

# Celebrities Discuss Philosophy Episode 4:

## A Transcript

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In early 2012 Fox TV ran a series called *Celebrities Discuss Philosophy*. A ‘fly on the wall’ documentary, it captured various celebrities having discussions about philosophy in their home environment. Unfortunately it did not prove popular, mainly because of it airing in a late night slot, and it was cancelled part way through. Six episodes were filmed, but only three aired before cancellation (Tilda Swinton discussing modality with her children, Honor and Xavier; a dinner party hosted by Kiefer Sutherland involving a discussion about scepticism; and Neil Patrick Harris delivering a, disturbing, soliloquy on medical ethics and adolescent physicians). I was fortunate enough to be able to get the original reels of the remaining shows and provide a transcript of the 4<sup>th</sup> episode which covers a conversation between Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. It took place on the evening of February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

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*Brad Pitt:* I don’t care if I lost the Oscar to that dead beat Dujardin, it’s just a lump of gold anyway.

*Angelina Jolie:* Well, it’s made of britannium, not gold... anyhow, darling, the statuette isn’t the same as the lump.

*B:* [groans] Seriously? We have to do metaphysics this late at night?

*A:* Surely you’re not scared?

*B:* Fine. Clearly the lump of metal is the same as the statuette – it’s not as if there are two things there.

*A:* That can’t be right. The lump of britannium came into existence in the factory that makes lumps of alloys. So say it came into existence six months ago. They then shipped it to the people who melt it down and shape it into the look of an Oscar. So say that happened a week ago. The lump – let’s call it ‘Lump’ – came into existence at one time; the Oscar – let’s call it ‘Oscar’ – came into existence at another. As they came into existence at different times they can’t be the same thing, for if they were the same thing – the *very* same thing – they’d have to come into existence at the same time. It’d be crazy otherwise: imagine if you met someone who was born in 1970 *and* born in 1975 – how would that work? No, I’m sorry: Lump and Oscar are two different things.

*B:* This is ridiculous. Statues aren’t special, and this is just like lots of other cases. The wood that makes a table came into existence before the table did; our bodies will be around, as a corpse, after we die; the metal that makes up my Ferrari existed before the car was made, and so on. We all know there can’t be two things in the same place at the same time, so just as none of those things are examples of there being two things in the same place at the same time, the statue doesn’t count either.

*A:* Oh Brad dear, they’re just *sequels* to the problem of Oscar and Lump. Of course lots of other things are in the same position, and whatever we say about Oscar and Lump will work for the tables and wood, for the bodies and people, for the cars and metal. But all you’ve demonstrated is that there’s some sort of answer to be offered, not what the answer is. So this talk of other cases doesn’t help at all, it just makes the problem more wide ranging. So let’s stick with Oscar and Lump for, if *Tomb Raider* taught me anything, it’s that sequels are worse than the original.

B: Okay, that sounds reasonable. But it's still not a problem. Clearly this is all to do with language – Oscar existing is just something to do with language and the way we talk.

A: Certainly there might be some truth in that, but you've still not solved the problem. Don't you remember Francis Coppola explaining to us that logic is 'monotonic': when you have a set of premises that lead to a conclusion, adding in more premises won't stop that conclusion following. For instance, if the moon is round and the moon is square, telling me more things won't stop me concluding the contradiction that the moon is round and square. What you need to do when you're responding to a problem like this is to say either that the argument is invalid or that some premise is false – you can't just tag on the end 'It's all to do with language' and leave it at that.

B: Really? Surely if it's all to do with language there just can't be any problem?

A: Surely not! Lots of things are to do with language and still leave us with problems. Just ask a linguist! At best you're just signalling that you don't care about the argument, not that you think you've got an explanation of where it goes wrong.

B: Oh, I care – I'm not admitting defeat this early. How about this then: it's all to do with language because Oscar is just what we *call* Lump when it's statue shaped.

A: What we call it? So Oscar *is* Lump, then? A rose by any other name, and all that! And if Lump came into existence six months ago, then so too did Oscar. But that sounds weird. Imagine it the other way around, and that I crush Oscar and leave us with a flattened Lump. I want to say that Lump exists but Oscar does not, but you have to say they both do. That sounds weird.

B: Maybe I could live with it.

A: Oh, but what about the sequels? Should an insurance company tell you they won't pay out for the destruction of a wrecked car just because there's still a lump of metal there? If you get hit by a truck and die should I still say that's you in the box they bury?

B: I think I could live with all of these things. At worst, I could compare it to sentences in English that conflict with science.

