Andrew Brenner

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Appointments

Associate Professor, Hong Kong Baptist University, July 2026 - present

Assistant Professor, Hong Kong Baptist University, January 2020 - June 2026

Post-Doctor, Wuhan University, September 2019 - December 2019

Post-Doctoral Researcher, Metaphysical Explanation Research Project, University of Gothenburg, January 2018 - July 2019

Adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Notre Dame, August 2017 - December 2017

Post-Doctoral Teaching Scholar, University of Notre Dame, August 2016 - May 2017

Education

Ph.D. Philosophy, University of Notre Dame, 2016
Dissertation: *A Defense of Mereological Nihilism*
Committee: Peter van Inwagen (adviser), Anjan Chakravartty, Cian Dorr (external), Michael Rea

M.A. Philosophy, University of Notre Dame, 2013

B.A. Philosophy *(Magna Cum Laude, Honors)*, University of North Florida, 2011

Areas of Specialization and Competence

Metaphysics

Philosophy of Mind

Philosophy of Science

Philosophy of Religion

Ethics

Buddhist Philosophy

Publications

Books

3. *The Methodology of Metaphysics*. Cambridge University Press (Elements in Metaphysics). 2026

2. *Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing? The Fundamental Problem of Ontology*. Cambridge University Press. 2026

1. *Personal Ontology: Mystery and Its Consequences*. Cambridge University Press. 2024
Reviewed in: *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, *The Review of Metaphysics*

Journal Articles and Book Chapters

23. "Must Objects Which Undergo Fission Cease to Exist?" *Erkenntnis*. Vol. 91 (October 2026), pp.3567-3584

22. "Against Dismissivism." In *Philosophical Methodology After Carnap*, edited by Darren Bradley (Cham: Springer, 2025), pp.269-293

21. "Sense Perception and Mereological Nihilism." *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 74, Issue 1 (January 2024), pp.68-83

20. "Conditional Probabilities and Symmetric Grounding." *Philosophy of Science*. Vol. 90, Issue 4 (October 2023), pp.958-973

19. "Metaphysical Foundationalism and Theoretical Unification." *Erkenntnis*. Vol. 88 (April 2023), pp.1661-1681

18. "Theoretical Virtues and the Methodological Analogy Between Science and Metaphysics." *Synthese*. Vol. 201, Issue 2 (February 2023), pp.1-19

17. "Explaining Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing." *Erkenntnis*. Vol. 87 (August 2022), pp.1831-1847

16. "How to be a Mereological Anti-Realist." *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. 10 (2022), pp.83-119 (Runner-up, 2019 Sanders Prize in Philosophy of Religion.)

15. "Four-Dimensionalism, Eternalism, and Deprivationist Accounts of the Evil of Death." *Synthese*. Vol. 199, Issue 5-6 (December 2021), pp.13643-13660

14. "Mereology and Ideology." *Synthese*. Vol. 198, Issue 8 (August 2021), pp.7431-7448

13. "How Does God Know That 2+2=4?" *Religious Studies*. Vol. 57, Issue 2 (June 2021), pp.301-316

12. "Why Composition Matters." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 50, Issue 8 (November 2020), pp.934-949 (with Andrew Bailey)

11. "Rejoinder to Kris McDaniel." *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. 70, Issue 2 (April 2020), pp.565-569

10. "Ontological Pluralism, Abhidharma Metaphysics, and the Two Truths: A Response to Kris McDaniel." *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. 70, Issue 2 (April 2020), pp.543-557

9. "Easy Ontology, Application Conditions and Infinite Regress." *Analysis*. Vol. 78, Issue 4 (October 2018), pp.605-614

8. "Theism and Explanationist Defenses of Moral Realism." *Faith and Philosophy*. Vol. 35, Issue 4 (October 2018), pp.447-463

7. "Science and the Special Composition Question." *Synthese*. Vol. 195, Issue 2 (February 2018), pp.657-678

6. "Simplicity as a Criterion of Theory Choice in Metaphysics." *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 174, Issue 11 (November 2017), pp.2687-2707

5. "Mereological Nihilism and Personal Ontology." *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 67, Issue 268 (July 2017), pp.464-485

