

# Some Thoughts on the General Form of a Linguistic Capacity

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## 0 Introduction

I have spent many hours with Jim's *The Logical Alien*, and, if asked to specify a single, most fundamental concern of Jim's in the book, I would say that is philosophical methodology. So that is the topic of this talk. In particular, this talk concerns the question of what it is to do transcendental philosophy, following Kant, after having made the linguistic turn, following Wittgenstein. This move, from Kant to Wittgenstein, is one of the core methodological themes of Jim's *The Logical Alien*. And yet, despite everything that Jim says (and he sure says a lot of things), I still think that some readers may fail to find the making of this move totally transparent. So, in this talk, I want to do two main things. First, I want to articulate how I think Jim actually makes this move, taking as my primary example the analysis of the act of seeing that Jim provides in the book. The upshot of this will be to show how "linguistic philosophy," as done by Jim in *The Logical Alien*, avoids the pitfalls that the sort of "linguistic philosophy" done in contemporary analytic philosophy of language can be seen as falling prey to. Second, however, I want to articulate what I take to be a fundamental opposition between the Kantian thread and the Wittgensteinian thread concerning the possibility of transcendental philosophy. I'll ultimately suggest that we perhaps we should turn to Sellars, rather than Wittgenstein, for a more Kantian conception of what transcendental philosophy, post-linguistic turn, could be.

## 1 A Line from Aristotle, to Kant, to Wittgenstein

It is hard, if not impossible, to trace the historical influences that figure in the view of philosophical methodology that Jim develops in *The Logical Alien*. The story is complicated by, for instance, by the treatment of Descartes, who is now a major figure in the philosophical trajectory. I will ignore that complication, as well as many others, and just trace a crude line of historical influence through three philosophers each of whom I see as making a key move in the philosophical path to the view that Jim develops. Those three figures, perhaps unsurprisingly, are Aristotle, Kant, and Wittgenstein. I'll try to explain the influence of each of these three figures in turn, using, as my example, how the thought of each of them bears on the analysis of the act of *seeing* that Jim develops in the book.

### 1.1 Aristotle

Let me start with Aristotle. Aristotle does not receive the explicit attention in *The Logical Alien* that either Kant or Wittgenstein receives, but a broadly Aristotelian metaphysics lays the conceptual foundation for the view that Jim develops. Perhaps most notably, Aristotle is the philosopher in the Western tradition to most fully develop the notion of a capacity on which Jim fundamentally relies. In particular, it's worth highlighting two crucial logical features of Aristotle's notion of a capacity. First, a capacity is essentially the capacity to *do something*. Accordingly, it's crucial, for Aristotle, that we understand what a capacity is in terms of what it is for that capacity to be actualized. In this way, actuality is prior to potentiality in the order of account. Second, and no less crucially, the *successful* actualization of the capacity—the actualization of the capacity in which the aim of the capacity is achieved—is primary in the order of account. Defective or attenuated actualizations are understood as involving some degree privation from the primary case of the successful, or, as Jim puts

it, “full-blooded” exercise of the capacity.

To spell out this basic Aristotelian notion of a capacity, let us consider the capacity for sight. Thus, in the case of the capacity for sight, we understand what this capacity is by thinking through what it is *to see*. What is it to see? We will say more about the details shortly, but, most generically, for Aristotle, seeing is an *energeia*, an activity whose completion is always internal to its actuality. Seeing is such that, in seeing, one has seen, and having seen does not entail that one is no longer seeing. Some contemporary analytic metaphysicians express puzzlement at the Aristotelian notion of a capacity that Jim explicitly deploys throughout *The Logical Alien*. And the concept of *energeia*, which is implicitly deployed throughout the book but only explicitly mentioned a few times (all of which can be found in the index), is even more foreign to contemporary analytic metaphysics. I take it, however, that these concepts can perfectly precisely articulated, and they, along with some neighboring Aristotelian metaphysical concepts, constitute the conceptual core of the view that Jim develops. The accounts of various philosophical concepts that Jim provides are developed through his thinking through what it is for our rational capacities to be in *energeia*, or, as it puts it throughout the book, “in act.”

