

Andrew Brenner

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Appointments

Assistant Professor, Hong Kong Baptist University, January 2020 - present
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, June 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 series. Forthcoming
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*

Articles

23. "Must Objects Which Undergo Fission Cease to Exist?" *Erkenntnis*. Forthcoming

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.")

Other Publications

3. 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 [1791 words]
2. “Metaphysical Explanation.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2021. (with Anna-Sofia Maurin, Alex Skiles, Robin Stenwall, and Naomi Thompson)
1. “The Metaphysics of Composition.” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2018.

Conference and Colloquium Presentations

41. Method and Convergence: International Conference on Methodology of Philosophy, University of Helsinki. “The Role of Simplicity in Metaphysics.” June 2025 (invited, keynote speaker)
40. Research presentation, Wuhan University. “Should We Expect There to Be an Explanation for Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing?” April 2025 (invited)
39. Metaphysical Explorations: Mind, Powers, and Agency Conference, Sun Yat-Sen University Zhuhai Campus. “Personal Identity, Fission, and Arbitrary Pairing.” November 2024 (invited)
38. 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 (invited)
37. 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 (invited)
36. Seminar, Institute of Philosophy of Mind and Cognition, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University. “The Personal Ontology of Mind Uploading.” November 2024 (invited)
35. 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 (invited)
34. Personal Persistence and Personal Ontology Conference, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. “Personal Identity, Fission, and Arbitrary Pairing.” June 2024 (invited)
33. Presentation, School of Philosophy, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law. “Personal Identity, Fission, and Arbitrary Pairing.” May 2024 (invited)
32. Metaphysics Workshop, Wuhan University. “Is Nothing Really ‘Simpler and Easier’ Than Something?” May 2024 (invited)
31. Analytic Metaphysics Workshop, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. “Is Nothing Really ‘Simpler and Easier’ Than Something?” September 2023 (invited)
30. The Questions of Origins: Contemporary Science, Philosophical and Religious Perspectives, Hong Kong Baptist University. “Is Nothing Really ‘Simpler and Easier’ Than Something?” June 2023 (invited)
29. 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 (invited)
28. 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 (invited)
27. Research presentation, Center for Traditional and Scientific Metaphysics, National Taiwan University. “Personal Identity, Fission, and Arbitrariness.” March 2023 (invited)
26. Ernst Mach Workshop X 2022: David Chalmers on Virtual Reality, Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences. “Uploaded Persons as Simulated Objects.” July 2022
25. Society of Christian Philosophers Eastern Regional Meeting. “Arguments Against Substance Dualism

- Transformed Into Arguments Against Our Being Composite Physical Objects.” January 2022
24. 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 (invited)
23. Society of Christian Philosophers Midwest Regional Meeting. “Arguments For Substance Dualism Transformed Into Arguments Against Substance Dualism.” October 2021
22. Between Formal and Informal Methods in Philosophy Workshop, University of Warsaw. “Theoretical Virtues and the Methodological Analogy Between Science and Metaphysics.” September 2021
21. 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 (invited)
20. 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 (invited)
19. 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 (invited)
18. 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 (invited)
17. Wuhan University Lecture Series in Philosophy of Religion, Wuhan University. “How To Be A Mereological Anti-Realist.” November 2019 (invited)
16. Thinking About Theory Choice: A Wuhan-Leeds Workshop in Philosophy, Wuhan University. “In Defense of Theoretical Virtues.” October 2019 (invited)
15. The 2019 Swedish Congress of Philosophy, Umeå University. “Explaining Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing.” June 2019
14. Wuhan University International Conference on Explanation in Philosophy, Wuhan University. “Explanation and Complex vs Simple Accounts of Personal Identity Over Time.” May 2019
13. Colloquium in the Department of Philosophy, the University of Hamburg. “Conditional Probabilities and Symmetric Grounding.” May 2019 (invited)
12. Research Colloquium in Theoretical Analytical Philosophy, Aarhus University. “Explaining Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing.” November 2018 (invited)
11. Metaphysical Explanation Workshop, Lund University. “Explanation and Simple vs Complex Accounts of Personal Identity Over Time.” August 2018 (invited)
10. Eastern APA. “Living and Dying in Four Dimensions.” January 2018 (accepted, not presented due to weather)
9. Metaphysical Explanation Workshop, University of Gothenburg. “The Mereological Pairing Problem.” September 2017 (invited)
8. ‘Nothing Over and Above’ Workshop, University of Helsinki. “Mereological Laws, Ontological Innocence, and Theory Choice.” August 2017
7. Pacific APA. “Theism and Explanationist Defenses of Moral Realism.” April 2017
6. Metaphysics and Epistemology Workshop, University of North Florida. “Mereological Nihilism and Personal Ontology.” September 2016 (invited)
5. Pacific APA. “Composition and Personal Ontology.” March 2016
4. Central APA. “Quantifier Variance and Ontological Deflationism.” February 2015
3. *Ellen C Wagner Lecture*, 16th Annual UNF Student Philosophy Conference. “Parfit On Free Will and

Desert.” March 2013 (invited)

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

Invited Commentaries

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

Primary Instructor

At Hong Kong Baptist University

Ethical Issues in the Contemporary World

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

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

Spring 2020, Fall 2023 x 2

At the University of Notre Dame

Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2017 x 3

Buddhist Philosophy

Spring 2017

Ethics

Fall 2016

Minds, Brains and Persons

Spring 2015

Graduate Student Supervision

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)

