

# EUROSENSE 2018

Eighth European Conference on Sensory and Consumer Research

A SENSE OF TASTE

2-5 September 2018 Verona, Italy



## Title:

Hedonic contrast affects how much we like the food we eat.

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How much we like a food depends upon how much we like other foods that have been eaten previously or are being eaten with that food. So what is true of food is the same as what is true of other stimuli. Gustav Fechner described this phenomenon, hedonic contrast, in his book *Vorschule der Aesthetik, II*, in 1898. He believed that good stimuli can reduce the hedonic value of other stimuli and bad stimuli can increase their hedonic value. In order for hedonic contrast to occur Fechner believed that the stimuli had to be similar to each other, that is, they had to be members of the same category of stimuli and had to be compared.

The hedonic value of foods can be reduced by first tasting better foods or by eating better foods at the same time as those foods. Thus, hedonic contrast can occur in a meal when good or bad foods are presented on the same plate as other, more hedonically neutral foods. It can also occur in a coursed meal when very good foods in one course reduce the hedonic value of the foods in the next course.

Of course, as Fechner said, the degree to which hedonic contrast occurs depends on whether we consider the foods to be similar. If people view a very good food and a less good food as belonging to the same food category they will rate the less good food worse than will someone who thinks of the two foods as being different. Thinking of food items as being in isolated categories might prevent disliking a food because a better food is present or has been eaten previously.