## 1.2 Kant

Let me now turn to Kant. Kant’s critical project is developed as an attempt to answer the question of “How is metaphysics so much as possible?” Kant’s answer is that, by thinking through what must be the case in order for our capacity for knowledge of the world to be in act, we can articulate what the world must be like insofar as it is such that we are capable of having knowledge of it. For Kant, the starting point in thinking about our knowledge of the world is to think about an act of *empirical cognition*: an act in which some articulable bit of the world is sensibly

given to us and conceptually grasped by us. The science that articulates the form of such an act what Kant dubs “transcendental logic.” Whereas general logic involves the articulation of a capacity for judgment that is not in disagreement with itself, providing a merely negative criterion of judgment that could so much as rise to the level of objective validity, transcendental logic, as Jim says, “articulates the form of a faculty whose non-defective exercise yields objectively valid judgments regarding what is the case,” (602). That is just to say, transcendental logic articulates what it is for the capacity for knowledge of the objective world, conceived as such, to be in act.

To take a concrete case of an act of empirical cognition, consider again the act of seeing. Consider, for instance, an act of seeing a cardinal on a branch of a pine tree. In this act, one has a bright red bird in view, and one sees what and how it is, coming to know such things as that there is a bird on the tree, that there’s a red bird on the tree, that there’s a cardinal on the tree, and so on. Of course, one does not need to know *all* such things in order to have seen a cardinal. If one lacks sufficient ornithological knowledge, one may see a cardinal without knowing that it’s a cardinal that one sees, and, if one is completely color blind, one may see a cardinal without knowing that it’s red. If, however, one comes to know *nothing* about what it is that one sees upon having seen such a thing, then it makes no sense think of one as “having seen such a thing” at all. So, an act of seeing is essentially articulable into two aspects: one both has things in view and grasps (at least partly) what it is that one has in view. Kant speaks of these two aspects, respectively, the having of *intuitions* and the deployment of *concepts*, and he conceives of these two aspects as the acts of two faculties, *sensibility* and *understanding*. Jim maintains, in opposition to many so-called “Kantians,” that Kant’s fundamental insight is that sensibility and understanding are not, as he puts it, “self-standingly intelligible capacities.” Each is intelligible only in terms of its relation to one another, and both are intelligible only insofar

as they conceived as jointly at work in the unitary act that is empirical cognition.

The core Aristotelian metaphysics articulated above is, of course, at work in this Kantian approach to philosophy. However, the crucial critical turn on the Aristotelian metaphysics is the explicit registration that the capacities at issue in philosophy are essentially *our own* and, as such, are essentially such as to be known *first-personally*. As Jim articulates the core Kantian thought, it is, fundamentally, the capacity for knowledge of the objective world that is of concern to Kant (in his theoretical philosophy), and the various other capacities such as the capacity for logical judgment, the capacity for perception, and so on, are understood as ingredient aspects of this more general and logically fundamental capacity. It is *through* consciously actualizing the capacity for knowledge, consciously thinking through what it is that one is doing in doing so, that one comes to a comprehension of what it is for this capacity to be in act. This methodological point amounts to what Jim calls “formal idealism,” which Jim characterizes as follows:

[T]here is no understanding the concept of a capacity for knowledge from a standpoint that seeks to comprehend what knowledge is from the outside—that is, apart from the form of self-conscious self-understanding that a subject who possesses the concept of such a capacity exhibits precisely in virtue of her knowing the capacity through its exercise—where the capacity one seeks to understand is the very capacity one must, at the same time, exercise in order to achieve such understanding, (776).

### 1.3 Wittgenstein

I turn, finally, to Wittgenstein. I mentioned above, in connection with Kant, that philosophical understanding essentially involves the understanding of a cognitive capacity in and through its conscious exercise.

The spin on this Kantian idea that Jim associates with Wittgenstein is that, insofar as we who do philosophy are essentially linguistic beings, our cognitive capacities that we seek to understand in doing philosophy are essentially linguistic capacities. Thus, as Jim says, “any act of philosophical comprehension involves a self-reflective exercise of an essentially linguistic capacity,” (496).

Consider once more the example of seeing. The above Kantian points about the what it is for the capacity to see to be in act still hold. However, the crucial Wittgensteinian point here is that the capacity for sight, along with all of our other cognitive capacities, is an essentially *linguistic* capacity. One way to express this fact is to say that our seeing is essentially such that we are capable of linguistically expressing that we see. Indeed, the capacity through which we see and the capacity through which we linguistically express that we see, are, in fact, one and the same capacity. Thus, it is through comprehending our use of such linguistic expressions as “see,” which express the exercise of this capacity, that we can comprehend the form of this capacity. In this way, with Wittgenstein, the critical turn goes linguistic.