4. "What Do We Mean When We Ask 'Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?' " *Erkenntnis*. Vol. 81, Issue 6 (December 2016), pp.1305-1322

3. "Mereological Nihilism and Theoretical Unification." *Analytic Philosophy*. Vol. 56, Issue 4 (December 2015), pp.318-337

2. "Mereological Nihilism and the Special Arrangement Question." *Synthese*. Vol. 192, Issue 5 (May 2015), pp.1295-1314

1. "Aquinas on Eternity, Tense, and Temporal Becoming." *The Florida Philosophical Review*. Vol. 10, Issue 1 (2010), pp.16-24. (Note: published as award for winning the "2009 Florida Philosophical Association

Gerrit and Edith Schipper Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Philosophy Paper in a Four-Year College or University.")

Refereed Encyclopedia Articles

2. "Metaphysical Explanation." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* 2026. (with Anna-Sofia Maurin, Alex Skiles, Robin Stenwall, and Naomi Thompson) (significantly revised and updated version of article originally published in 2021)

1. "The Metaphysics of Composition." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* 2018.

Book Reviews

1. Review of Stephen Mumford, *Absence and Nothing: The Philosophy of What There is Not*. *The Philosophical Review*. Vol. 133, Issue 2 (April 2024), pp.202-205

Articles Written for a General Audience

3. "Why Anything Exists." *Aeon.* 12 November 2026. `https://aeon.co/essays/a-new-answer-to-why-there-is-something-rather-than-nothing`

2. "Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?" *Philosophy Now.* Issue 176 (October/November 2026), pp.14-16

1. "Making Progress on the Mystery of Existence." *Fifteen Eighty Four* (the blog of Cambridge University Press). 6 May 2026. `https://cambridgeblog.org/2026/05/making-progress-on-the-mystery-of-existence/`

Honors, Awards, and Grants

8. Hong Kong Baptist University Outstanding Research Output Award, 2023-2024 academic year

7. Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty Performance Award in Scholarly Work (Early Career Researcher), 2022

6. Hong Kong Research Grants Council Early Career Scheme (ECS) (HKD 150,000, approximately EUR 17,000 or USD 19,000): "The Mystery of Personal Identity." Project number: 22602521. Principal investigator. July 2021-June 2023.

5. Runner-Up, 2019 Sanders Prize in Philosophy of Religion

4. UNF 2011 Robert W. Loftin Prize for Outstanding Graduate in Philosophy, April 2011

3. UNF 2010 Philosophy Paper Prize for Outstanding Undergraduate Student Paper, April 2010

2. 2009 Florida Philosophical Association Gerrit and Edith Schipper Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Philosophy Paper in a Four-Year College or University, November 2009

1. UNF 2009 Philosophy Paper Prize for Outstanding Undergraduate Student Paper, April 2009

Under review: Hong Kong Research Grants Council General Research Fund (GRF) (HKD 201,000 requested, approximately EUR 23,000 or USD 26,000): "Philosophical Foundations of AI Moral Status." Reference number: 12605727. Principal investigator. 24 months. Decision expected in mid-2027.

Keynote and Invited Talks

29. Seminar, Department of Philosophy, Lingnan University. "Do Present AI Systems Have Moral Status?" September 2026

28. Method and Convergence: International Conference on Methodology of Philosophy, University of Helsinki. "The Role of Simplicity in Metaphysics." June 2025 (keynote)

27. Research presentation, Wuhan University. "Should We Expect There to Be an Explanation for Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing?" April 2025

26. Metaphysical Explorations: Mind, Powers, and Agency Conference, Sun Yat-Sen University Zhuhai Campus. "Personal Identity, Fission, and Arbitrary Pairing." November 2024

25. Joint Research Colloquium between Hong Kong Baptist University and Shanghai University. "On Some Proposed Explanations for Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing." November 2024

24. Research presentation, Center for Traditional and Scientific Metaphysics, National Taiwan University. "On Some Proposed Explanations for Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing." November 2024

23. Seminar, Institute of Philosophy of Mind and Cognition, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University. "The Personal Ontology of Mind Uploading." November 2024