A: I'm not quite sure what you mean – do explain, dear, whilst I make the coffee.

B: Imagine I'm in our garden sunbathing. I notice it gets cooler and I ask why, and you say 'The sun has moved behind the elms.' Now that's a fine sentence to utter – I wouldn't hold it against you – and I might even say it was true. But science has showed us that, technically, it's false. The sun doesn't move behind the elms, as the Earth rotates so that the elms are between me and the sun – it's the Earth hurtling through space around the sun, and not the other way around. But we don't take this fact to mean that I should stop you saying 'The sun has moved behind the elms' or that it's false. We can say that the fundamental fact about the Earth's rotation makes it true that the sun has moved behind the elms. I think the sentences about Oscar are like that. When you say Oscar came into existence a week ago, that's true but only in the same way that the elm-sentence is true – the fundamental fact that makes it true is that Lump has become statue shaped, not that some new object has come into existence.<sup>1</sup> So, fundamentally, all that exists is Lump, which becomes statue shaped, but it's still true to say Oscar has come into existence.

A: I'm uncomfortable saying that the elm-sentence is true – after all, isn't it false ('technically', or otherwise)? Everyone who says that sort of thing is surely saying something misleading? Moreover: if the elm sentence is true, so too are the sentences about Oscar and Lump. And if they're true, then we *still* don't know where the argument goes wrong. Monotonicity strikes again! Adding that the sentences are 'made true' by other sentences is just adding in more premises, and we said that adding in more premises wouldn't stop us getting to a contradiction. So you have to say that they're false anyhow.

B: Okay, but I won't acquiesce all the way. Clearly when someone says 'The sun has moved behind the elms' it's false, but they're not saying something as false as 'A leprechaun has cast a magic spell and made it dark' or 'An

eclipse has just started happening'. Those two sentences are simply false, whereas the elm-sentence isn't so bad in comparison. Let's say it's 'nearly as good as true'. It's the kind of thing we can freely assert without someone complaining, and holding it against us. Sentences about Oscar are nearly as good as true – a nice guide to navigating the world, bearing out fundamental facts only about Lump. But they're still false, per se, so we have an explanation of how I can avoid your argument.<sup>2</sup>

A: Given the sequels, this'll mean that a lot of sentences are nearly as good as true rather than true – doesn't that worry you?

B: Not really. Science, for instance, has shown that lots of sentences are in the same boat. Physics says that when we say one thing is simultaneous with another, invariably that's false because of Einstein's theory of relativity. We don't take from this that all our sentences about what's going on around us are false. But they are! Fortunately we can say that they are 'nearly as good as true' and continue living our lives as if they were true.

A: I agree there must be something in this. So let me try a different tactic. You say that statues like Oscar are just a *façon de parler*, and they're not really there?

B: Yes.

A: So we're agreed that *something* has been discovered about the nature of the world – there are no statues!

B: I guess.

A: So we're clear that you've taken the problem seriously, and offered a serious, contentious, conclusion.

B: I suppose – I don't deny that metaphysical discussions like this can tell us about the world!

A: So since you're onboard with thinking these conversations we have can tell us about the world, let's press on. You seem to be happy to drop the existence of statues – they're the things that are *façon de parler*. But why not Lump? Why don't you think that fails to exist? Why are you suspicious about Oscar and not the lump of metal constituting the poor thing?

B: I can't see any reason to be worried about Lump.

A: Here's a reason. Before Lump was made in the alloy factory, there were all the bits of metal in the ground – the tiny chunks that would eventually be stuck in a pot and melted together. Those chunks existed millions upon millions of years ago. But just as it's weird to think that merely shaping Lump into a statue makes Oscar, isn't it weird to think that bringing those bits together makes Lump?<sup>3</sup>

B: There's a difference: those bits of Lump are a far distance away from one another, scattered around the Earth's mantle. That's reason enough to think there's a difference. Only when they get close to one another do they come to make up Lump.

A: Does distance really make a difference? After all, it's not like those bits *touch*. Physics has taught us that nothing really ever touches anything else – we're just made up of scattered little bits of things. So the only difference between the bits of metal before they come to make up Lump and after is how far they are from one another. And at what distance do they come to make up Lump? It seems to me that only your anthropocentric viewpoint makes you think it's when they get close in the alloy making factory. Imagine some creature that was tinnier than you, and correspondingly thought that even in the alloy making factory they weren't close enough together. Or imagine some creature that was enormous and thought that even when the bits were in the ground they *were* close enough. How are you going to say you're right instead of them?