Of course, this broadly Kantian conception of philosophical comprehension is not explicit in the writing of Wittgenstein, but it’s not hard to see it implicitly at work there. For instance, in response to his interlocutor in the *Philosophical Investigations* positing that “red” has two senses, one signifying something “confronting us all” and one signifying something known only to each person, Wittgenstein says:

Look at the blue of the sky and say to yourself, “How blue the sky is!” – When you do it spontaneously – without philosophical purposes – the idea never crosses your mind that this impression of color belongs only to *you*. And you have no qualms about exclaiming thus to another.

Here, Wittgenstein draws our attention to the actual use of the word “blue” in order to show that the basic concept of *blue* that we actually

deploy (most fundamentally *in* language) is not one that we think of as only really applicable to our individual experience. If I see that the sky is particularly blue today and express this by saying “How blue the sky is today!” what I express is essentially something that you can yourself endorse, saying “Wow, you’re right! It is really blue!” The fact that you can agree with me in this way means that the concept of *blue* that I’m deploying in saying that the sky is blue cannot be something that applies only to my private impressions. This is a basic point about logic of sensible qualities, and it is made through the consideration of language in use.

It is this final turn, from Kant to Wittgenstein, where the critical turn becomes the post-critical linguistic turn, on which I want to focus here. I want to do two things. First, I want to show how Jim’s work in the *Logical Alien* provides a model for how transcendental philosophy can be done, post linguistic turn, avoiding the philosophical pitfalls faced by contemporary philosophy of language. Ultimately, however I want to highlight a crucial line of opposition between Kant and Wittgenstein, on which Jim’s position in the *Logical Alien* remains, at least to me, unclear.

## **2 The Difficulty of Linguistic Philosophy**

In his discussion of the so-called “linguistic turn,” Jim points out that two different ways that one might take the phrase. On one common and influential conception, the linguistic turn involves the turn to language as the distinctive *object* of philosophy. On such a conception, the linguistic philosopher is not really concerned with such topics as truth, knowledge, causation themselves, but, rather, principally concerned with language in which terms such as “truth,” “knowledge,” “causation,” and so on are used. Such an conception is expressed, for instance, by Ayer:

[T]he philosopher, as an analyst, is not directly concerned with the physical properties of things. He is concerned only

with the way in which we speak about them. In other words, the propositions of philosophy are not factual, but linguistic in character – that is, they do not describe the behaviour of physical, or even mental, objects; they express definitions, or the formal consequences of definitions. (Ayer 1936: 61–2)

The mistake of this conception, by Jim's lights, can be understood by analogy with Kant's critical turn. To say that Kant was really concerned with our causal *judgments* or the *concept* of causation that we deploy in such judgments, rather than the nature of causal relations themselves, is to completely miss the point of Kant's critical philosophy. Kant's concern with causal *judgment* is not something done at the *exclusion* of concerning himself with causal relations themselves, but, rather, the *mode* in which he concerns himself with causal relations themselves. Likewise, Jim takes it that Wittgenstein's concern with language is not his taking language to be a special *object* of philosophy, at the exclusion of other traditional topics, but, rather, the recognition that language is essentially, and not just accidentally, the medium through which philosophy is done. As Jim puts it, "Language for Wittgenstein stands to his investigations as reason does to philosophy for Kant. It is both everywhere and nowhere in particular."

And yet, with the turn from the Kantian conception of *reason* as the instrument of transcendental philosophy to the to Wittgensteinian conception of *language* as the instrument of transcendental philosophy, there arises a threat of transcendental philosophy losing its properly transcendental status. Insofar as linguistic philosophy is always done in some particular language or other, and particular languages are always particularly shaped in various ways, there is the threat that the fruits of linguistic philosophy might be indexed to that particular language, and if that is so, the resulting philosophy will not be properly transcendental in that it will lack the sort of *necessity* required of transcendental philosophy. It is not hard to see this problem as plaguing much of the much of the "ordinary language philosophy" that boomed in Oxford in the few



decades following Wittgenstein, but this problem is no less present in much of the philosophy of language that takes place today (though, in this contemporary context, it generally is not seen as a problem). Let me explain.

