

Juan Carlos González

Department of Philosophy
University of California, San Diego
9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA, 92093-0119

<https://juancarlosphilosophy.com/>
jcg050@ucsd.edu

Areas of Specialization and Competence

- **AOS:** History of Modern Philosophy (esp. Kant, Latin American, Post-Kantian Continental)
- **AOC:** Aesthetics, Social Philosophy (focused on race and ethnicity), Ancient Greek Philosophy

Dissertation

- **Title:** “Beyond Mechanism: Rethinking Kant’s Philosophy of Nature with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*”
- **Committee:** Clinton Tolley (chair), Eric Watkins, Monte Johnson, Lucy Allais (Johns Hopkins University), Karen Ng (Vanderbilt University), Page DuBois (UC San Diego Literature)
- **Short Abstract:** My dissertation defends a non-mechanistic interpretation of Kant’s philosophy of nature. Inspired by the picture of nature in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, most readers align Kant with Descartes and Spinoza, who claim that we can know organisms and non-mechanistic causal structures have no place in nature. To these mechanistic readers, Kant banishes teleology from nature. To moderate mechanists, because we cannot know whether there is teleology in nature and we can demonstrate that mechanism applies to nature, Kant pushes us to believe that any seemingly non-mechanistic natural products will eventually be explained in mechanistic terms. To strong mechanists, Kant gives us the tools to know that there is no room for teleology in nature. Frogs, trees, dogs, and beetles only superficially differ from clocks, trains, and other inanimate objects, for the deepest causal mechanisms driving both kinds of being are the same. My non-mechanistic interpretation rejects this trend by arguing that Kant urges us to believe organisms exist in nature. Belief in this context is a firm, positive, and voluntary attitude that aligns with and serves a subject’s interests and ends, and that has implications for the subject’s rational action, assertion, and deliberation. Kant’s stated goal in the *Third Critique* is to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature. I show that, if we do not adopt my interpretation, Kant cannot achieve this goal.

Education

- **Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy**, The University of California, San Diego (UCSD), expected Spring 2024
- **M.A. in Philosophy**, The New School for Social Research (NSSR), 2017
- **B.A. (with honors) in English Literature**, minor in Philosophy, Xavier University, 2014

Publications

1. González, Juan Carlos (Forthcoming). “A revised existentialist look at the Americans.” Recipient of the 2023 Inter-American Philosophy Award. *The Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*.
2. González, Juan Carlos (Forthcoming). “La revolución kantiana de Antonio Caso”, in *Los argumentos filosóficos fundamentales de las transformaciones de México*. Mexico City, MX: Universidad Panamericana.

Research Articles in Progress

(Drafts available upon request)

- “Believing in organisms: Kant’s non-mechanistic philosophy of nature”, *under review*
- “Walking the path of taste: Kant’s aesthetics and early 20th-century Mexican politics”, *under review*
- “Beyond positivism and anti-positivism: José Martí’s philosophies of education and race”
- “Did Kant Care About Aristotle? On §§72-73 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*”
- “From organisms to God: A non-mechanistic reading of the Methodology of the *Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment*”
- “Three Inter-American perspectives on the US Latino: Martí, Locke, and Uranga”

Awards & Honors

(All essay prizes are accompanied by a brief description of the prize and the title of the prize-winning paper.)

- **Nominated to APA Graduate Student Council, Fall 2023**
American Philosophical Association
- **Oga Po’Geh Prize, June 2023**
American Society for Aesthetics
 - **Description:** Awarded to the best paper on Latinx and/or Native American indigenous art practice and cultural thought submitted to the annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain Division of the American Society for Aesthetics
 - **Paper Title:** “On Kant, Vasconcelos, and the role of aesthetics in 20th century Mexican politics”
- **Center for Philosophical Studies Best Graduate Essay Prize Award, May 2023**
Lamar University Center for Philosophical Studies and the American Society for Aesthetics
 - **Description:** Awarded to the best graduate student essays presented at the 39th Annual Rocky Mountain Meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics
 - **Paper Title:** “On Kant, Vasconcelos, and the role of aesthetics in 20th century Mexican politics”

