Demystifying Mind-Independence (Penultimate Version)

Abstract: Both John Campbell and Quassim Cassam have argued that we perceptually experience objects as mind-independent (MI), purportedly solving a problem they refer to as “Berkeley’s Puzzle.” In this paper, I will consider the same topic from a Husserlian perspective. In particular, I will clarify the idea of MI and argue that there is, indeed, a sense in which we can perceptually experience objects as MI, while also making objections to Campbell’s and Cassam’s respective arguments to the same effect. In particular, I will argue that objects can be experienced as MI in the sense of the experience’s not being due to the malfunctioning of a perceptual organ, e.g., when one examines the ways in which the object displays itself, and gains confidence that there is, indeed, nothing the matter with one’s eyes. I will address the issue of MI from the perspective of Husserlian evidentialism, according to which perceptual content is conceived in terms of ways of perceptually exploring the object, thereby gaining evidence pertinent to the object and its properties, e.g., as when one takes a look at the object’s shape from a different angle, or scrutinizes its color in better lighting.

I

Both John Campbell and Quassim Cassam have argued that we perceptually experience objects as mind-independent (MI), purportedly solving a problem they refer to as “Berkeley’s Puzzle.” In this paper, I will consider the same topic from a Husserlian perspective.[[1]](#footnote-1) In particular, I will clarify the idea of MI to make objections to Campbell’s and Cassam’s respective arguments to the effect that we can perceptually experience objects as MI. I will then argue that there is, nevertheless, a sense in which we can perceptually experience objects as MI.

Campbell’s and Cassam’s views of MI are at the core of their jointly authored book, *Berkeley’s Puzzle: What Does Experience Teach Us?* where either presents his answer to Berkeley’s Puzzle, while offering criticisms of the other’s putative solution (2014).[[2]](#footnote-2) As formulated by the authors, “Berkeley’s Puzzle is to understand how it could be that both (a) our grasp of concepts of ordinary objects is grounded in our experience of those objects, (b) and we have the conception of mind-independent objects” (Ibid: 27). They provide detailed discussions of how their respective views of perceptual experience are meant to reconcile points (a) and (b), thereby purporting to solve the puzzle.

In my paper, I will only discuss this puzzle as construed by Campbell and Cassam, taking no stand on whether their construals accord with George Berkeley’s historical views.[[3]](#footnote-3) Campbell’s and Cassam’s puzzle is of considerable interest, insofar as it appears to provide an important touchstone for theories of perception, and should therefore inform our choice among the available competing accounts, including, but not limited to, Campbell’s “relationist” and Cassam’s “representationalist” view. However, the chief aim of this paper is to bring to bear a Husserlian perspective on the topics of MI and Berkeley’s Puzzle, providing just enough context to underscore the interest and relevance of the Husserlian approach. I will therefore not, e.g., undertake to discuss all aspects of the arguments that Campbell and Cassam make in their book, or consider where my criticisms ultimately leave their larger, “relationist” and “representationalist,” perspectives—but will only draw upon the elements of their discussions that can motivate our looking to a Husserlian alternative.

In Section II of this paper, I will sketch Campbell’s and Cassam’s putative solutions to Berkeley’s Puzzle. Campbell’s solution involves conceiving of an object’s MI in terms of its internal causal unity, while Cassam proposes to approach MI in terms of an object’s displaying perceptual constancies, as well as its persistence while out of view. I will observe that both philosophers effectively conceive of MI in terms of something else—in terms of “surrogates for [MI],” as Penelope Mackie puts it (2019: 13).

I will then introduce the pertinent Husserlian ideas in my Section III, with a focus on Husserl’s stratified account of the “constitution” of intentional experiences and the objectivities to which they are directed. Such directedness needs to be understood in terms of Husserlian evidentialism, according to which perceptual content is conceived by recourse to ways of perceptually exploring the object, thereby gaining evidence pertinent to the object and its properties, e.g., as when one takes a look at the object’s shape from a different angle, or scrutinizes its color in better lighting. According to our Husserlian view, such exploration can yield evidence which either “fulfills” or “disappoints,” i.e., confirms or undercuts, the perceptual experience.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Next, in Section IV, I will use these Husserlian notions to argue against Campbell’s and Cassam’s respective ideas of MI as a perceptual (i.e., perceivable) property. Specifically, I will consider MI, first, in the sense of an object’s amounting to more than a mere collection of sensations or appearances, second, in the sense of an object’s materiality (or physicality), and, third, in the sense of an object’s persistence while out of view.[[5]](#footnote-5) I will rehearse two kinds of objection, viz., that the ideas in terms of which Campbell and Cassam conceive of MI are, in fact, significantly different from MI, and that they are not ideas of perceptual properties.

Finally, in Section V, I will argue that objects can, nevertheless, be experienced as MI in the sense of the experience’s *not* being due to the malfunctioning of a perceptual organ, e.g., when one examines the ways in which the object displays itself, and gains confidence that there is, indeed, nothing the matter with one’s eyes. This proposal contrasts with Campbell’s and Cassam’s in that it envisions the perceptual experience of MI as non-ubiquitous, as something that happens only in narrowly circumscribed situations.

II

In Ch-s 1-4 of his and Cassam’s book (2014), Campbell sets up the problem he calls “Berkeley’s Puzzle,” and articulates an answer in terms of a relationist view, according to which perceptual experience is a three-place relation between an observer, the observer’s point of view, and the observed scene (Ibid: 27). Such prominent regard for the point of view, or the aspectuality of perception, enables Campbell to also underscore the importance of attention in perceptual experience (Ibid: 51). In Ch-s 4-8, Cassam clarifies the various assumptions that Berkeley’s Puzzle involves, makes objections to Campbell’s relationist solution, and proposes an alternative, representationalist solution, according to which MI objects figure in the representational content of perceptual experiences (Ibid: 105). In their respective Epilogues, the authors provide certain final thoughts on the subject. It is against the background of Campbell’s and Cassam’s disagreement over the respective merits of relationism and representationalism, two well-known mainstream views in the philosophy of perception, that we can contextualize Berkeley’s Puzzle. It is a problem that Campbell uses to motivate the relationist view, viz., as providing the best way to solve a long-standing problem that already vexed Early Modern philosophers, such as Locke and Berkeley. However, Cassam argues that the setup of the problem requires the rather questionable assumption of experientialism, i.e., the view that our concept of MI is in need of experiential grounding (Ibid: 101). Cassam thus has considerable difficulty accepting that there even is a problem to be solved, but nevertheless proceeds to offer a solution. If the reader of this paper is, for example, prepared to reject the experientialist assumption, then, for such a reader, Berkeley’s Puzzle has, by the same token, become dissolved. It should be clear, however, that I, on my part, am prepared to take Berkeley’s Puzzle seriously enough to consider Campbell’s and Cassam’s solutions, and later provide an alternative solution of my own.