Standard work in contemporary philosophy of language, which might go under the label “philosophical semantics,” takes as its starting point a bunch of “data” consisting in which English sentences, in which circumstances, are reliably judged to be true or false, normal-sounding or strange-sounding, by competent speakers of English. One then puts forward a theory which says how sentences of these sorts acquire their meanings that predicts these judgments of truth and falsity, felicity and infelicity. For instance, a semantics for perceptual verbs will aim to give an account of speakers’ judgments concerning sentences like “I saw the painter’s signature” or “Mary saw that Bob was already on the boat.” Such work takes as its starting point certain judgments of truth, felicity, and entailments between such sentences, and aims to formally specify the meanings of these expressions so as to predict these judgments.

Now, there is, of course, a perfectly legitimate *empirical* question of how to characterize the actual use of English speakers, devising a theory that reliably predicts whether or not English speakers will assent to the truth or felicity of certain sentences. But this work is of *philosophical* interest only insofar as it does something more than that. Presumably, this “something more” is to give us some grip on the philosophically significant notions that we actually express with the use of English expressions such as “see,” “can,” “must,” and so on. Taking again the case of perception as our example, it’s not unnatural to assume that a semantic account that systematically specifies the correctness conditions of the English perceptual verbs like “see” and “hear” would be one way of systematically going about the task of giving an account of what it is to perceive. However, insofar as the analysis goes through an analysis of English expressions, there is always the worry that the notion of

perception at which one arrives is going to be the notion of perception that *English* speakers grasp, having mastered English, and that this might be distinct from the grasp on the notion of perception that a speaker of a different language has, having mastered the way in which perceptual acts are expressed in that language. In response to this worry, I take it that there are three possible responses that a contemporary philosopher of language might have.

The first response is to accept that their analysis may be restricted to a certain class of languages—perhaps just English, or perhaps a broader class of languages such as Indo-European languages. The account characterizes how perception is expressed in those language, but perhaps doesn't extend to other languages. While, once again, this is perfectly fine concession insofar as one's aim is simply to characterize a certain set of linguistic facts, insofar as the account is meant to have the *philosophical* upshot of providing an account of a philosophically significant concept, the straightforward acceptance of contingency in this response is unacceptable, amounting to an acceptance of linguistic relativism concerning the most basic philosophical notions.

The second response is for the proponent of this approach to linguistic philosophy to take their result to be universal as a matter of empirical fact, and, accordingly, to take themselves to be burdened with the task of providing empirical evidence that, as a matter of fact, all known languages in the world *do* express these meanings in this way. Beyond the fact providing such evidence, covering all actual languages, may be a practically impossible task, the more basic issue is that, even if the analysis *was* shown to apply to all actual languages, it *still* wouldn't dispel the concern of linguistic contingency—the threat of contingency just arises at a different level. Perhaps there are contingent features of human biology or psychology that make it such that all actual human languages are shaped in this way. Insofar as this contingency remains, the philosophical result still lacks the sort of necessity that at least Kant took to be

characteristic of successful philosophical work.

Finally, the third sort of response is to maintain that, though the investigation proceeds through an analysis of language, what is ultimately the philosophically significant topic of this investigation is not linguistic at all. For instance, one might maintain that there simply are acts of perception in the world, such as acts of seeing or hearing (perhaps instantiated by both human and non-human animals). Since these acts play a significant role in human lives, it is natural that all human languages would have means of faithfully describing them with particular expressions such as the English “see” or Chinese “看到.” Accordingly, one can understand these acts by analyzing the meanings of the linguistic expressions that are used to express them, but it’s wrong to infer from this fact, on this response, that these acts are “essentially linguistic” in any meaningful sense. Though this is a natural way to recoil from the threat of linguistic contingency, the problem here is that once one loses the link between the phenomenon under investigation and the language used to express them, the door for skepticism about the results of the linguistic investigation is opened up. Thus, in a review of Berit Bogaard’s *Seeing and Saying*, the most comprehensive contemporary philosophical account of the semantics of perceptual reports, Mohan Matthen asks:

How much can we infer about the nature of perceptual states from the logical form of perceptual reports? [...] [W]hy should we assume that perceptual states are well-described by the language of ‘seems’ and ‘looks?’

This is precisely the sort of gap whose possibility is meant to be precluded by *critical* philosophy. Once this gap is opened up, the idea that we can arrive at a satisfying philosophical understanding of the various issues that concern us through a comprehension of the logic of our language is lost.