- **Irene H. Chayes Travel Grant, May 2023**
The American Society for Aesthetics
- **The Inter-American Philosophy Award, March 2023**
Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy
 - **Description:** The Committee on Inter-American Relations presents the Inter-American Philosophy Award to the best submitted paper concerning Latin American, Latino/a, or indigenous philosophies across the Americas that is presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy.
 - **Paper Title:** “A revised existentialist look at the Americans (or what Simone de Beauvoir should have learned from the Mexistentialists)”
- **Center for Hellenistic Studies Translation Scholarship, Winter 2023**
University of California, San Diego
- **GPSA Travel Grant, Winter 2023**
University of California, San Diego
- **Summer Graduate Teaching Scholar, Summer 2022**
University of California, San Diego
- **The Arts and Humanities Dean’s Travel Award, Summer 2018**
University of California, San Diego
- **Competitive Travel Stipend, Summer 2018**
Universität Bonn
- **Invited to the 8th International Summer School in German Philosophy, Summer 2018**
Universität Bonn
- **Provost’s Scholarship, 2014 - 2016**
The New School for Social Research
- **Wentersdorf Award for Excellence in the Study of Shakespeare, 2014**
Xavier University

Presentations

Upcoming presentations

- A paper on Kant’s philosophy of nature and its post-Kantian reception (title tbd), International Kant-Congress, Bonn, Germany, September 2024
- “Inter-American perspectives on the US Latinx: Martí, Locke, and Uranga,” 2024 Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, Boston, MA, March 2024
- “Schiller in Mexico” (provisional title), APA Central Division Meeting, New Orleans, LA, February 2024

- “José Martí on education and race,” UCSD FiloMex Lab, December 2023

Past presentations

- “Did Kant Care About Aristotle? On Sections 72-73 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,” History of Philosophy Roundtable, UCSD, November 2023
- “On Kant, Vasconcelos, and the role of aesthetics in 20th century Mexican politics,” Rocky Mountain Meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics, Santa Fe, NM, July 2023
- “Kant’s doctrine of the organism and the threat of organic materialism,” Berkeley-Stanford-Davis Graduate Conference, Palo Alto, CA, April 2023
- “Leaving room for life: Kant and the inorganicism challenge” (invited talk), APA Pacific Division Meeting, San Francisco, CA, April 2023
- “A revised existentialist look at the Americans (or what Simone de Beauvoir could have learned from the Mexistentialists)” presented at
 - the 2023 Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, Denver, CO, March 2023
 - UCSD FiloMex Lab, Winter 2023
- “How Kant’s definition of purposiveness explodes his concept of the concept,” History of Philosophy Roundtable, UCSD, Fall 2022
- “On Kantian themes in the philosophy of Antonio Caso,” UCSD FiloMex Lab, Winter 2022
- “Hilos kantianos en la filosofía de Antonio Caso,” Universidad Panamericana, Mexico City, Mexico, Fall 2021
- “Kant’s conception of life,” History of Philosophy Roundtable, UCSD, Spring 2021
- “Kant on psychology,” Kant Roundtable, UCSD, Spring 2020
- “Places and Space: A (Re)Reading of the First Metaphysical Exposition of the Concept of Space,” UCSD Graduate Student Conference, April 2018
- “Cognitive Impenetrability and the Nonconceptual Contents of Perception,” Louisiana State University’s Graduate Student Conference, April 2016
- Response to Professor Stephen R. Grimm’s “The Ethics of Understanding,” New York City’s Wittgenstein Workshop, April 2016

Teaching Experience

As instructor of record

- University of California, San Diego
 - PHIL 28: Ethics and Society II, Winter 2024
 - PHIL 33: Philosophy Between Reason and Despair, Summer 2022

- Grossmont College
 - PHIL 160: Latin American Philosophy, Spring 2023 (*online*)
 - PHIL 160: Latin American Philosophy, Spring 2022

As teaching assistant (* = *as guest lecturer in addition to TA*; + = *online instruction*)