B: Fine, maybe I should be suspicious of Lump as well. Let's say none of these things exist: no Lump, no Oscar. All that exists, fundamentally speaking, are tiny little atoms – the kinds of tiny, little things that physicists are interested in. Now it's nearly as good as true that Oscar came into existence a week ago because a bunch of those tiny little atoms were arranged 'statue wise'. That's the fundamental fact that, like the rotation of the Earth grounding the truth of the sun moving behind the elm, grounds it being appropriate to say that Oscar was made last week.

A: My my, how quickly you make strong statements! Now there are so very few objects! But you have two problems. One: what if there aren't any tiniest little atoms? What if physics finds that the particles keep getting smaller and smaller, and just as quarks make up atoms, something makes up quarks, and whatever makes those things up are made up by other things? Surely science could find that the world was like that?<sup>4</sup> Problem two: you no longer exist! And did Descartes not say *je pense, je suis*? Surely if you know anything, you know you exist and that this theory is wrong for it's not false (nor nearly as good as true!) that you exist; it is, definitely and in every way, true!<sup>5</sup>

B: I'm going to get some ice cream, and think on it.

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A: So?

B: So, okay, I admit that I should think there are two objects in the same place at the same time. Maybe that's not too bad, actually. You've fooled me – I thought it sounded stupid only because I was thinking that you were suggesting something like two statues in the same place at the same time, or a ghost passing through a wall, or something ridiculous like that. But it turns out that it's not so odd, and it only sounds odd at first – when you tell me the two things in the same place at the same time are Oscar and Lump, that doesn't sound too bad.

A: If only it were that easy! This is what James McAvoy said on the set of *Wanted* and I quickly showed it to be wrong.

B: How so?

A: If the two objects have different properties we have a problem because we'd have thought that the properties of an object were 'grounded' in its parts. If they've both got exactly the same parts at the same time, then how is it that they have different properties?<sup>6</sup>

B: You mean like properties about how long they've existed for?

A: Exactly! And why stop there: they also differ with regards to what we *could* do to them (for we can crush Lump without destroying it but not Oscar without destroying it); they differ with regards to the *aesthetic* (after all, a statue, but not a lump of stuff, can be Romanesque); and they differ with regards to the *sortal* (for Lump isn't a statue whilst Oscar isn't a mere lump!). If they've both got the same parts, why don't they share all of these properties?

B: Can't I just stamp my foot and say that there's no reason to think they do?

A: Not at all. Imagine I had a machine that duplicated objects – what goes in one end has a duplicate come out of the other. To duplicate it, all you need to do is copy its parts in exactly the same arrangement – once you've done that, you've made the duplicate. There's nothing more to making one thing the same as another than ensuring the duplicate has the same sort of parts in exactly the same arrangement (just ask a forger!). After all, it makes no sense to think that I could put a 1' tall statuette in one end, copy all of its parts and have those parts in exactly the same arrangement, but get, say, a 2' tall statuette out of the other!

B: Agreed...

A: And we're agreed that Lump and Oscar have exactly the same parts, in exactly the same arrangement, for how could it be otherwise? So they must have the same properties, but they don't! We have a problem still.

B: I see the force of your objection, but I wonder if it's true that they actually have the same parts.

A: Really? Isn't every tiny bit of britannium that is part of Oscar also a part of Lump? And every bit that's a part of Lump a part of Oscar too?

B: Doubtlessly so. But there are more parts that might matter than the tiny little bits of alloy. For instance, Oscar, but not Lump, has a leg and a head as a part. Only statues have fingers and heads, lumps of metal do not. So Oscar has parts that Lump does not.<sup>7</sup>

*A:* But can't we go again? Call the head of Oscar 'Head'. Oscar has the property of having Head as a part, whilst Lump does not.

*B:* Correct.

*A:* But what, then, explains Oscar having that property and Lump not having a property?

*B:* Only Oscar has an ear as a part, and Lump does not – to have Head as a part, you have to have an ear as a part.

*A:* But can't we just go again? And say that you need to explain why Oscar has that ear and Lump does not?

*B:* Certainly. But my explanation will just be that Oscar has an earlobe as a part, and not an ear. And so you'll ask me again about the earlobe and so on. I know what you think: eventually I'll get to really small parts if I carry on like this, say the molecules of alloy. And with molecules of alloy there is no smaller part that seems reasonable for a statue to have rather than a lump, because – unlike with Head and ears and so forth – it seems plausible that Lump *does* have the alloy molecules as a part. But I can avoid that. Earlier you objected to me that there might be no tiniest particle, and that we can have a chain of parts, each smaller than the last, and that the chain is never-ending. But if that's true then why can't I say similar? So say I: there is a never ending chain of things like Head, an ear, an earlobe, a sculpted curve of an earlobe etc., and this infinite chain is such that each part is a part of Oscar and not Lump, and that the chain never, ever reaches the molecules. It never 'bottoms out' at the molecules.