So, anyone attempting to do linguistic philosophy faces a dilemma. On the one hand, insofar as the enterprise is conceived of as genuinely

*linguistic*, there is the threat that it's fruits are nothing but the uncovering of contingent features of a particular language or class of languages. Accordingly, the idea that the comprehension achieved is genuinely *philosophical*, a comprehension of the sort of universals with which philosophy is essentially concerned, is lost. On the other hand, if, recoiling from this threat of contingency, one conceives of the topic under investigation as *not* essentially linguistic, a potential gap is opened up between the philosophical phenomena ultimately of concern to us and the language used to describe it, and the critical idea that the phenomena of concern to us can be understood through a comprehension of our language is lost. In short, the dilemma is that it can seem impossible to do linguistic philosophy in a way that is at once genuinely philosophical and genuinely linguistic.

Once again, I've taken as my example the case of perception, but this sort of worry applies generally, to *any* philosophically significant set of notions that are seemingly given an account by a formal semantics for some class of English expressions, such as possibility and necessity, ability and compulsion, causation, and so on. Now, the vast majority contemporary philosophers of language, I take it, don't see this sort of issue as a serious problem. However, that's because the vast majority of contemporary philosophers of language simply do not aspire, in doing philosophy, to the sort of necessity that Kant did. For self-consciously post-Kantian philosophers, however, this sort of necessity is a non-negotiable feature of philosophy done right. Accordingly, in doing post-Kantian *linguistic* philosophy (which is only misleadingly called "philosophy of language") we face a philosophical burden that is simply not faced by the vast majority of contemporary philosophers of language. What, then, *is it* to do linguistic philosophy in a way that is both genuinely philosophical and genuinely linguistic? To answer this question, I want to turn back to Jim's own approach to the notion of seeing, as it's pursued in *The Logical Alien*.

### 3 Jim's Debate with McDowell

Let me start by providing a bit of context for the debate into which Jim inserts himself in *the Logical Alien*. In his paper "Seeing what is So," Barry Stroud argues that "any satisfactory understanding of human perceptual knowledge must make room for the fact that we know things about the world by perception alone," (2020). The crucial world here is "*alone*." That is, on Stroud's view, it is not perception *plus judgment* through which we know things about the world—it is *simply* perception. Since knowing involves judging perception itself must involve judgment. Against this thought, McDowell argues that perception does *not*, as such, involve judgment. McDowell's main point in favor of this claim, which Jim picks up in *the Logical Alien*, is a linguistic one. McDowell considers a case in which someone has an experience in which a tie appears to them to be visually green, but they believe then that they might be looking at a blue tie under yellow lighting, and so, at that time, they don't judge that the tie actually is green. Only after the fact do they realize that the lights were normal, and so how the tie appeared to them was how it really was. In such a case, McDowell says that the following remark is "quite intelligible":

I thought I was looking at the tie under one of those lights that make it impossible to tell what color things are, so I thought it merely looked green to me, but I now realize that I was seeing it to be green.

The intuition McDowell intends to pump here is that "this person, as she now realizes, did see that the tie was green, though she withheld her assent from the appearance." Seeing, understood as the reception of a non-misleading visual appearance, does not, as such, involve assent to that appearance. On McDowell's picture, the act of seeing is something that *puts us in position* to knowingly judge, but it does not as such involve knowingly judging. In opposition to this claim, Jim, siding with Stroud,

argues that the proper conception of the “full-blooded” exercise of a perceptual capacity cannot stop short of an act of knowing.

The first thing to point out about this position of McDowell’s and the considerations on which it is based is that these are just sort of considerations that would move contemporary philosophers of language developing an account of what it is to see on the basis of a semantics of the English expression “see.” The use of “see” that McDowell describes in this case is indeed felicitous. That is just to say, most English speakers, when presented with this case, take the person in this scenario, saying what she does, to be using the word “see” correctly. And so, insofar as one is giving a semantics of the English verb “to see,” taking the judgments of competent speakers as “data” constraining one’s account, one would want providing a semantics for “see” that does not rule out this use. And it’s worth noting that standard contemporary semantic accounts of the verb “to see” are such that the truth of a statement of the form “*S* sees that *p*,” though it of course entails the truth of *p*, does *not* entail the truth of a sentence of the form “*S* judges that *p*.”