22. The 2nd Hong Kong Metaphysics Conference, Lingnan University. "Should We Expect There to Be an Explanation for Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing?" October 2024

21. Personal Persistence and Personal Ontology Conference, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. "Personal Identity, Fission, and Arbitrary Pairing." June 2024

20. Presentation, School of Philosophy, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law. "Personal Identity, Fission, and Arbitrary Pairing." May 2024

19. Metaphysics Workshop, Wuhan University. "Is Nothing Really 'Simpler and Easier' Than Something?" May 2024

18. Analytic Metaphysics Workshop, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. "Is Nothing Really 'Simpler and Easier' Than Something?" September 2023

17. The Questions of Origins: Contemporary Science, Philosophical and Religious Perspectives, Hong Kong Baptist University. "Is Nothing Really 'Simpler and Easier' Than Something?" June 2023

16. Research Seminar in Theoretical Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Theory of Science, University of Gothenburg. "Is Nothing Really 'Simpler and Easier' Than Something?" May 2023

15. Monthly Department Research Colloquium in the Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University. "Is Nothing Really 'Simpler and Easier' Than Something?" April 2023

14. Research presentation, Center for Traditional and Scientific Metaphysics, National Taiwan University. "Personal Identity, Fission, and Arbitrariness." March 2023

13. Monthly Department Research Colloquium in the Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University. "The Buddha's Arguments For The Non-Self Doctrine" January 2022

12. Research Seminar in Theoretical Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Theory of Science, University of Gothenburg. "Personal Identity, Fission, and Arbitrariness." September 2021

11. Seminar in the Department of Philosophy, Lingnan University (with Hong Kong University and National University of Singapore). "Arguments Against Substance Dualism Transformed Into Arguments Against Our Being Composite Physical Objects." November 2020

10. Research Seminar in Theoretical Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Theory of Science, University of Gothenburg. "Presupposition Failure and Compatibilist Semantics in Ontology." September 2020

9. Monthly Department Research Colloquium in the Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University. "Arguments Against Substance Dualism Transformed Into Arguments Against Our Being Composite Physical Objects." September 2020

8. Wuhan University Lecture Series in Philosophy of Religion, Wuhan University. "How To Be A Mereological Anti-Realist." November 2019

7. Thinking About Theory Choice: A Wuhan-Leeds Workshop in Philosophy, Wuhan University. "In Defense of Theoretical Virtues." October 2019

6. Colloquium in the Department of Philosophy, the University of Hamburg. "Conditional Probabilities and Symmetric Grounding." May 2019

5. Research Colloquium in Theoretical Analytical Philosophy, Aarhus University. "Explaining Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing." November 2018

4. Metaphysical Explanation Workshop, Lund University. "Explanation and Simple vs Complex Accounts of Personal Identity Over Time." August 2018

3. Metaphysical Explanation Workshop, University of Gothenburg. "The Mereological Pairing Problem." September 2017

2. Metaphysics and Epistemology Workshop, University of North Florida. "Mereological Nihilism and Personal Ontology." September 2016

1. *Ellen C Wagner Lecture*, 16th Annual UNF Student Philosophy Conference. "Parfit On Free Will and Desert." March 2013

Other Conference and Workshop Presentations

14. Presentation, AI & Humanity Lab, University of Hong Kong. "Do Present AI Systems Have Moral Status?" September 2026

13. Ernst Mach Workshop X 2022: David Chalmers on Virtual Reality, Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences. "Uploaded Persons as Simulated Objects." July 2022

12. Society of Christian Philosophers Eastern Regional Meeting. "Arguments Against Substance Dualism Transformed Into Arguments Against Our Being Composite Physical Objects." January 2022

11. Society of Christian Philosophers Midwest Regional Meeting. "Arguments For Substance Dualism Transformed Into Arguments Against Substance Dualism." October 2021

10. Between Formal and Informal Methods in Philosophy Workshop, University of Warsaw. "Theoretical Virtues and the Methodological Analogy Between Science and Metaphysics." September 2021

9. The 2019 Swedish Congress of Philosophy, Umeå University. "Explaining Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing." June 2019