I wish to emphasize that all these attempts at solving the problem are couched in terms of the idea of *apparent* MI. When I or any other participants to this debate speak of MI, it is always to discuss whether objects are experienced as MI, not whether they really are MI. The latter is a different, if not unrelated, issue. If somebody accepts that we perceptually experience objects as MI, this is not tantamount to a rejection of Berkeleyan idealism, although this idea can serve as an important premise in its refutation. Neither is it the same as the idea that we are not brains in vats, although it may be invoked as part of an argument to that effect. Also, should the reader be inclined to feel that the arguments offered in this paper are getting things the wrong way around, by rendering objects’ MI dependent on aspects of our intentional experiences, when it is, instead, these experiences that need to be understood as dependent upon MI reality—then I must re-iterate that the debate is about whether objects are experienced as MI, thereby grounding our concept of MI, not, or at least not directly, about whether they are really MI. While the present debate doubtless connects with larger themes and developments in Western philosophy, it seems to have been brought center-stage by Campbell and Cassam, as far as mainstream philosophy of perception is concerned. I will therefore not attempt to contextualize it further, but will, instead, proceed to limn the solutions offered by Campbell and Cassam.

Campbell’s solution to the puzzle is that we experience objects as MI, based on experiencing their causal unity. He connects the ideas of causal unity and MI by appealing to the role that the former notion plays in the identity criteria of physical objects,

We think of physical objects as internally causally connected: the way an object is later depends not only on how other things impinge on it, but on the way the object itself was earlier. And, as we shall see, this internal causal connectedness of the object, which is independent of its relation to a mind, is what constitutes the identity of the object. [Dr. Samuel] Johnson’s kick [of a wayside rock] brings out the way in which the objects we live among have lives of their own. The obstance [sic!] of the rock, its resistance to his will, reflects the fact that its identity is established independent of its relation to any mind (Campbell and Cassam, 2014: 26).

Campbell is thus arguing that we engage in kinds of reasoning that “reflect a conception of the object as having its identity constituted in a way that is independent of any mind,” and asks what justifies us in these kinds of reasoning (Ibid: 28). The answer has to do with the ways we experience objects’ causal properties, viz., not just in terms of counterfactuals, but in “thicker” terms, involving the causal mechanisms of objects’ acting upon one another (Ibid: 30). It is in virtue of this that we are able to reason to three kinds of identity-involving conclusions, viz., that it is the same object that we encounter over time, that it is the same object we encounter in different sensory modalities, and that different people can encounter one and the same object. He then goes on to argue that the relational view of perception, which he espouses, is uniquely well-positioned to account for the kinds of perceptual experience that can validate such patterns of inference, insofar as it *directly acquaints* us with the objects that can serve as part of the causal mechanisms, whereas representationalist views of perception are not up to this task.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Cassam begs to differ, with regard to both MI and the potential of the representationalist views. Insofar as he believes that a feasible representationalist view needs to be couched in non-conceptualist terms, he envisions the task as follows,

[A] mind-independent object is one that is there anyway, that can persist beyond the course of a subject’s experience of it. When such objects are experienced they are experienced as persisting, and this is at least part of what it is for them to be experienced as mind-independent. The challenge, then, is to make sense of the idea that objects can be represented in experience as persisting, as there anyway, without the subject needing to have the concept of mind-independence (Ibid: 162).

Cassam proposes to address the challenge by invoking the idea of perceptual constancy, specifically, shape- and size-constancy. E.g., to see a tree in the courtyard as persisting, is to see it as coming into view, rather than as coming into existence, when one enters the courtyard, and as receding into distance, rather than diminishing in size, as one backs away from it. The tree persists as the perceiver changes his location while perceiving it. In other words, an object like the tree appears as MI, insofar as it is perceived as constant (Ibid.). By perceiving it so, we perceive it as a material object, insofar as a material object has primary qualities like shape and solidity, and it is those primary qualities that are revealed to us as constant.

By way of a first reaction to Campbell’s and Cassam’s views, I wish to agree with Penelope Mackie’s observation that Campbell and Cassam appear to be arguing for MI by putting forward certain substitutes, or “surrogates,” for MI, presumably as constituting MI (2019: 13). Insofar as Campbell appeals to the idea of objects’ causal unity, he effectively regards MI in terms of objects’ materiality. Insofar as Cassam foregrounds our experiences of perceptual constancy and objects’ persistence, he conceives of MI in terms of constancy, persistence, and materiality. Guided by Mackie’s observations, I would distinguish the following three ideas for our critical consideration in Section IV: MI as objects’ amounting to more than a mere collection of sensations or appearances (viz., in terms of their constancy); MI as objects’ materiality; MI as objects’ persistence while out of view.

III

Preparatory to our critical consideration of these three different ideas of MI, I will now briefly introduce the perspective of Husserlian phenomenology, with a focus on the idea of the stratified constitution of perceptual experiences and the objectivities to which they are directed.[[7]](#footnote-7) Husserlian phenomenology is well-known for proposing to solve various philosophical problems by conducting a thorough investigation of aspects of consciousness. More specifically, it studies the consciousness-objectivity correlation: consciousness as directed to objects, or objects as given to consciousness—with the aim of clarifying our concepts by grounding them in aspects of our experiences. Notice that this renders the Husserlian approach broadly experientialist in Cassam’s sense (Campbell and Cassam, 2014: 101). From the perspective of Husserlian phenomenology, meaningfulness ultimately depends upon sensuous experience, with the upshot that the clarification of many concepts is likely to raise questions as to which sensuous evidence they implicate—even if Husserl also allows for the possibility of certain non-sensuous evidence, viz., by what he refers to as “categorial intuition.”[[8]](#footnote-8) However, when the Husserlian phenomenologist investigates our perceptual experiences with the aim of clarifying our concept of MI, she is *not*, by the same token, working to establish that the external world is really a product of the mind—which would be tantamount to pushing a kind of error theory about MI. To illustrate this point by recourse to a better-known parallel case, consider that Husserl investigates the givenness, in experience, of logical objectivity, while being known for objecting in the strongest terms to psychologism about logic, i.e., to the view that the subject matter of logic forms part of the domain of psychology (Husserl, 1970a). The constitutive stratification that I have mentioned plays an important role in this project of conceptual clarification, insofar as it captures the dependence relations among various aspects of sensuous intentional experiences, and therefore also among concepts that involve sensuous evidence that is due to such aspects of sensuous intentional experiences.

As can be expected of a philosophical account of perception, the Husserlian view aims to do justice to both the phenomenology (the phenomenal character, the what-it-is-like) and the epistemology of perceptual experience. In the former regard, it provides a conception that closely aligns with the perceiver’s point of view, while being at pains to avoid lapses into anything like a “sideways,” third-personal perspective of the perceiver and the object. In the latter regard, it is sensitive to what it registers as the peculiar epistemological import of perceptual experiences, insofar as they not only provide justification for perceptual beliefs and judgments, but are themselves pervaded by various projections, or anticipations, for which evidence is provided as the experience unfolds, and attains “fulfillments.” In this way, perceptual experiences are self-justifying.