*A:* But it has to bottom out doesn't it? You have to eventually arrive at the atoms?

*B:* No. It's like the number series from 1 to 2. There is a chain of numbers, each less than the last, stretching from 2 down to 1, but that chain is infinitely long without including 1 (for there is an infinite number of numbers bigger than 1 and smaller than 2). Oscar is like 2, the atoms are like 1, and the chain of Head, the ear, the earlobe etc. are like all the numbers in between. There is an infinite chain of them, explaining why the slightly bigger part is a part of Oscar and not Lump, and each being part of Oscar (and not Lump) explained by a slightly smaller part being a part of Oscar (and not Lump) and so on.

*A:* Touché. That's a sophisticated response. But maybe there's a better objection. You say that Head cannot be part of a lump?

*B:* I do.

*A:* Imagine I slice the head off of Dujardin's Oscar – I'd do it for you, as an act of spite, if you asked – and then, as the police come looking for it, I hide it in a lump of play-dough that the kids have. Is it then not part of the lump? And if it can be a part of that lump of play-dough, why not a part of lumps like Lump?

*B:* Is it not just inside the lump of play-dough? It's weird to say that the britannium metal can be part of play-dough.

*A:* What if I had a pot of lukewarm britannium bubbling away and I plunged it in – just cool enough for it to slide into the middle of the cooling contents, but not hot enough to melt Head. When the pot cools we'll have a lump of britannium with Head still inside – cannot it not be a part of that lump like any other blob of britannium?

*B:* Maybe that's a problem. I'm tired of this, let's go to bed.

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*A:* Before we turn off the light, aren't you going to ask?

*B:* Ask what?

*A:* What my answer is?

*B:* Ah, of course – go on then.

A: I spoke to Ron Howard about his new film, *The Perdurantist*, and he says that we can think of objects as being 'spread out in time' – so we're not just extended in the three dimensions of space but we're also extended along the dimension of time as well. You end up being extended across 'spacetime', not just 'space'.<sup>8</sup>

B: Sounds reasonable. But how does that help?

A: Well now Lump is extended across spacetime from a period six months ago, whilst Oscar is extended only from a point a week ago. So they aren't in the same place – the places they occupy are different, as Lump's is longer – in time, if not in space – than Oscar's.

B: Ah, but I think there's a problem. Now they're the wrong shape.

A: What do you mean?

B: Well imagine there were only two dimensions of space, rather than three, to make it easier (I hear Woody Allen is doing an adaption of Edwin Abott's *Flatland* novel in which exactly this scenario plays out). If the creatures in flatland were each circles which grew in size then, when we imagine them extended across time as you want us to do, they won't be a circle they'll be a cone! So it is with Oscar. He's not statue shaped, as that's just his shape *in space*. Once we accept what you say, and that poor Oscar is stretched out in time as well, he won't have *that* shape anymore, and will instead have some weird, funky, four-dimensional shape. Just as the flatlander stretched out in time ends up being a cone, rather than a circle, Oscar won't be statue shaped as *that* shape is three dimensional, not the four that Oscar now is!

A: True enough. So Oscar, and Lump (and all the sequels, including you and me) all have funny four dimensional shapes rather than the three dimensional shapes that we thought we had.

B: Isn't that a deal breaker?

A: Not at all! Think about how we might talk about how an object is versus how it is *at a certain place*. For instance, where your hand is, you're hand shaped, and where your hand is you have five fingers, even though you are human shaped and have ten fingers. How you are *at a place* is different from how you are *'full stop'*.

B: How does that help?

A: Just as we distinguish between how something is, and how it is at a place, we can distinguish between the shape Oscar is, and the shape Oscar *is at some time*. Sure, Oscar has a funny shape, but *at any given time* Oscar is statue shaped. When we zoom in and concentrate just on any given time that Oscar exists at, he's statue shaped as we ignore the rest of him just as we ignore the rest of you when I ask how many fingers you have where your hand is. We could also say the same about the growing circle on Flatland: it's conical, but at any given time it's a circle. That is, it's circular at every time, but conical 'full stop'.

B: And would this work for all properties? So I'm not good looking, but only good looking at certain times – good looking now, but not when I'm old and wrinkly?