Honours Projects

Honours Project Adviser: “Assessing Hume’s Account on Space as a Contribution to Constructive Empiricism” (Fall 2025 - Spring 2026); “Towards Eudaimonia: A Perfectionist Argument For Vegetarianism and Animal Welfare” (Fall 2024 - Spring 2025); “John Hick’s View on Soul-Making Theodicy” (Fall 2023 - Spring 2024); “Hong Kong’s Policies on Wildlife Trade: Assessing Their Impact on Animal Conservation” (Fall 2023 - Spring 2024); “Knowing Beyond Sense and Reason: Yogic Perspective of Consciousness” (Fall 2023 - Spring 2024); “Views on Euthanasia Legalization from Virtue Ethics Perspective” (Fall 2023 - Spring 2024); “Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and the Existence of God” (Fall 2022 - Spring 2023); “A Critical Analysis of Public Health and Animal Ethics on Killing Hamsters for Health Policies in Hong Kong” (Fall 2022 - Spring 2023); “The Concept of Self in Early Buddhism and Hinduism” (Fall 2022 - Spring 2023); “Almighty Gods in Crime Scenes and on Screen: Discourse Analyzing the Baudrillardian Simulacra of the Law Enforcement in Hong Kong Crime News and Movies” (Fall 2022 - Spring 2023); “The Justice of Punishment – Comparing Bentham and Xunzi” (Fall 2021 - Spring 2022); “Stepping Into Semi-Vegetarianism” (Fall 2021 - Spring 2022)

Honours Project Second Examiner: “Transcendence of the Body: Advaita Vedanta and the Spiritual Understanding of Physicality” (Spring 2026); “Is the Zombie Argument Against Physicalism?” (Spring 2026); “A Philosophical Investigation on the Thickness of John Rawls’ Veil of Ignorance” (Spring 2025); “A Critical Examination on Peter Singer’s Views on the Right to Die, Euthanasia, and Suicide” (Spring 2025); “Analysing Attack on Titan Through Camus’s Concept of Absurdity” (Spring 2025); “The Agama Sutras: A Buddhist View of Love” (Spring 2024); “Analyzing ‘Elden Ring’ Through the Theory of Implicit Religion” (Spring 2023); “Jason Brennan and the Obligation to Resist State Injustice” (Spring 2022); “A Critical Analysis on How Shelly Kagan Counts Animals” (Spring 2022); “Concerning the Promotion of Animal Rights and Ethics in Hong Kong” (Spring 2021); “The Buddhist Understanding of the Psychological Dimension of Depression” (Spring 2021); “A Critical Evaluation of the Metaethics and Metaphysics of David Gauthier’s Contractarianism” (Spring 2020); “The Argument From Miracles: A Case Study on the Resurrection of Jesus in Recent Research” (Spring 2020); “Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing? An Analysis of the Views of Kant and His Critics” (Spring 2020)

Teaching Assistant

At the University of Notre Dame

God and the Good Life. Summer 2017 (online course)

Medical Ethics. Fall 2014

Paradoxes. Spring 2014

Introduction to Philosophy. Fall 2013, Fall 2012

Philosophical Theology. Spring 2013

Honors, Awards, and Grants

8. Hong Kong Baptist University Outstanding Research Output Award, 2023-2024 academic year
7. Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty/School/the Academy of Visual Arts Performance Award in Scholarly Work (Early Career Researcher), 2022
6. Hong Kong Research Grants Council Early Career Scheme (ECS) (HKD 150,000 [approximately USD 19,318]): "The Mystery of Personal Identity". Project number: 22602521. 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

Service

At Hong Kong Baptist University

- Founding Member, Asian Society for Philosophy of Religion (Spring 2025 - present)
- Academy of Chinese, History, Religion, and Philosophy Academic Advisor (Fall 2024 - present)
- Departmental Exchange Coordinator (Summer 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)
- Interview panel member of non-JUPAS year 1 candidates (March 2025)
- Interview panel member for Outgoing Student Exchange Scholarships (January 2025, January 2026)
- Faculty Academic Advisor (Summer 2021 - Summer 2024)
- Speaker at orientation talk for Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics majors at Hong Kong Baptist University, introducing philosophy and explaining why it is worth studying (22 September 2023, 27 September 2024, 26 September 2025)
- Speaker at an intradepartmental presentation regarding advice for Hong Kong Research Grants Council Early Career Scheme grants applications (19 April 2023)
- Speaker at Information Day for Undergraduate Admissions (2023 Entry), about what students study when they study philosophy (22 October 2022)
- Speaker at JUPAS Virtual Consultation Week (2022 Entry) (26 May 2022)
- Speaker at the Faculty Research Workshops 2022, 2023 – presentations regarding my successful Hong Kong Research Grants Council Early Career Scheme grant (28 March 2022, 27 March 2023)
- Interview panel member of Jupas Year 1 candidates (Summer 2021)
- Recording Secretary for the Arts Faculty Board meetings (academic year 2020/21 and the 1st Arts Faculty Board meeting, 2021/22)

At the University of Notre Dame

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

Referee Service

Article referee for: *Acta Analytica*, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Analysis* x 5, *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 2, *Kriterion*, *Manuscrito*, *Mind* x 3, *Noûs*, *Philosophers' Imprint*, *The Philosophical Quarterly* x 3, *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)

Last updated: May 5, 2026