To illustrate this by example, when we perceptually experience, say, an apple in front of us, there is a phenomenal contrast between the way we experience the front side and the back. Let us call the experience of the front side, “full,” and that of the back side, “empty.” This enables us to christen the change that takes place when we turn the object around and bring the back side into a “full” experience, “fulfillment.”[[9]](#footnote-9) We propose to generalize this idea, and to regard the perceptual experience of objects and their properties in terms of fulfillment conditions, instantiated by perceptual anticipations, whether visuo-kinaesthetic, environmental, or some other kind. In this way, the object is directly present to us, and yet there is room for future “disappointments” (the opposite of fulfillment) with regard to the object, as well as for its closer determination in further experiences. In this sense, the experience is direct but open-ended. E.g., we could take the color or shape of an area of the object’s surface that is facing us, being thus, so to speak, in plain view, and conceive of possible scenarios running counter to our (more or less tacit) perceptual anticipations, in which we could be disappointed with regard to it. Consider that such open-endedness is ineliminable. One can never exhaust the various possible perspectives of the object, the different lighting conditions, the ways in which the object could be impacted by other objects, etc., creating a space for disappointments.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Let us now turn to the object, considered as part of the experience-object relation. To begin, when we speak about objects’ appearing in perceptual experiences, we should distinguish between mere appearances, on the one hand, and the apparent properties, on the other. The two must not be run together, since a mere appearance is just too thin, too transitory to amount to an apparent property of an object. E.g., in the case of shape or color, an appearance, a perspective, regarded in isolation, does not have what it takes to be an appearance of a shape, or of a color, as is clear from the fact that it decisively underdetermines what shape or color we may be dealing with. It is a different matter altogether when we insert it within an order of appearances. Within such a system, an appearance can begin to present an apparent shape or color property. Combined with the perceptual circumstances, e.g., the way the perceiver is moving and the way the scene is lighted, it will yield a sequence in which one is (yet) to be presented with the relevant appearances, if it be, indeed, the case that the object has this shape or color. In this way, the apparent properties can be experienced as not merely subjective, in the sense of coinciding with a series of appearances present and past, but as invested with an objectivity, in the sense of being distinct from any such series, rendering our experience of them epistemically problematic at least to some degree.[[11]](#footnote-11)

None of this is meant to be incompatible with the possibility that sometimes one look at an object will be enough—for us to experience it as having certain properties, and for the experience to be able to serve to justify perceptual beliefs. In these cases, we can say that the appearance which was presented to us, was implicitly incorporated within a system of appearances, but these other appearances were not actualized in the experience, e.g., when the perceiver does not, in fact, proceed to examine the object from different sides. It may also be that the way it caught the perceiver’s eye, was already enough to meet the epistemic demands of the situation. But we can still say that there was room for further epistemically significant continuation of the experience. Notice that these are conceptual (or even essential) truths which cannot be empirically confuted. They are, in fact, based on a conception of objectivity, pertinent to sensuous objects and their properties, as something that is experienced by us as distinct from the experiencing consciousness, and that is experienced thoroughgoingly in terms of possibilities of evidence.[[12]](#footnote-12) In case it seems to the reader that having to explore an object, or encounter it through presentational changes, is an outlying exception, rather than the rule, and should not be regarded as the central case, be it said that changing perceptual experiences are more likely to seem like the central case if we consider not our “realistic,” everyday perceptual experiences but attempt to abstract away from our conceptual sophistication, ingrained perceptual habits, and the background knowledge that we bring to bear on perceptual scenes. While the Husserlian approach certainly allows for cases of unchanged perception, turning our attention to such basic cases will help see the relevance of presentational change, as enabling the perceiver to get a sense of something persisting, persevering through the changes.

According to the present view, any apparent property can be dwelt upon and explored over periods of time, viz., by pursuing sequences of appearances, so as to validate or invalidate what was anticipated, viz., by fulfillment or disappointment. This means that in considering whether the property of MI is indeed perceptually experienced, we ought to examine whether it is possible to attain fulfillments or disappointments with regard to it.[[13]](#footnote-13) While it may sometimes be difficult to decide whether a given stretch of experience yielded certain fulfillments or not, it should be helpful that fulfillments are attained just when the perceiver renders herself open to the possibility of disappointments—here there is a compelling parallel with the familiar idea that a hypothesis is only confirmed by observations that could have rendered it falsified. In deciding the issue of whether MI, or some other property, is perceptually experienced, we would therefore do well to ask ourselves whether it is possible for the experience to disappoint us with regard to it. We should also ask ourselves whether the disappointment we experienced pertained specifically to MI, or whether it pertained to some other property, based on which we *then* drew an inference with regard to MI. Fulfillment and disappointment are non-inferential in nature, and the need for any such further inferences can be regarded as an indication that the property in question is not itself perceptually experienced.

To continue, in the case of apparent shapes and colors, their perceptual examination can yield experiences of constancy, or else, of objective change in shape or color. But it does more than that, since being able to differentiate shapes and colors, and the closely related ability to detect boundaries, lines of demarcation, will yield a basic sense of an object, as something identical in the passing flow of appearances. The perceptual object is constructed, or constituted, in experience, stratum by stratum, with such rudiments of identity, and identification, being pre-supposed by, and incorporated into, more complex and “realistic” experiences—ones that provide for the whole gamut of situations in which identity could become an issue, including highly intellectual swapping-related conceits, with objects being swapped in ways that do not seem to register with the perceiver at all, that one comes across in philosophical discussions of the topic.[[14]](#footnote-14) Constitution should thus be regarded as the emergence of a kind of experienced unity, which arises from a multiplicity of constituting elements, such as the appearances of which we have been speaking.[[15]](#footnote-15) In general, in accounting for the constitution of aspects of the intentional experience and the experienced objectivity at a certain level, we may legitimately draw upon non-intentional constitutive resources, as well as what constitutive accomplishments have already been accounted for: e.g., we may draw upon aspects of the spatial objectivity in accounting for the constitution of material thinghood.

However, in the Husserlian framework, constitution is neither composition nor causation, with regard to the experienced object. When subjective resources, e.g., color sensations, function to constitute the object, they neither become part of the constituted object, nor cause it to come into being. The point of the constitutive account, as I understand it, is to align the constituting elements with the constitutive accomplishments in such a way as to achieve an interface that is adequate from the point of view of epistemic rationality. Thus, perceptual experience, considered from the first-personal viewpoint, is considered with regard to the evidential significance of its unfolding, and yet as ineliminably open-ended, in a way that a composition- or causation-based account would not allow for—e.g., if we were to contend that the object amounts to either the cause, or the effect, of our sensations—insofar as it would effectively pass epistemic judgment on the experience from an extrinsic, third-personal perspective.