Jim warns, however, that reading off our account of what it is to see from the felicitous uses of “see” in English can lead to just the sort of problem that McDowell himself correctly diagnoses in his development of disjunctivism. The general point is that, in English, “see” can be used in different senses to express logically distinct kinds of exercises of one and the same perceptual capacity. For instance, if we know we are suffering from visual hallucinations, we might felicitously say “I see spots on the wall,” fully knowing that there are no spots on the wall, to express that, given our experience, it seems to us as if there are spots on the wall. It would be a mistake to infer from this felicitous use of “see,” that what “seeing spots on the wall” really amounts to must be a common factor between the two cases of “seeing spots on the wall,” the first being when one has painted them there and the second being when when one is hallucinating them. In the former case “I see spots on the

wall" expresses a *logically basic* exercise of the capacity to see, whereas, in the latter case, it expresses a *logically derivative* exercise, which might equally be expressed by "It visually seems as if there are spots on the wall." If we think "see" expresses the same thing in each of these cases, we will be led thinking that it expresses a "common factor" across these logically distinct exercises, which, as McDowell has shown in this particular sort of case, is epistemologically catastrophic. Though this is a point that McDowell himself develops, Jim maintains that carrying through this point involves saying the same sort of thing about the trickier case that McDowell considers. So, in response to McDowell's example, Jim maintains that there is a use of "see," such that "I was seeing the tie to be green" is felicitous, but that *this* use of "see" is a *logically derivative* use. Just as it's a mistake in the case that McDowell himself diagnoses to assume that "see" expresses a common factor present in both the logically basic and logically derivative case, so too is it a mistake in the case that McDowell considers.

This sort of disambiguation of the different uses of cognitive verbs and the articulation of their relative logical priority is, I take it, the crucial feature of Jim's linguistic approach that must be spelled out if we are to understand the sense in which the approach is at once critical and linguistic. To further spell out this notion of logical priority, let me turn to Sellars, who explicitly uses speaks of what is "logically prior" and "logically simpler" in his discussion of the relative priority of "sees" and "looks" in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, which clearly provides some of the inspiration for Jim's discussion of the two senses of "sees" and their relative priority in *The Logical Alien*. Sellars's aim in these sections of EPM is to attack a conception, widely-held at the time, that something's merely *looking* green is the logically basic concept, with concept of one's seeing that something *is* green being logically downstream from this more basic concept. Sellars claims, by contrast, that the order of logical priority goes in the other direction. However, what Sellars means by "logical priority"

cannot be what his opponents mean by “logical priority,” since he does not attempt to give a direct semantic reduction of concept of looking in terms of the concept of seeing. Rather, he brings out their relative priority by telling the story of John who, he imagines, “has learned the use of color words in the usual way,” but has never looked at things in abnormal conditions, and so has not learned to express that something *looks* a certain way. Sellars shows how we can account for John’s acquisition of this new expressive capacity by thinking of him as learning, under which circumstances, to *hold back* from making the full “sees”-report that he’d antecedently be inclined to make. In this way, we can make sense of the act of making a “looks”-report as an actualization of the very capacity to make a “sees”-report, albeit, as Jim says, a “logically attenuated” exercise. And, as I’ve sketched above, Jim argues that an analogous sort of “logical attenuation” obtains in the McDowellian case we’ve just considered.

Of course, much more can be said about what is involved here, but, at this point, I want to turn to consider how this general approach to linguistic philosophy is capable of responding to the concerns raised above regarding the sort of linguistic approach exemplified by contemporary philosophy of language. The first point to make clear is that, though the point about the relation of logical priority of “sees” and “looks,” in Sellars’s case, or the two senses of “sees,” in Jim’s case, is clearly a *linguistic* point, concerning the relative priority of linguistic capacities, it is not a point about *English* or some other particular natural language. Indeed, the starting point of the observation, as Jim presents it, is that taking the felicitous uses of the English verb “to see” at (what seems like) face value can mislead us into a misunderstanding of the form the capacity whose various actualizations are expressed by those uses. Speakers of a more perspicuous language might be less inclined to being misled in these ways. For instance, in Chinese the structure of the verb expressing the successful actualization of our capacity to see bears this “success” character on its sleeve, such that, the notion *misseeing* does not straight-



forwardly arise in Chinese grammar. I was originally going to go into much more detail about this feature of Chinese perceptual verbs (and I can in the Q&A if anyone's curious), but, in some way, it's irrelevant to the present point that this this point about the relative priority of linguistic acts swings free of the particular languages in which these acts may be more or less perspicuously expressed.

