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Doughnut Holes: An Inquiry

I will begin by defining terms. By doughnut hole (“do-nut” if one must, though one shouldn’t) I mean the space around which a doughnut exists, having been shaped by hand, mold or machine.

This space is, to the best of my knowledge, non-mone-tized to date and unlikely to change in that regard unless — and even more improbably — I am paid for this essay. (Even then, the average value of a doughnut hole, whether discussed here or among the invisible multitudes lost to time, will increase only notionally and not in any meaningful way.)

This non-lucrative absence contrasts with the present and commodified “donut holes” sold by the fraudulent dozen, as if they had in fact been excised from the blanks that would shortly become doughnuts — an implausibly inefficient process. (By this logic, every bagel would begin as a bialy and/or end as a bialy manqué.) Particularly troubling are Tim Horton’s “Timbits,” nubs of dough that sound disturbingly like a starch-based analogue to mountain oysters.

Whether because such spaces call for definition or be-cause people feel called to define them, by “doughnut hole” I do not mean all space except that occupied by a given doughnut. To take the notation of economics, and smack it around somewhat, such a broad definition could be written as

$$DH=U-D$$

where *DH* stands for doughnut hole (not designated hitter, another subset of the problem of evil), *U* stands for the uni-verse and *D* represents a particular doughnut. That would encom-pass the Rocky Mountains and the Horsehead Nebula, inter alia, not to mention all other doughnuts and their respective holes. This definition is not only broad and unwieldy, but one that also exaggerates the importance of any particular doughnut —likely to be eaten before it is adequately described or measured. To measure a doughnut’s volume by displacement of water (likewise milk or coffee), per Archimedes, seems unwise. Any doughnut this side of Elly May Clampett’s petrine efforts would prove perme-

able and thus invalidate the experiment. From the standpoint of experimental ethics, dunking the whole confection at once is simply vulgar.

More narrowly, and intuitively, a doughnut-hole could be defined as the space surrounded by an any given doughnut but extending no higher or lower (or farther across, depending on initial presentation, packaging and/or the consumer's grip) than the outermost plane tangent to each side of that doughnut.

This definition may still be too generous, suggesting a concave cylinder whose flat ends seem to spill too generously from that which defines it. (Jelly and filled doughnuts, lacking a visible hole, lie beyond the scope of this inquiry.)

More intuitively still, those ends could be trimmed down to a squatter cylinder well within its upper and lower bounds. What, then, can we do with this entity-slash-nonentity? We can insert a finger and briefly wear the surrounding doughnut like a ring —glazed or unglazed. We can intersect one or more with a rod set on a flat surface, much like a vertical paper towel holder, and make them available in stacks or sleeves, much as the doughnut's distant savory cousin simit and its accompanying hole are offered by street vendors in Turkey.

We can for the moment consider the conditions of the doughnut hole's existence. Does it precede the doughnut, an ethereal last on which the doughnut is fashioned by hand, mold or machine, or does the doughnut occasion the hole's existence?

Likewise, whatever the doughnut hole's origin may be, does it survive the doughnut once the latter is consumed, or its existence coterminous with that of the doughnut? As with the preceding question, no empirical test appears to be available, and providing an answer from posits and principles lies beyond my powers of deduction.

This discussion could come to a dead end. As Wittgenstein claimed, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

Often attributed to Abraham Lincoln is the more pointed observation "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."

Ergo. . . .

Just kidding. Or, as some might write these days, "jk; lol."

Silence and the humility from which it arises stand far from the spirit of the age. To have an opinion means that one has a chance — yea, even a perceived obligation — to state

it as vehemently and often as possible on all present/existing media and, to take the current wording of intellectual property contracts, all those that may be invented in the future. We opine reflexively if not compulsively for the same reason that the dog in the joke licks his nether regions.

Thus conspiracy and other theories fester on the basis of the slightest of pretexts, as if the microdosing entailed by the homeopathic law of similars had any more than a placebo effect. Online communications, in some instances aided by satellites, have enabled a resurgence in the belief that the Earth is flat — unlike any other planet. By the same media a faction of former Flat Earthers assailed by facts has taken the no less unlikely fallback position that Earth, again unique among planets, is a torus — the geometrical term for a doughnut's shape. Why it has a vacant center with no gravitational pull (instead exerting centrifugal force), and what that central void should be named, appear to call for further study.

In the spirit of these inquiries, I would like to end by offering a selection of hypotheses on doughnut holes past, present, and future, if such distinctions apply. Others will have to formulate suitable tests and apply them to those hypotheses.

To wit:

- A thousand doughnut holes went down with the Titanic, the tip of the iceberg that makes up the historical record.
- Under the bodhi tree Gautama met a doughnut hole no less defined than the eye of a Category 5 hurricane. The prayers it spun out would lead some to die into Nirvana.
- Cyril and Methodius brought the Slavs an alphabet for the Logos—and doughnut-holes such as outlined the bases of cupolas.
- Others, raised by wolves and never dunked in coffee, cannot pronounce their O's.
- Many have migrated over the years, slipping quietly as light under the doors of Ellis Island.
- With a vision of rustic doughnut holes in his mind John Henry drove stakes that trembled at his name.
- According to their respective natures, some drop flaccid to the floor. Others rise yeast-high to the ceiling or, like deluded balloons, fly out the window for adventure. A nostalgic few go looking for a pan.

- Decades or more of doughnut-holes fill a house with cliques left by successive owners. Each looks past — through — the others, snubbing them.
- On a clear day, the doughnut-holes can be seen congregating on Catalina.