A: I dare say you'll be good looking then, too. But, yes, that's right. You're good looking at a time, but not good looking 'full stop'.

B: And it works for being intelligent? Or knowing who the Queen of England is? Or what weight you are?

A: Sure. No-one is intelligent, no-one knows who the Queen is, no-one has a weight – you only have those things at any given time.

B: And relations? Like being married?

A: Nothing is married full stop – what would that even mean? People are only married at certain times.

B: And having parts? Do I have certain atoms as a part or merely as a part at a time?

A: The latter!

B: Aha! Then I have you! And Ron Howard!

A: Why?

*B:* Because you said to me earlier that the properties something has at a time are fixed by the parts it has at that time – that was why I retreated to saying that Head was a part of Oscar and not of Lump to explain exactly that, and from there it seemed my position was sunk.

*A:* That's right – your argument was as sunk as Erin Moran's career.

*B:* But now it seems that, even given your own theory, Lump and Oscar *do* have the same parts at the same time. For take that time when they both exist, as they do now on Dujardin's unworthy shelf. What are they like, at that time and there in particular? Oscar has no weight full stop, but at this time he weighs 9 pounds; Oscar has no parts, but at this time he has lots of bits of britannium as parts. Lump has no weight, but at this time weighs 9 pounds; Lump has no parts, but at this time it has lots of bits of britannium as parts – the self same parts that Oscar has! So they *do* have the same parts at the same time, so how can *you* explain them having different properties?

*A:* Good point. What if I said that not only do they have parts at a time, they *do* have parts full stop – parts that end up differing between the two. We could imagine each slice of the four dimensional object corresponding to a part – a 'temporal part' if you like. It's almost as if objects are stretched out in time like a sausage is across space, and just as we can slice each bit of the sausage, we can slice each bit of the four dimensional object into slices. Each temporal part is, at the time the object exists at, as big as the object (and the same weight as the object at that time and so on), but that part exists for but an instant. So right now, lying next to you, is a temporal part of Angelina Jolie – it's not Angelina Jolie, just a part of the four dimensional worm that stretches across spacetime which is Angelina Jolie.

*B:* Comparing you to a sausage rather than a worm is nicer. In any case, how does this help?

*A:* Lump has more of those temporal parts than Oscar, as it exists longer.

*B:* Who cares about that? You never said that things had to have different parts full stop to have different properties, you said they had to have – at any given time – different parts. Remember what you said about monotonicity! You agree with me that Oscar and Lump have the same parts at the same time, and that they have different properties. Here you're just adding in some extra facts about the parts they have full stop, and adding that fact in doesn't seem to get around the original problem that two things with the same parts at the same time should have the same properties.

*A:* Au contraire. I have an objection, although it's getting late, and it's a hard objection to follow, so I shan't be upset if you don't follow it: I should say that two things can have different properties if any of their parts differ, whether they're the parts it has at that time, or the parts it has full stop.

*B:* That'll never work. If we make it so that any parts differing means they can have different properties, then I can say the same. Lump, but not Oscar, had parts six months ago – for Oscar didn't even exist back then! – so at least some parts differ. And if you say any parts differing can explain away Oscar and Lump's different properties, I've got what I need! If you get to say that having different parts full stop – where those parts nonetheless exist at another time – explains why Lump and Oscar are different, why can't I say that their having different parts at different times – where those parts nonetheless exist, and are had, at another time – explain why Lump and Oscar are different? I never need once mention things being extended in spacetime, or being four dimensional or what have you, in order to say exactly the same as you do to escape the problem.

*A:* So either both our theories fail or both of them work?

*B:* At this point, I'll take either!

*A:* I'll have a think. I've got a charity gig tomorrow to raise money for metaphysicians driven insane by the strain of thinking about this sort of thing – I'll ask them for their advice and help. Goodnight dear.

*B:* Goodnight.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See van Inwagen [1990: 98-114] for more on this.

<sup>2</sup> See Merricks [2001: 162-90].

<sup>3</sup> See van Inwagen [1990] and Markosian [2008] for more on issues about 'composition'.

<sup>4</sup> See Sider [1993] and Williams [2006] for more on this argument.

<sup>5</sup> See Olson [2007: 180-210] for more on this objection.

<sup>6</sup> A standard statement of this worry can be found in Burke [1992].

<sup>7</sup> See Wassermann [2002]

<sup>8</sup> See Sider [2001; 2008] for more on this view.

<sup>9</sup> For more on this philosophical issue in general, see Sider (2008), Conee and Sider (2005) and Wasserman (2013).