The constitutive strata can be distinguished in terms of the constitutive accomplishments, but also in terms of the kinds of experienced possibilities characteristic of them. Thus, if we speak about the constitution of the various spatial properties, such as shapes, sizes, and spatial configurations of objects, we will be focusing upon the possibilities of experiencing objects from different perspectives by re-positioning ourselves relative to them, i.e., various visuo-kinaesthetic conditionalities (Husserl, 1997: Sect. IV). However, if we move on to the various physical properties, insofar as these are represented in ordinary perceptual experience, we will be considering possibilities for objects’ interactions with their environments, i.e., environmental conditionalities, yielding experiences of solidity, liquidity, fragility, elasticity, flexibility, etc.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In sum, the Husserlian stratified constitutive account regards perceptual contents as fulfillment conditions, aiming, thereby, do justice to the phenomenology (the phenomenal character, the what-it-is-like) and the epistemology of perceptual experience (involving the provision and reception of evidential support). We are now in a position to critically consider Campbell’s and Cassam’s views of MI from the viewpoint of Husserlian evidentialism.

IV

I believe that the Husserlian approach provides us with reasons to reject Campbell’s and Cassam’s conceptions of MI as a purported perceptual property. To remind the reader, we will be looking at MI as objects’ amounting to more than a mere collection of sensations or appearances, MI as objects’ materiality, and MI as objects’ persistence while out of view. In regard to each of these three conceptions, we will be considering whether MI can, indeed, be said to amount to this MI-substitute, and whether this particular substitute can be regarded as a perceptual property. Notice that if *either* question is answered in the negative, the appeal to a given substitute fails.[[17]](#footnote-17)

To begin, MI seems to be a considerably different idea from the object’s amounting to more than a bundle of sensations or subjective appearances. The latter is essentially the idea of mind-distinctness, which emerges at the stratum of spatial objectivity, rendering it possible for the object to emerge as *either* mind-dependent (MD) *or* MI at the higher stratum of material thinghood. To grasp this, consider that before we bring into our purview causal relations among objects, it is already possible for us to conceive objects as moving, relative to the perceiver and to one another, and as changing shape and size. It is also possible to conceive of them as being occluded by other objects, as one manifestation of their three-dimensionality (Husserl, 1997: Sects V and VI). Such other-occlusion, as well as self-occlusion, as in the case of an object’s being experienced as having sides that are currently hidden from view, establishes the object as distinct from the subjective sensations or appearances that one may currently be having, thereby establishing it in its mind-distinctness. It is only when we consider the causal relations among objects, thus moving to the level of material thinghood, that we enter a realm where it is possible to speak of the object as MD or MI.[[18]](#footnote-18)

To elaborate and address a possible objection, remember that we have already discussed the idea of mind-distinctness in the previous section, by highlighting the role of identity-consciousness in establishing something as distinct from the experiencing consciousness, with an object’s identity being experienced in terms of its persistence through the experiential flow and through various changes. In this way, identity-consciousness and identity criteria are layered. The reason why constancy comes into this, is that it is primarily shape constancy that lifts an object above the chaos of *pre-objective* change, of which we might think in terms of a chaotic multitude of sensations.[[19]](#footnote-19) It is by starting from this basic experience of constancy that we are again, step by step, able to incorporate various kinds of *objective* change, i.e., through which identity can, in principle, be preserved, into our experience of an object. Sure, we are, in fact, able to track some thoroughly protean objects and retain our sense of their identity—think of some jellyfish-like living creature—but this can be regarded as a highly complex constitutive achievement, and should not be viewed as an empirical refutation of the Husserlian approach.

Considering the idea of mind-distinctness from a different angle, one may also wonder whether it does not directly bring with it aspects of materiality: e.g., if one object partially blocks another from view, is it not natural to think of the occluding object (indeed, to sensuously experience it!) in terms of its bulk and solidity? To reply to this, yes, it may well be natural, but I maintain that it is nevertheless possible to abstract away from such physical aspects of objectivity and retain our sense that one object is occluding another: these objects’ physical properties are not playing any indispensable role in the experience of occlusion. This is perhaps already the case with geometrical figures like the well-known Kanisza triangle, giving us a sense of occlusion, despite our not having entered the constitutive stratum of materiality, and having, precisely by virtue of our sense of occlusion, the barest foothold in the realms of depth and three-dimensional spatiality. But I take it to be a manifest phenomenon that we can imagine three-dimensional figures occluding each other, while abstracting away from their physical features, viz., by making anticipatory provision for the re-emerging of the occluded object, but none for its interactions with the occluding object.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Let us move on to the second of our two questions, and consider whether an object’s amounting to more than a collection of sensations, or appearances, could be regarded as a perceptual property. To ascertain this, we need to ask whether perceptual experience can yield fulfillments or disappointments in regard to such a property. As was suggested above, we can just focus on disappointments, in adjudicating this issue—and we will do well to do so, given that their disruptiveness is liable to render disappointments experientially salient and recognizable. Now, the disappointment we are looking for would have to throw the perceiver back upon the realization that the object is, indeed, just a collection of sensations or subjective appearances. Perhaps a disappointment with regard to a property such as shape or size could do the trick, as in the case of a drastic breakdown of shape and/or size constancy? Yet, this seems an impossibility (indeed, a conceptual impossibility): such a breakdown could only throw us back upon the realization that the object had some other shape or size (even if still indeterminate), or that there was no object there at all, but never upon the experience of the object as amounting to mere sensations or appearances.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Moving on to the second of the three MI-substitutes, could we say that MI just is the object’s materiality, and is perceptually experienced as such? Yet, the problem is that material thinghood and MI appear to be markedly different properties: the Husserlian constitutive account conceives of material thinghood in terms of the object’s dependence upon its circumstances, not in terms of its MI.[[22]](#footnote-22) To refute Campbell’s argument for the contrary view, let us return to his use of the event of Dr. Johnson’s kicking a stone. According to Campbell, Johnson, in doing so, experiences the stone’s resistance, manifesting its internal causal unity, which really is what materiality and MI amount to. Let us assume that the stone did not budge an inch, so that there certainly was resistance, in the sense that Dr. Johnson, so to speak, failed to change the fate of that stone. Yet this cannot be the main point of the story, since if Johnson had instead kicked an air balloon or a ball of cotton, which are also MI, material things, he would have easily overcome their resistance and hardly felt it at all. Indeed, the mind regularly engages in multi-faceted commerce with physical objects, being capable of creating, sustaining, changing, and destroying them. So, the idea must be, not just that he failed to change the stone’s fate, but that the stone maintained its internal causal integrity, something that would have been equally true of an air balloon or a ball of cotton. But now, in experiencing the stone’s resistance in that sense, would Johnson necessarily have experienced the stone’s internal causal unity as MI, rather than MD? I would say no, because the mind, too, has its own, let us call it, motivational unity, and an inertia of its own, and is, as such, capable of resisting itself. For example, I might make efforts to change and improve my personality, or knowledge, or skillset, and fail at it: e.g., despite teaching myself how to keep calm, I still find myself angrily snapping at other people; despite going through endless flashcards, I find that the 2178 most commonly used Chinese characters simply have not stuck—indeed, I might be surprised at these failures. Moreover, speaking of other people, their minds have an internal motivational unity of their own, which I can influence, or, indeed, fathom, only to a limited extent.[[23]](#footnote-23) So, the experience of resistance is not always an experience of MI.