8. Wuhan University International Conference on Explanation in Philosophy, Wuhan University. "Explanation and Complex vs Simple Accounts of Personal Identity Over Time." May 2019

7. Eastern APA. "Living and Dying in Four Dimensions." January 2018 (accepted, not presented due to weather)

6. 'Nothing Over and Above' Workshop, University of Helsinki. "Mereological Laws, Ontological Innocence, and Theory Choice." August 2017

5. Pacific APA. "Theism and Explanationist Defenses of Moral Realism." April 2017

4. Pacific APA. "Composition and Personal Ontology." March 2016

3. Central APA. "Quantifier Variance and Ontological Deflationism." February 2015

2. Society of Christian Philosophers Eastern Regional Meeting. "Aquinas on Eternity, Tense, and Temporal Becoming." March 2010

1. Florida Philosophical Association Meeting. "Aquinas on Eternity, Tense, and Temporal Becoming." November 2009

Conference Comments

5. RoME: Nineteenth Annual Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, University of Colorado Boulder. Comments on "The Ethics of AI Data Centers" by Matthew Kisner and Dustin Sigsbee. August 2026

4. Research Colloquium in the Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University. Comments on "Pitting Naturalistic Leibnizian Monism against the Transcendentally Construed Principle of Sufficient Reason" by Lok-Chi Chan. March 2024

3. New Debates on Human Rights and East Asian Philosophical Traditions: Confucianism and Beyond, Hong Kong Baptist University. Comments on "Confucianism, Cognitive Disability, and Moral Status" by William Sin. January 2022

2. FraMEPhys/Gothenburg Conference on Metaphysical Explanation in Science, University of Birmingham. Comments on "The Problem of Meta-Causation" by David Mark Kovacs. January 2019

1. Metaphysical Explanation II: Unionism or Separatism, University of Gothenburg. Comments on "Grounding For Theists" by Einar Duenger Bøhn. February 2018

Teaching

Courses Taught

At Hong Kong Baptist University

Graduate Courses

Graduate Seminar (seminar for new Philosophy PhD students, co-taught with several other professors)
Fall 2026

Undergraduate Courses

Contemporary Analytic Philosophy
Fall 2026

Ethical Issues in the Contemporary World (general education)
Fall 2023

Philosophy, Morality and Society
Spring 2023

Metaphysics: Quest for Reality
Fall 2022, Fall 2025

Philosophy of Religion
Fall 2021, Fall 2024

Matters of Life and Death (general education)
Spring 2021 x 2, Spring 2022 x 2, Spring 2024 x 2, Spring 2025 x 2, Fall 2025, Spring 2026

Mind in Chinese Buddhist Philosophy
Fall 2020, Spring 2024

Happiness East and West (general education)
Spring 2020, Fall 2023 x 2

At the University of Notre Dame

Undergraduate Courses

Introduction to Philosophy
Fall 2017 x 3

Buddhist Philosophy
Spring 2017

Ethics
Fall 2016

Minds, Brains and Persons
Spring 2015

Graduate Student Supervision

WONG Kwing-Yui, PhD student, "Fore-Structure and As-Structure in Epistemic Practices: A Hermeneutical Approach to Hinge Epistemology" (primary supervisor), Fall 2026 - present

GO Ki Tsun, PhD student, "On Moral Judgements: A Dialogue between Non-Cognitivism, Realism and Parfit's Non-Metaphysical Cognitivism, with a New Hybrid Approach" (primary supervisor), Fall 2026 - present

ZHOU Congjia, PhD student, "Exploring potential conflicts between the methodological components of empirical research and the resulting scientific explanations" (co-supervisor, with Ahti-Veikko Pietarinen acting as primary supervisor), Fall 2024 - present

Graduate Theses Examinations

Internal examiner for MPhil thesis "Kant on Self-Consciousness and Self-Knowledge" (24 September 2026)

Undergraduate Final Year Honours Projects

Honours Project Adviser for twelve undergraduate projects (2021-2026), on topics including euthanasia, animal welfare, Bentham and Xunzi on punishment, the self in early Buddhism and Hinduism, and Hick's soul-making theodicy