Consider now the sort of worry raised by Matthen in what I quoted above, about how these points about the relative priority of making "sees" reports and "looks" reports bears on the question of the relative priority of the *perceptual acts* of one's seeing that something is so and something's merely looking to one to be so. The crucial point that is essential feature of Jim's approach is that the capacity to see is an essentially *linguistic* capacity, and thus, is not conceived as distinct from the capacity to linguistically express that one sees. That is, we don't have two self-standingly intelligible capacities—the capacity to enjoy perceptual states, on the one hand, then the capacity to linguistically describe these states, on the other. No, it is part of the very form of our capacity for perception, as an essentially *rational, self-conscious* capacity, that it is a *linguistic* capacity. Indeed, properly understood its being a rational, self-conscious capacity *just is* its being a linguistic capacity.

This last point can be spelled out and defended in various ways, and I will not be able to mount a substantive argument for this crucial point here, but, very briefly, just to gesture at the sort of argument that would substantiate it, note first that a capacity perception is essentially a capacity whose exercise results in propositional knowledge, knowledge of such things as *that the tie is green*. It is a crucial feature of such contents, distinguishing the sorts of contentful mental acts that that characterize our form of mindedness from those that characterize the form of mindedness possessed by non-linguistic creatures, that they are, at least in principle, *determinate*. That is, it possible, at least in principle, to say exactly what it is for one to think of something that it's green, and this determinateness

of our mental states can only be understood in terms of our essentially linguistic capacity to not just *express* our thoughts (there's a *sense* in which we can say that some non-linguistic creatures are capable of doing that), but to *articulate* them.

#### **4 Towards the General Form of a Linguistic Capacity**

I have been discussing, as the example here, the philosophical methodology at work in Jim's discussion of the act of *seeing*, a topic on which he devotes well over a hundred pages of *The Logical Alien*. The question remains why this is the proper target of a philosophical, and, more specifically, transcendental investigation at all. Seeing is, of course, also the topic of cognitive psychology, neuroscience, psychophysics, and so on. In what way is a properly *philosophical* investigation into seeing distinct from these *empirical* investigations? This is, of course, a central question of concern in the book, though it primarily arises within the discussion of psychologism about logic. However, I want to approach it a bit differently here, considering not *logical* but *actual* aliens—extra-terrestrials.

Let us suppose that we ourselves are not human beings but creatures who evolved on Proxima Centari B, an earth-like Planet in the Alpha Centari solar system. It is the year 2482, and we intercept a spaceship, the Voyager 3, which contains works of art, music, science, and philosophy from Earth. From the physiological diagrams provided on the Voyager 3, we learn that, unlike us, who primarily perceive through the detection of energy fluctuations through our specialized tendrils, humans' primary mode of perception involves the use of complex organs located on the upper part of their bodies known as "eyes." But, in addition to the scientific contents providing this sort of information, there is also a copy of Jim's *Logical Alien*. What might we learn from the discussion of *seeing* there? Presumably, we can learn how we are to conceive of our own acts of perceptual knowledge, achieved through the uses of our tendrils. That

is, though human author's discussion takes as the example the distinctively human act of seeing, the philosophical point he makes is ultimately a point about perceptual acts generally. Whether perception is achieved through the use of eyes or tendrils, the exercise of a perceptual capacity, must, in the first instance, be conceived of as an act of perceptual knowledge. And, once again, these points are properly understood as points about the form of essentially linguistic capacities.

Now, this thought experiment, as I've just presented it, is obviously a bit far-fetched. However, I regard it as crucially important that it (or some refined version of it) is at least intelligible. That is, it is I think it is crucially important that we can, in principle, conceive of ourselves in a way that transcends a conception of ourselves as essentially human, where being human is understood as being the sort of creature that has two arms, two legs, eyes, ears, and so on. Establishing a conception of ourselves—an answer to the question *who are we*—that does not identify ourselves with a particular biological species here on Earth was, at the very least, crucially important to Kant. The Kantian answer, I take it, is to say that we *finite rational beings*, beings who have rationally articulable knowledge of an independent world. Kant's theoretical philosophy articulates what it is to be such a being and what it is to be the world of which such a being is capable of having knowledge by taking, as its primary object, an act of empirical knowledge. Having taken the linguistic turn, it seems clear that what we should say that we are *linguistic beings*, and we should philosophical aspire to some generic specification of what it is to be some such being. Here again, I take it there to be another potential tension between Kant's transcendental orientation and the Wittgenstein's linguistic one, and this one, I think, is much more fundamental, constituting a fundamental opposition between the two philosophers.