In sum, resistance, in the sense in which it does necessarily accompany materiality, is not a distinguishing mark of MI. I do not believe that Campbell can change the situation by insisting that the internal causal connectedness be conceived not just in terms of counterfactuals, but in a special, “thicker” sense. If it is so “thick” that we cannot make sense of it in evidentialist terms, then we just cannot make concrete experiential sense of it, and any appeals to it, from our Husserlian perspective, are illegitimate. What we would need, for an experience of MI, is a lively sense of the contrast between cases where an object’s causal unity depends on the mind and when it does not. I will propose an idea for this kind of experience in Section V.[[24]](#footnote-24)

These considerations give us reason to reject Campbell’s reasoning in support of the idea of materiality as a substitute for MI. But, further, is materiality as such even a perceptual property, as we seem to have assumed in the above discussion? Clearly, many disappointments with regard to an object’s physical properties, e.g., solidity, liquidity, fragility or flexibility, do not disappoint us with regard to the object’s materiality as such, but will merely leave us with the realization that the object has some other physical properties, perhaps yet to be determined. But I hesitate to say that we can never be disappointed about an object’s materiality as such—leaving us perhaps with the realization that we are having a hallucinatory experience of some kind of phantom-object. So, while I do wish to reject the appeal to materiality, I will not argue for this on the grounds that materiality is not a perceptual property.

Let us move on to the third conception of MI as a perceptual property, viz., as an object’s persistence while out of view. Here, we are dealing with an idea that straddles the two constitutive strata that we have been considering, viz., mere spatial objectivity and material thinghood. While we cannot *see* what is out of view, whether due to self-occlusion, other-occlusion, or because the object is outside the cone of the visual field, we can perceptually experience it, viz., emptily.[[25]](#footnote-25) There is no sensuous objectivity without emptiness, and, as the fulfillment conditions and the anticipations that instantiate them are enriched, upon our ascending through the constitutive strata, the experiential emptiness, by the same token, is also enriched—e.g., we move from an experience where a brief period of occlusion is accompanied by the sense that the occluded object is still there, to an experience where one can also have a lively sense of a certain currently unseen object’s presence, insofar as it distinctively influences the behavior displayed by the objects that *are* currently seen. Now, we must certainly concede that disappointments are possible with regard to objects that are currently unseen, and that such disppointments are facilitated by the emptiness that goes with their being out of view. But again, my contention is that the pertinent disappointments will need to be regarded as more specific in nature—as opposed to something like the idea that one could be disappointed with regard to the very emptiness that is required for the constitution of spatial objectivity or material thinghood. My disappointments, e.g., as I look behind the occluding object and find that there is nothing there, do not go with anything like the realization that the object must have undergone annihilation precisely when it exited the visual field. Instead, I will have the sense that something must have happened to it where I could not see it—or else that such an object never existed at all.

Moreover, objects’ experienced persistence, when out of view, seems a significantly different idea from their MI. As I have said, aspects of such persistence are accounted for at the pre-causal constitutive level of mere spatial objectivity, and thus come prior to any ideas of MD or MI, meaning that MI could not be implicit in such persistence. As for our sense of the persistence of the material things that are currently out of view, it is due to our experience of their embeddedness in a web of causal relations with objects that *are* in view. But given that the latter are also experienced as part of this web of causal relations, it is hard to see why the currently unseen objects should be deemed to manifest MI in any privileged fashion.

Assuming that these arguments are sound, and the attendant considerations pertinent, do they contribute significantly to the debate over Campbell’s and Cassam’s views? I have already said that, in their book, each philosopher makes criticisms of the other’s view, and their views have also been criticized by Penelope Mackie, whose line of questioning we, in a sense, have been pursuing (Mackie, 2020). Cassam counters Campbell’s view with the following criticism, “[S]uppose that, like Berkeley, one thinks of ordinary objects as collections of sensations. On the face of it this does not preclude one from thinking that the way an object is at one time depends causally on the way it was earlier” (2014: 128). Campbell, on his part, contends that Cassam’s view only gives us an “attenuated,” and as such, problematic, sense of MI, insofar as it would permit even smells or shadows to qualify as MI (Ibid: 185, 193). Mackie, however, takes a negative view of both Campbell’s and Cassam’s ideas, arguing that both have failed to distinguish between “particular” and “absolute” MI, in the sense that they only show that we experience objects as independent of particular minds, not of any mind whatsoever (including the mind of God) (2020: 9-11). Based on this consideration, Mackie regards the perceptual experience of (absolute) MI as an “extremely implausible,” even “crazy” idea (Ibid: 11).

Without attempting to pursue all these ideas, I wish to just highlight the fact that our criticisms of Campbell’s and Cassam’s views issue from a distinctive, phenomenological viewpoint, rendering us sensitive to issues of phenomenological adequacy. Thus, notice that Cassam objects to Campbell’s view by appealing to the possibility that one accepts Campbell’s idea of MI, *and yet* “thinks [sic!] of ordinary objects as collections of sensations.” But, of course, whether one can speculatively *think* of ordinary objects in this way, and *perceptually experience* them in this way, are different matters altogether. It is precisely to avoid such confusions that Husserl develops his account in a stratified fashion, and emphasizes the need for a rigorous methodology, to systematically heed the order of stratification. For another example, Mackie criticizes Campbell and Cassam for their accounting for particular MI but failing to account for absolute MI. Granted, these two notions come apart at the level of thought, but perhaps they do not come apart at the level of perceptual experience? In the next section, I will, in the spirit of Husserlian phenomenology, advance the idea that that MI amounts to the object’s displaying itself in a manner that is experienced as *not* being due to the malfunctioning of a perceptual organ. Thus, the perceiver may get the sense that his experience of the object may be occasioned by an abnormal perceptual organ of his, and examine the object with a view to eliminating this possibility—but it would be absurd to attribute to him the perceptual-level sense that the way the object displays itself *to him* is somehow due to the influence of *another* mind, or, more specifically, traceable to *another* subject’s dysfunctional perceptual organ. I therefore cannot accept Mackie’s line of criticism of Campbell’s and Cassam’s views.

V

Our final task, now, is to argue that the Husserlian approach provides for the possibility of a non-ubiquitous perceptual experience of MI, viz., as an object’s displaying itself in a manner that is experienced as *not* being due to the malfunctioning of a perceptual organ.

I believe that we can only make progress on the issue of MI if we take on board the idea that the mind is embodied, because only embodiment can render specific the dependence relations on which our conception of MD and MI can be based. The embodiment of the mind can be appreciated by giving due consideration to the fact that the Husserlian account of the constitution of objectivity is also an account of the constitution of intentional experiences, i.e., important aspects of our mindedness. Consider that intentional experience is accounted for in terms of fulfillment conditions, which are instantiated by perceptual anticipations, which, in turn, implicate many aspects of our embodiment. The fulfillment conditions are captured by conditionals, many of which specify how the object will display itself if the perceiver makes certain movements, which can range from eye movements, to turning one’s upper body, to locomotion (Husserl 1997: Sects IV and V). But, of course, one cannot have fully-blown experiences of such bodily movements, unless one is *also* able to experience one’s body as an object in the world, and its movements in an objective way—i.e., in terms of fulfillment conditions like other material things (except for the relevant differences), and not *just* as implicated in the fulfillment conditions in terms of which material things are experienced. Thus is the embodiment of the mind built into the Husserlian layered account, and our embodied minds built up layer by layer.[[26]](#footnote-26) It is evident from this that the stratified account does not begin with the mind, and move, as it were, within a sphere of MD, until it finds a way, an opening, into the realm of MI—a misconceived idea which might suggest that there must be a sphere where the experience of MD is ubiquitous, and another, where the same goes for the experience of MI.