Honours Project Second Examiner for fourteen undergraduate projects (2020-2026)

Service

Service to the Profession

Article referee (86 reports for 33 journals): *Acta Analytica*, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Analysis* x 6, *Analytic Philosophy* x 2, *The Asian Journal of Philosophy*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* x 5, *Croatian Journal of Philosophy*, *dialectica* x 2, *Disputatio*, *Ergo* x 3, *Erkenntnis* x 12, *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy*, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, *The Journal of Ethics*, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, *The Journal of Philosophy* x 3, *Kriterion*, *Manuscrito*, *Mind* x 3, *Noûs*, *Philosophers' Imprint*, *The Philosophical Quarterly* x 4, *The Philosophical Review*, *Philosophical Studies* x 9, *Philosophy*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Philosophy East and West*, *Religious Studies*, *Res Philosophica* x 2, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* x 2, *Synthese* x 12, *Theory of Science*, *Thought* x 2

Book referee for: Cambridge University Press x 2, Routledge

Conference referee for: FraMEPhys/Gothenburg Conference on Metaphysical Explanation in Science, University of Birmingham (January 2019); Metaphysical Explanation III, Lund University (January 2020)

Founding Member, Asian Society for Philosophy of Religion (Spring 2025 - present)

Hong Kong Baptist University

Ongoing:

Acting Programme Director for M.A. in Ethics and Public Affairs (August 2026 - January 2027)

Member of the Academy of Chinese, History, Religion, and Philosophy Programme Management Committee (August 2026 - January 2027)

MAEPA (M.A. in Ethics and Public Affairs) Committee, Department of Religion and Philosophy (August 2026 - Summer 2027)

Member of the Human (Non-Clinical) Research Ethics Panel (September 2026 - August 2028)

Member of the Research and Impact Committee, Department of Religion and Philosophy (Fall 2026 - present)

Academy of Chinese, History, Religion, and Philosophy Academic Advisor (Fall 2024 - present)

Member of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, Department of Religion and Philosophy (Spring 2020 - present)

Research Coordinator, Department of Religion and Philosophy (Fall 2020 - present)

Past:

Departmental Exchange Coordinator (Summer 2024 - Summer 2026)

Faculty Academic Advisor (Summer 2021 - Summer 2024)

Recording Secretary for the Arts Faculty Board (academic year 2020/21)

Speaker at the Faculty Research Workshops (2022, 2023) and an intradepartmental presentation (2023) on Research Grants Council Early Career Scheme applications

Speaker at JUPAS Virtual Consultation Week (2022), the Information Day for Undergraduate Admissions (2022) and orientation talks for majors (2023-2026), introducing philosophy and explaining why it is worth studying

Interview panels for JUPAS and non-JUPAS Year 1 candidates (2021, 2025) and Outgoing Student Exchange Scholarships (2025, 2026)

University of Notre Dame

MAP (Minorities and Philosophy) Undergraduate Mentoring Program (Spring 2017, Fall 2017)

Community Outreach

Podcast discussion of my book *Why is There Something Rather than Nothing? The Fundamental Problem of Ontology* (`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nF4EWHDOLxs`) (August 2026)

Podcast discussion of my book *Personal Ontology: Mystery and Its Consequences* (`https://youtu.be/POPPECfkVko`) (April 2024)

Youtube video: "宗哲求其問- 哲學家分析日本動漫電影《攻殼機動隊》/What are We? Philosopher Analyses Japanese Anime "Ghost in the Shell"" (`https://youtu.be/SnrP4uYy7GM`). Part of the HKBU Department of Religion and Philosophy Youtube channel "Idea Series" on the philosophy of movies (August 2022)

Podcast discussion of my paper "Metaphysical Foundationalism and Theoretical Unification" (`https://youtu.be/_UApaPgOH9Y`) (July 2022)

Podcast discussion of my paper "How Does God Know That 2+2=4?" (`https://youtu.be/IOju0RqceQI`) (December 2021)

Podcast discussion of the special composition question (`https://youtu.be/CutCpqL6vNE`) (May 2018)

Last updated: November 26, 2026