I take it that Wittgenstein denies that there is some such thing as "the general form of a linguistic capacity." This comes out at various places in his writing, but perhaps most pointedly in his remark that "If a lion could

talk, we wouldn't be able to understand it," (327). The point that Wittgenstein is making here, I think, is relatively straightforward. Wittgenstein takes it that "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life," and so, for a creature whose form of life is so radically different from our own as a lion, the language of such a creature, which is inextricable with its form of life, will be incommensurable with our own. If this is right, then, for Wittgenstein, there can be no such thing as articulating what it is to be a linguistic being as such. There is being a linguistic being of this or that form of linguistic life, but there is no such thing as the form of linguistic life as such. I take it that this is directly related Wittgenstein's contention that language has no downtown. We might put the same point in Jim's more Aristotelean vocabulary by saying that, for Wittgenstein, there is no such thing as the primary act of a linguistic capacity, in relation to which the various other linguistic capacities can be understood. This, I believe, is a genuine fundamental philosophical disagreement between Kant and Wittgenstein. For Kant, philosophy which transcends the particularities of our distinctively human form of mindedness can be done through articulation of the basic act of empirical cognition as such. For Wittgenstein, there is no analogous notion of transcendental philosophy.

My aim here is not to settle this opposition, just to register it genuine one, and to explain how one might, in opposition to Wittgenstein himself, retain the transcendental conception of ourselves, essential to Kant's critical philosophy, while still taking Wittgenstenian linguistic turn articulated above. This, I take it, is what Sellars does. Let us turn back to Jim's characterization of Kant's "transcendental logic" as the science that "articulates the form of a faculty whose non-defective exercise yields objectively valid judgments regarding what is the case," (602). "Transcendental linguistics" is Sellars's successor concept to Kant's transcendental logic. Sellars describes transcendental linguistics as the science that "attempts to delineate the general features that would be common to the epistemic functioning of any language in any possible world." To speak

of the “epistemic functioning” of a language is to speak of a language as functioning as a “cognitive instrument,” as a means through which knowledge is acquired. The most fundamental way in which knowledge is acquired through language is *testimonially*, through someone’s successfully saying something to someone.<sup>1</sup> The basic speech act through which one accomplishes such a thing is assertion. Through such acts, the members of a linguistic community come to acquire knowledge that they would not otherwise possess. Transcendental linguistics, then, aims to articulate the general structure of any language in which the speech act of assertion, understood as the act of successfully saying something to someone, is capable of being performed.

Understood in this sense, transcendental linguistics is a science that is *common* to human beings and any other linguistic beings, for instance, those who might inhabit Proxima Centari B. In this way, it is universal, like physics, but, unlike physics, it is characterized by the first-personal methodology that Jim labels “formal idealism,” involving an understanding of what it is to speak a language from within the self-conscious exercise of that capacity. If one countenances transcendental linguistics as a real science (as I think one should, if one wants to preserve a fundamental aspect of Kant’s critical project through the linguistic turn), the points about perceptual reports articulated above are conceived as belonging to transcendental linguistics. There can be no assertions about the objective world, in a given linguistic practice, if there are no perceptual reports that directly express knowledge of the objective world. Thus, language speakers, as such, must be capable of expressing perceptual knowledge, saying such things as “I see the tie is green,” or whatever it is that Proxima Centarians say when they perceptually know something through the use of their tendrills. Framed in this way, the above points about the

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<sup>1</sup>The idea that the act of “successfully saying something to somebody” is a logically fundamental philosophical notion has been developed and defended more recently by Jenifer Hornsby. Hornsby remarks, “Many philosophers will deny that *successfully saying something to another* could be a simple notion, or a fundamental one,” (2000, 93).

primacy of “full-bloodedly perceiving,” where perceiving is itself an act of perceptually knowing, are conceived of as articulating aspects of the general form of a linguistic capacity as such.

## **5 Conclusion**

I do not know where Jim stands on this last issue that I have raised. My hunch is that he will say that the apparent opposition between Kant and Wittgenstein on whether or not there is a transcendental articulation of who we are as rational, linguistic beings, which would apply just as well to us and the Proxima Centarians, is not as clear-cut as I have made it out to be. But I do see this opposition here, and I, for one, am inclined to side with Kant (or, rather, Sellars), over Wittgenstein. It seems to me that there is such a thing as the general form of the capacity to speak a language, and it seems to me that the primary goal of transcendental philosophy, understood along the lines developed by Jim in *The Logical Alien*, should be to articulate what that is.