I, by contrast, believe that we can have non-ubiquitous, quite narrowly circumscribed experiences of MI. To see how this works, consider that MI involves a negation of MD, an absence of certain dependence relations. When we want to understand the fulfillments and disappointments that pertain to MI, we should do so by heeding the relevant kinds of MD. Having accepted that the mind is embodied, it will be possible for us to conceive of MD in quite specific ways that could be experienced by the perceiver. I have in mind the kinds of experiences where the subject is in a position to recognize, by disappointment, that the experience was due to a malfunctioning perceptual organ. To ward off a possible misunderstanding, notice also that the present view, according to which embodiment is a necessary aspect of our mindedness, by no means amounts to a kind of physicalism, i.e., the view that the mind is to be conceived in exclusively physical terms. While our minds (or “souls,” for Husserl) are embodied, our bodies are “ensouled.” Also, when I speak about perceptual organs, I mean it in a sense broad enough to allow for the entire body, insofar as it plays a role in perception, to be regarded as a perceptual organ.

In case of a disappointment concerning the malfunctioning of a perceptual organ, there would occur a conflict between at least two internally harmonious lines of experience, with one, so to speak, winning out against the other and establishing itself as normal, with the other being thereby rendered abnormal, from the point of view of the perceiver. The problems with the abnormal line of experience can range from its representing aspects of the object in a distorted fashion, to its representing an object where there is none. E.g., the following situation may arise,

If the function of [an] organ is disturbed or if it has, on its own, changed abnormally, let us say “pathologically,” without the subject’s knowing anything about it, then the subject will obviously experience, in the “experience by means of this organ,” changed thinghoods, provided the new sense data can be apprehended as phenomenal sense things, wholly analogous to normally motivated ones, and are in fact apprehended accordingly. The healthy sense organs in that case present contradictory “reports.” The senses conflict with one another, but this conflict can be resolved in view of the fact that precisely afterwards an organ must be rejected as abnormal. All the other senses together furnish a world progressing harmoniously, whereas the rejected sense, the one which does not concord with the course of the earlier experience, demands a general and unmotivated world-change, something avoided in the case of the reports of the rest of the senses, if they have normal validity (Husserl, 1989: 77-78).

It is my view that such conflicts can reveal to the perceiver that he is experiencing an object as MD.[[27]](#footnote-27) Notice that the arising of a conflict does not necessarily bring such an experience to an end: it may prove recalcitrant, if the organ continues to be “disturbed,” yet giving the perceiver the sense of aspects of the experienced object as being MD. On the other hand—and this, now, is the view we have been working towards—the perceiver can be said to be experiencing the object as MI, when he is experiencing it in terms of fulfillment conditions that render him open to the possibility that a perceptual organ, e.g., his eyes, might be functioning abnormally, might be playing tricks on him. However, insofar as he is gaining fulfillments to the effect that this is not the case, his (perceptual) confidence in MI grows, and he experiences the object as MI.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Some clarifications might be helpful here. The solution we offer is based on a certain outlook, and it might be wondered how different this outlook is from something that Campbell and Cassam could readily accept and incorporate into their views. In particular, if our main ideas are that the mind is, in some sense, embodied, and that perception involves anticipations, could Campbell and Cassam simply take these ideas aboard, and so perhaps be open to our view of MI as well? While I cannot here get into a larger discussion as to the relations between Campbell’s relationism, Cassam’s representationalism, and our phenomenological view, I wish to point out that it does not all just come down to the mind’s embodiment, or to perceptual anticipations. Instead, we are making a particular kind of use of the idea of perceptual anticipations, viz., in developing a constitutive, evidentialist approach, and speaking about the mind’s embodiment as a datum yielded by such an approach. This larger outlook is also relevant when somebody objects that we seem to be putting the cart before the horse by analyzing MI in terms of the idea of a well-functioning sense organ. Should we not, instead, conceive of a well-functioning sense organ as one that gives us access to MI reality? Some might find this a compelling objection, but the phenomenologist would likely be worried that we are taking the idea of MI reality for granted here, and that a failure to clarify it in experiential, evidential terms is bound to come back to haunt us—opting therefore to account for the well-functioning sense organ in experiential, coherence-based terms, as in the above block quotation from Husserl.

In sum, I have argued that the experience of MI needs to be conceived with a view to specific ways in which the object could turn out to be MD, and that can give rise to low-level, non-intellectual concerns for the perceiver, along the same lines—to be distinguished from intellectual concerns, e.g., to the effect that one might be altogether failing to make contact with an external world beyond a veil of ideas. As I have already underscored, this is not just a way to patch up a philosophical problem in an *ad hoc* fashion, insofar as we are addressing Berkeley’s Puzzle in a principled way, from a distinctive, phenomenological perspective, which has the potential to cast light on various issues and take the debate forward. For example, as we have seen in the relevant block quotation in Section II, Cassam prefers to address Berkeley’s Puzzle from the perspective of a non-conceptualist brand of representationalism, bypassing any circularity worries that might arise in connection with a conceptualist solution, according to which perceptual experience is “simply an exercise of our grasp of concepts” (Ibid: 168).[[29]](#footnote-29) But the core idea of Husserlian evidentialism provides a way—I am not denying that there may also be others—to avoid the circularity issue for conceptualist representationalism: perceptual experience is *not* just another way to exercise our grasp of concepts, because it embeds (or grounds, I would venture to say) concepts within the sensuous fullness—or, rather, its ongoing interplay with emptiness—that renders them intelligible to us in the first place.[[30]](#footnote-30)

VI

In this paper, I have objected to Campbell’s and Cassam’s accounts of how we can perceptually experience objects as MI, purportedly solving Berkeley’s Puzzle. Considering this issue from a Husserlian perspective, I have argued, first, that the respective ideas, in terms of which they approach MI, do not enable them to establish MI as a perceptual property. I have, secondly, argued that, according to the Husserlian evidentialist view, viz., that perceptual contents amount to fulfillment conditions, objects can, nevertheless, be perceptually experienced as MI, insofar as the perceiver has the sense that the experience of the object is not due to a malfunctioning perceptual organ, and is gaining fulfillments to that effect as she experiences the object.