- University of California, San Diego (Department of Philosophy)
 - PHIL 10: Introduction to Logic, Spring 2018, Summer 2019, Fall 2021, Fall 2023*
 - PHIL 27: Ethics and Society I, Summer 2020, Winter 2021+, Summer 2023+
 - PHIL 28: Ethics and Society II, Fall 2017, Winter 2018, Summer 2018, Spring 2021+
 - PHIL 31: Introduction to Ancient Greek Philosophy, Fall 2019, Fall 2022*
 - PHIL 32: Philosophy and the Rise of Modern Science, Winter 2020*
 - PHIL 35: Philosophy of the Americas, Winter 2020*, Winter 2023*
 - PHIL 155: Mexican Philosophy, Fall 2020+
 - PHIL 173: Topics in Bioethics, Summer 2020+
- UCSD Revelle Humanities Writing Program
 - HUM 1: Foundations of Western Civilization, Winter 2019
 - HUM 2: Rome, Christianity, and the Middle Ages, Spring 2019
 - HUM 5: Modern Culture (1848 - Present), Spring 2020+

Service

- Interim organizer, UCSD Mexican Philosophy Lab, Fall 2023
- Grad Peer Mentor, UCSD Philosophy, 2021 & 2023
- Session chair for "Women Philosophers in 19th Century German Philosophy", Pacific APA, April 2023
- Anonymous reviewer, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing
- Co-organizer and submission reviewer, UCSD Modern Philosophy Conference, Fall 2021 - Spring 2022
- Advisory board and admissions committee, Summer Program for the Advancement of Women in Philosophy, UCSD, 2017 - 2019
- Organizer, PhD Application Workshop, NSSR, Fall 2016

Languages

- Spanish: fluent
- German: reading, speaking
- Ancient Greek: reading
- French: reading

Academic Translations

- Aspe Armella, Virginia. 2021. "The Renaissance Reception of Nahua Paideia in the Writings of Bernardino de Sahagún: An Aesthetic Approach to Religion" *Religions* 12, no. 12: 1070.
Translated from Spanish to English
- "Riendo, Llorando, Ira, Euthumia, Melancolia, y la anécdota Demócrito y Heráclito," a talk presented by Monte R. Johnson, Spring 2023
Translated from English to Spanish (funded by the UC San Diego Center for Hellenistic Studies Translation Scholarship)
- Aspe Armella, Virginia. *Aristotle and New Spain* [Tentative Title]. Forthcoming with Routledge Press. Original monograph: Aspe Armella, Virginia. *Aristóteles y Nueva España*. Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, México. 2018. 453 págs.
Translated from Spanish to English
- In *Divergent Scholasticism: Interpreting Nature, Society, and Philosophy in Early Modern Europe and the Americas*, eds. Abel Aravena Zamora and Nicola Polloni. Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group (forthcoming):
 - "José de Acosta's Epistemological Revision of Scholasticism" by Francisco Castilla Urbano
 - "Towards a philosophy of 16th century New Spain: Voyages, colleges, libraries, and the case of Alonzo de la Veracruz" by Virginia Aspe Armella
 - "Heavenly Bodies and American Enlightenment: The Case of Manuel Antonio Talavera" by Abel Aravena Zamora and Francisco Cordero Morales

Translated from Spanish to English

Professional Affiliations

- American Philosophical Association
- American Society for Aesthetics
- Karl Jaspers Society of North America
- North American Kant Society

Pedagogical Training

- HyFlex Training, Grossmont College Winter-Spring 2023
- Distanced Teaching Certification, Grossmont College, granted Spring 2022
- College Teaching Training, UCSD Teaching + Learning Commons, granted Spring 2022
- Diversity in Online Teaching, UCSD, granted Spring 2020
- Humanities Pedagogy Seminar, UCSD Revelle Writing Program, Fall 2018

