating the delicious food. As long as the food's taste and texture put the emotional eating experience in the foreground, contents unrelated with the food's deliciousness will be left unattended or cast toward the periphery of one's conscious attention. Thus, by eating something delicious, one experiences a distraction from negative mental states (e.g., worries, anxieties, and unhappiness) that can range from minor concerns to life-changing events, i.e., ranging from trivial annoyance to medium-level difficulties, the weight of past events or life-changing events. The strength of the hedonic value of the gustatory experience will determine whether the distraction will be effective only against minor issues or against life threatening situations (most likely, a kinder bueno is not powerful enough to annihilate the fright felt when one is pursued by the mafia).

8. Conclusion

The case I analyzed is drawn from my own experience and it sufficiently captures traits that are applicable to emotional eating in general; this does not mean that it applies to all cases and that I always have the same experiential states while I am emotionally eating a kinder bueno. The kinder bueno experience that I had multiple times is intersubjectively relevant because it discloses that one's global conscious experience in

emotional eating includes both impoverished and rich contents. Impoverished contents enable the addition of rich contents that serve to temporarily divert one's attention away from discontent(s). Describing this often tacit attentional dynamic is intersubjectively relevant because it provides a starting point for spotting those moments in which one finds the means to edit one's lived experience; not only that, it also allows one to spot the types of rich contents added and the likely motivations behind their addition. Part of this article's therapeutic function is to show that the nonconscious, or at least what is left unattended and we are distracted away from, is less elusive, in concrete situations, than usually conceived.

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