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1. I draw upon the resources of Husserlian phenomenology and take myself to be doing philosophy in its spirit. However, while I believe myself to be, in the main, adhering to Husserl’s actual views, I do not commit to be doing so always, and I also lack the space to offer a detailed defense of my construal of Husserl’s views. Instead, my main concern is with the philosophical merits of my position. For my other uses of Husserlian views and perspectives, see, e.g., Laasik (2019, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Many of the ideas to which Campbell and Cassam appeal in addressing Berkeley’s Puzzle, have received more in-depth treatments in their previously published books, Campbell 2002 and Cassam 2007. Another discussion of the the topic of apparent MI, pre-dating Campbell and Cassam 2014, has been contributed by Spener (2012). I would also note a recent contribution by Ivanov (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I am also bypassing questions concerning the relations between Berkeley’s idealism and Husserl’s transcendental idealism. For Husserl’s views concerning Berkeley’s idealism, see, e.g., Husserl (1970c: §§ 23, 24). For Husserl’s elucidation of phenomenology as transdendental idealism, see e.g., Husserl (1960: 86). Taking up the topic of Husserl’s transcendental idealism in relation to the main concerns of this paper, would inevitably raise complex questions as to how it relates to the other Husserlian ideas used here. For reasons of space and focus, I prefer not to thus broaden the paper’s scope. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For Husserl, *every kind* of intentional experience is associated with kinds of evidence which could support it by bringing the pertinent object or objectivity to fullness, which he also refers to as original givenness or self-givenness, “*The concept of any intentionality whatever*—any life-process of consciousness-of something or other—and *the concept of evidence, the intentionality that is the giving of something-itself, are essentially correlative*” (1969: 160). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The notions of materiality and physicality are sometimes distinguished from each other, but I do not undertake to draw any such distinction in the present paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. To remind the reader, according to Campbell’s distinctive version of the relational view, perceptual experience is a three-place relation between an observer, the observer’s point of view, and the observed scene (Campbell and Cassam, 2014: 27). Alternatively, one may espouse a simpler, two-place relational view, according to which perceptual experience amounts to, or constitutively involves, the relation between the perceiver, or observer, on the one hand, and the perceived object, or scene, on the other. Such views motivate versions of disjunctivism, i.e., roughly, the idea that perceptual experiences and hallucinations are fundamentally different kinds of items. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A more thorough introduction to the same topics can be found in Bernet, Kern, and Marbach, 1993: Ch. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Husserl maintains that all categorial intuition is ultimately founded upon sensuous intuition, “that a “categorial intuition,” an intellectual insight, a case of thought in the highest sense, without any foundation of sense, is a piece of nonsense” (1970b: 306). However, while sensuous concepts are immediately based in sensuous intuition, purely categorial concepts allow for a free variation of the underlying sensuous data (Ibid: 307). For further discussion, see Tugendhat (1970: 123-26). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Concerning Husserl’s understanding of fulfillment, see Husserl (1970b: Investig. VI, First Sect.; and 1997: Sect. III, Ch. 6). For authoritative discussions of intuition and fulfillment in the secondary literature, see, e.g., Tugendhat (1970) or Bernet (2003).

   Notice that in the LI, Husserl considers fulfillment as a higher-level synthesis of identification, a matching between the senses (i.e., act matters) of the judgment and the sensuous experience, even as he distinguishes between the static and dynamic versions of the idea, the latter allowing for a more or less perfect matching, and thus for a process of fulfillment growth (1970b: Investig. VI, First Sect., Ch. 1, §§ 6, 8). I, however, have just introduced fulfillment, as it occurs in the course of the unfolding of a perceptual experience. Here, there is no higher-level synthesis of identification between aspects of two distinct intentional acts; fulfillment happens within a single intentional act. Elsewhere, I have considered such fulfillment as the evidential self-support of perceptual experience—thereby underscoring the intrinsic mindfulness, rationality of perceptual experience (Laasik, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For the development of Husserl’s views in this regard, compare Husserl, 1970b: *Appendix*, § 5; and Husserl, 1997: 114-16. For the related topic of perceptual optimality, see, e.g., Doyon (2018) or Summa (2014: Part IV, 7.3). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. We are effectively operating with a three-fold distinction, viz., subjective sensations vs. mere appearances vs. apparent properties, even if our main concern in this paper is to distinguish the first two kinds of item from the third. When I speak of subjective sensations, I have in mind what Husserl describes as the sensuous stuff which inheres “really” (*reell*) in the experience and “contain[s] nothing of the character of perception” (Husserl, 1997: 39). Husserl adds that such sensuous contents “would in themselves be, as it were, dead matter, but through the apprehension they acquire animating significance in such a way that they are able to present an object. In this regard, we name the contents presentational contents, in contrast to what is presented in them, namely the determinations of the object” (Ibid: 39-40). These “determinations” are a case of what I refer to as apparent properties, viz., they are the apparent spatial properties, to be distinguished from apparent physical and other properties. When I speak of apparent properties, I have in mind the properties of objects that are out there in space, indeed, of real things—but considered in regard to their givenness in experience. By appearances I mean something different from apparent properties, or apparent things—I mean what Husserl also refers to as “adumbrations”, i.e., perspectives, shadings, or aspects: “The same color appears “in” continuous multiplicities of color *adumbrations*. … One and the same shape (given “in person” *as* the same) appears continuously but always “in a different manner,” always in different adumbrations of shape” (Husserl, 1982: 87). So, appearances are not to be identified with apparent properties or things, or parts thereof. To appreciate this, consider, e.g., that colors and shapes are in space, but it is only by virtue of the pertinent appearances that something like space and spatiality are constituted in the first place. Appearances are also different from mere subjective sensations, notably since, far from being a formless mass, they make up systems and series. We can say that insofar as sensations have been animated, *there are* appearances. But can we also say that appearances *just are* the *animated* sensations? Both “appearance” and “sensation” are technical terms, and it may well be that insofar as their use has not already been fixed in this respect, we may “legislate” in various ways in regard to this identity claim. But, as I have already indicated at the start of this footnote, our paper’s argument does not require that we settle this point, since we are mainly concerned with the demarcation between sensations and appearances on the one hand, and apparent properties and things on the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In other words, such objectivity is not “immanent” but “transcendent” (Husserl, 1997: §§ 9 and 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Is it not the case that not only perception but also imagination involves some kind of fulfillments and disappointments? Might this consideration compromise our discussion, unless specifically addressed? Look at it this way: I am primarily concerned with fulfillments and disappointments as part of the *necessary conditions* for something’s being a perceptual property. I.e., if they do not obtain, MI is not a perceptual property—and my argument thus does not require an additional comparative discussion of perception and imagination. However, for a discussion of Husserl’s views of imagination, including in comparison with perception, see Jansen (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Regarding Husserl’s views, see, e.g., Husserl (1997: §§ 10-12), where identity and identity-consciousness are founded in the essence of perception, and § 67, where the preservation of identity, as objects’ various aspects are experienced in a sequence, viz., through modifications of displacement, rotation, and positive and negative expansion, is regarded as key to moving from the level of a mere image in the visual field, to that of an object in three-dimensional space. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In his illuminating account, James Mensch construes the Husserlian view as development upon the Kantian idea of a synthesis of apprehension, which enables the object, viz., as a unity, a “one-in-many,” an “X” that is distinct from the synthesized elements, to arise from a temporally dispersed multiplicity of intuitions (2010: Ch. 1, § 3). In Mensch’s view, the Husserlian approach amounts to an improvement upon the Kantian, insofar as it investigates this topic by invoking constitutive layers or strata (Ibid: Ch. 2, § 1). In the constitutive process, a subjective and objective side come apart, “On the subjective side, the side of what is really present (or immanent) in consciousness, we have both the interpretations and the contents-there-to-be-interpreted. … On the objective side, we have “the identical temporal object, the sound [as it may be].” As a one-in-many, it transcends the many. As such, it “is not really and immanently given” (Ibid: Ch. 2, § 6). (Mensch is quoting from Husserl, 1991: 294.) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For a contrastive discussion of the levels of spatial objectivity and material thinghood, see Husserl (1989: Sect. One). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The same, or at least very similar, questions are posed by Mackie, “(1) Do the properties invoked by Campbell and Cassam as surrogates for mind-independence really show up in our perceptual experience in the relevant way? (2) Are these properties really fit to play the surrogacy role?” (2019: 13) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Might there be any real-life examples of objects that are mind-distinct but not MI? Also, what about objects that are mind-distinct but neither MD nor MI? The latter question may seem especially difficult, since a claim of MI appears to be equivalent to the negation of a claim of MD, and two contradictory claims should not leave room for other possibilities or cases. However, in the context of the present debate, attributions of MD and MI, though mutually exclusive, are not contradictory, because these expressions are taken to mean “apparent MD” and “apparent MI”. E.g., to say that an object does not have the property of apparent MD is not equivalent to saying that it has the property of apparent MI, because it is also possible that the object happens not be be appearing to the subject in either of these ways. Similarly, to say that the object does not appear to me as green is not the same as to say that it appears to me as not-green. So, for an example of an object that is mind-distinct but neither MD nor MI, I can simply point the reader to the apple on my desk in front of me—with the caveat that the reader’s experience of it might be different from mine, in regard to its MD or MI. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. I take it that such a chaos of sensations is at least imaginable, thereby legitimizing the idea. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Further discussion of Husserl’s changing and developing views of perceptual occlusion can be found in Byrne, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Here someone might have the worry that, based on such reasoning, shape would not qualify as a perceptual property either, since a disappointment cannot reveal an object as having no shape at all. But in my view, this is not a counterintuitive result. Somewhat determinate shapes are perceptual properties, and one can certainly be disappointed about them, but a generic, completely indeterminate shape is not a perceptual property. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. I am using Husserlian language here. See Husserl (1989: § 15 c) “Exhibition of the materiality of the thing by way of its dependence on circumstances”). I am, roughly, speaking about a thing’s functional dependencies on other things, captured by certain conditionals and forming part of a perceptual experience in terms of the anticipations that necessarily go with it. Husserl gives the example of “[a] steel spring, [which,] once struck, executes certain oscillations and runs through certain successions of states of relative change of place and deformation: the spring has the real property of “elasticity.” … Under similar circumstances, similar consequences: so with similar changes of circumstances, similar modes of oscillation” (1989: 45).