Professional References

- Clinton Tolley (UCSD), Professor of Philosophy, ctolley@ucsd.edu
- Manuel Vargas (UCSD), Professor of Philosophy, mrvargas@ucsd.edu
- Eric Watkins (UCSD), UC Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, ewatkins@ucsd.edu
- Monte R. Johnson (UCSD), Professor of Philosophy, monte@ucsd.edu
- Lucy Allais (Johns Hopkins University and University of the Witwatersrand), Professor of Philosophy, lallais1@jhu.edu
- Karen Ng (Vanderbilt University), Associate Professor of Philosophy, karen.ng@vanderbilt.edu
- Nick Riggle (University of San Diego), Associate Professor of Philosophy, nriggle@sandiego.edu

Teaching Reference

- June Yang (Grossmont College), Philosophy Instructor, june.yang@gcccd.edu

With the advent of Newtonian physics in the Early Modern period, philosophers become increasingly preoccupied with the question of whether nature can be explained exclusively in mechanistic terms. While some (e.g., Descartes and Spinoza) affirm that nature is wholly determined by mechanism, others (e.g., Leibniz) contend that nature is non-mechanistic in important respects. Inspired by the picture of nature in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, most readers align Kant with Descartes and Spinoza, who deny that there is room for non-mechanistic forms of causality in nature.

To all mechanistic readers, Kant banishes teleology from nature. To *moderate* mechanists, because we cannot know whether there is teleology in nature and we can demonstrate that mechanism applies to nature, Kant pushes us to believe that any seemingly non-mechanistic natural products will eventually be explained in mechanistic terms.¹ To *strong* mechanists, Kant gives us the tools to know that there is no room for teleology in nature.² Frogs, trees, dogs, and beetles only superficially differ from clocks, trains, and other inanimate objects, for the deepest causal mechanisms driving both kinds of being are the same.

I offer a novel *non-mechanistic* reading of Kant's doctrine of nature. The key to my reading is appreciating that we can believe organisms exist in nature. Belief is a firm, positive, and voluntary attitude that aligns with and serves a subject's interests and ends, and that has implications for the subject's rational action, assertion, and deliberation. Kant's stated goal in the *Third Critique* is to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature. I show that, if we fail to form such a belief, Kant cannot achieve this goal.

Part I analyzes the key concepts involved in my reading. In **Chapter 1**, I define purposiveness as a causality according to which inner principles, not outer principles, determine their effects. I show that this notion of purposiveness is general enough to extend to all kinds of purposiveness encountered in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and I contrast it with the dominant conception of the term that depicts it as a "lawfulness of the contingent." **Chapter 2** analyzes the terms nature, mechanism, organism, and life. Most importantly, I show that the very concept of nature does not exclude the possibility of there being purposiveness in nature.

Part II turns from conceptual analysis to the questions of whether and how there is purposiveness in nature. In **Chapter 3** I consider the available answers to the question "Are there organisms in nature?" Most commentators argue that we merely judge that there are organisms in nature and that we can never know whether there really are. However, many of Kant's overt remarks about organisms contradict this standard line, revealing that this is not the *only* way to interpret him. In **Chapter 4**, I provide a close reading of the Antinomy of Teleological Judgment to show that Kant does not make organisms out to be merely a convenient fiction or a mental projection. **Chapter 5** contains a defense of my non-mechanistic interpretation of Kant's doctrine of nature. I first lay out various ways in which the text of the *Third Critique* plainly contradicts and complicates mechanistic interpretations of it before explaining how belief that there are organisms in nature is not only possible but justified.

Though Kant denies that we can cognize teleology in nature, we need not opt for a mechanistic construal of nature. A non-mechanistic reading makes better sense of Kant's remarks about the mechanical inexplicability of nature and certain natural products, revealing a much more nuanced understanding of nature in Kant than many have anticipated. Moreover, the non-mechanistic position makes sense of how human beings, which are not merely mechanistic actors, can exist in and influence nature. Ultimately, Kant does not affirm that mechanism gives us a complete picture of nature, for it cannot exhaustively explain the origins and the activities of organisms.

¹Hegel, Schelling, Henri Bergson, Helmuth Plessner, Henry Allison, Hannah Ginsborg, Paul Guyer, James Kreines, Karen Ng, John Zammito and Rachel Zuckert are a few significant philosophers in this camp.

²Jacobi, Goethe, Schopenhauer, Robert Richards, and Peter McLaughlin are a few significant strong mechanists.