    Does not the mind, likewise, depend upon the circumstances, and would it therefore have to be regarded as material, by Husserl’s lights or mine? To reply, the mind does depend upon its circumstances but cannot be exhaustively understood in terms of such dependencies. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Intersubjectivity is, of course, a major Husserlian topic, of which much has been written. For thorough treatments, see, e.g., Mensch (1988) or Zahavi (2001). The topics of constitution and intersubjectivity are interwoven in complex ways, raising questions as to whether and to what extent the constitution of objectivity can be pursued without recourse to the other minds. Generally speaking, from the phenomenological perspective, it seems that the material world is necessarily an intersubjective world. However, it does not appear to me that there is a straightforward answer as to whether intersubjectivity, or the involvement of other minds, is either necessary or sufficient for the experience of MI as such. In this paper, I only have the space to pursue one line of argument to the effect that we have experiences of MI, viz., with a focus on the theme of embodiment. I would therefore set aside intersubjectivity, while noting that it is also a topic of undoubted interest in connection with our main subject matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Instead of making a connection between materiality and MI by appealing to the phenomenon of resistance, could we perhaps do so by appealing to the phenomenon of surprise? Things do, after all, sometimes break into our experiences in an abrupt and unruly fashion. Perhaps this could be considered a manifestation of their materiality and MI? But this line of thought simply throws us back upon our central topic of disappointment—with which the emotion of surprise is arguably somewhat closely connected—raising the question as to what kind of disappointment or surprise it would take, to announce an object’s MD or MI. This is, however, is the main issue that we are exploring. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Perhaps the most obvious cases of emptiness are the ones that pertain to what is out of view: it is with such cases that I started my exposition, viz., by inviting the reader to consider the experience of an object’s back side—and it is with such cases that we are concerned here. However, let me add, to give the reader a better-rounded account of the phenomenon, that not all aspects of emptiness pertain to that which is out of view. E.g., I may emptily anticipate the way that the shape of the object’s front side will look if I change my angle of view somewhat, or the way the color of the front side will appear if the lighting changes—yet both the shape and the color are in plain view now! Such emptiness in plain view is also recognized by Alva Noë, as aspect of his enactive view of perception (2004: 134-35). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For a more detailed discussion of the embodiment of the mind (or, roughly, for Husserl, the “soul”), see Husserl (1989: Sect. Two, Ch. Three). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Such experiential conflicts generally establish one line of experience as having been incorrect all along. However, since the present debate is about MD in the sense of apparent MD, it cannot be said that the conflicts invest the object with this property retroactively. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. It might nevertheless be wondered whether Husserlian phenomenology enables us to affirm a more ubiquitous experierience of MI, viz., by drawing upon Husserl’s discussions of the position-taking, the belief (*doxa*) in being that ubiquitously informs our perceptions and experiential lives in the natural attitude. E.g., Husserl discusses the loss of such belief when we discover that our experience of a lady on the staircase was merely illusory, since it was really a waxwork figure (1970b: 137-38). But notice that Husserl, in the same discussion, asserts that the change occasioned by the loss of belief is not one of act matter (i.e., sense), but act quality. In other words, it is not, per se, to do with gaining or shedding any experienced properties, such as MD or MI—even if it may become associated with other experiences of MD or MI, or motivate the inference that the presence of the lady was merely MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Regarding the choice between conceptualist and non-conceptualist versions of representationalism, in view of issues such as the so-called “incompatibility problem” (for conceptualism) and “justification problem” (for non-conceptualism), see Cassam (2014: Ch. 8). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. To remind the reader, beside sensuous intuition, Husserl also allows for kinds of non-sensuous categorial intuition (1970b: Investigation VI, Second Section, Chapter Six). Nor are we claiming that, from the Husserlian perspective, all perceptual content must be regarded as conceptual. Instead, the Husserlian view has been interpreted as accommodating the idea of non-conceptual content (Hopp, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)