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We Are All Inmates of Different Cages

Psycho-Cosmocide and the Two Cages of Civilisation

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Abstract

This paper advances the concept of Psycho-Cosmocide as a philosophical framework for understanding the dual confinement of living beings under cosmic and civilisational conditions. It distinguishes between the *First Cage*, the non-negotiable finitude shared by all living things through birth, embodiment, mortality, ecological dependency, and time, and the *Second Cage*, a historically constructed hierarchy of worth produced by civilisation. It argues that this hierarchy comes to be mistaken for the order of reality itself through processes of naturalisation and intergenerational transmission. Bringing this distinction into dialogue with philosophical reflections on confinement and finitude from Plato, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Camus, while engaging decolonial and settler-colonial scholarship, the paper argues that the Second Cage is neither natural nor inevitable, but historically constituted and therefore contingent. It further identifies one of its principal defence mechanisms as the continual deferral of confrontation to an imagined future redeemer, whether prophetic, political, technological, or civilisational. Rather than replacing concepts such as genocide, epistemicide, coloniality, or ideology, Psycho-Cosmocide is proposed as an integrative framework for explaining how perception, cosmological standing, and civilisational reproduction become organised as a single historical process. The paper concludes that recognising this structure is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for resisting it.

Keywords: Psycho-Cosmocide; decolonial philosophy; coloniality of power; civilisational critique; Indigenous ontology; West Papua; eschatological deferral.

Two Cages

Start with an image rather than an argument. Imagine a herd of cattle standing in the rain beside a highway, eating, moving and breathing, wholly absorbed in the moment. The animals do not know that a truck is approaching. They are unaware of the industry that breeds them or the market that priced them before birth. Human observers register something before this image: pity, discomfort and habitually unfinished recognition. This paper begins by finishing it. Every organism operates within conditions that it neither chose nor fully perceives, nor can escape birth, embodiment, mortality, ecological dependency and the one-directional current of time. These are not punishments, but the terms on which existence is granted, regardless of any question of justice. This is the first cage — the cosmic condition that is shared by all living things, including cattle and philosophers. Civilisation has long consoled itself with the idea that language, reflective consciousness and self-awareness elevate humans out of this shared condition, or at least its most degrading implications. According to this view, to see the bars is already to have transcended them. The present paper argues that this consolation mistakes description for escape. Being able to see a structure is not the same as being able to stand outside it. A prisoner who can draw an accurate map of the prison remains, in the relevant sense, imprisoned. The ability to represent one's situation does not necessarily indicate liberation from it — a distinction that the paper revisits throughout, as it is precisely at this juncture that the concept of Psycho-Cosmocide emerges.¹

Psycho-Cosmocide is proposed as the name of a specific philosophical process rather than as an unnecessary neologism. It identifies a compound structure in which a shared cosmological condition of finitude is overlaid by a historically constructed hierarchy of worth, and that hierarchy is then naturalised so thoroughly that those who live within it — human and non-human alike — lose the capacity to recognise it as historically constructed. Psycho-Cosmocide therefore names a structure rather than a mood: not a passing psychological state but a durable arrangement that reorganises perception, cosmological standing, and civilisational reproduction. The sections that follow develop this structure, distinguish it from existing philosophical accounts of confinement and absurdity, and explain why it should not be mistaken for a form of fatalism.

Some words must be said about the coinage itself, since a neologism in philosophy should justify its introduction rather than merely embellishing an existing argument. The compound combines 'psyche' the dimension of perception, self-understanding and recognition — with 'cosmos', the total order within which a life is situated, via the suffix '-cide', which marks not only physical extermination, but also the extinction of a form of existence within that order. This term is necessary because the existing vocabulary is insufficient to describe the pattern in question: 'genocide' names the destruction of a people, but not the prior process by which their cosmological standing was downgraded. Similarly, 'epistemicide', a term discussed below, names the destruction of ways of knowing, but not the full structure that makes such destruction seem, to its perpetrators and often to its victims, like the correction of an error rather than the commission of a crime.

Psycho-Cosmocide is proposed to fill this gap — a term that encompasses both perception and cosmological standing, which must be recognised as a whole rather than in several partial vocabularies, if it is to be identified and rejected in future.

Why Psycho-Cosmocide?

Before proceeding, the author owes the reader a direct answer to a question that will occur to any philosopher familiar with this literature: why not simply use the terms 'coloniality', 'epistemicide', 'ideology' or 'genocide', each of which already describes something similar to what is being discussed here? This question deserves a more thorough response than the brief explanation provided above, since a neologism that cannot precisely describe what existing vocabulary fails to capture has not earned its place, however elegant its construction.

Each existing concept is powerful within its own domain, and none is being displaced here. Rather, each is being asked what it can and cannot register when considered in isolation. The concept of genocide refers to the destruction of a people, but it is based on physical and demographic facts, not the initial process by which a people's status in the cosmological order is lowered — a process that usually precedes, enables and outlasts the physical violence it makes possible. In Santos' formulation, epistemicide names the destruction of ways of knowing with real precision. However, it is a concept anchored to knowledge systems as its unit of analysis and does not, by itself, specify the perceptual dimension — what this paper calls 'psyche' — by which such destruction is perceived by perpetrators and often victims as the correction of an error rather than a crime. Quijano's concept of 'coloniality of power' and Mignolo's concept of the 'colonial matrix' provide the main theoretical framework for Psycho-Cosmocide: an explanation of how a racialised hierarchy became infrastructural, organising labour, subjectivity and knowledge long after the formal empire had disappeared. However, coloniality is, by design, an account of persistence at the institutional and civilisational level. It does not, in itself, provide a phenomenological explanation as to why the hierarchy becomes imperceptible to those living within it. Ideology, in its classical and Gramscian senses, comes closest of the four to offering such an account, since it too concerns the securing of consent. Yet, typically, ideology critique presupposes a subject who holds a belief that could, in principle, be argued against — namely, a false consciousness that can be corrected through better arguments or exposure. This paper makes a stronger claim, which, if correct, is more troubling: the naturalisation described here is not a matter of holding a false belief, but of losing the capacity to recognise that a belief was ever in question. This is a difference in kind, not merely in degree, and it is a difference for which existing vocabulary has no single term.

Two further candidates deserve direct engagement here, since they sit closer to Psycho-Cosmocide's terrain than the four already discussed. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics describes the power to decide who may live and who must die, and the political and infrastructural machinery — camps, checkpoints, the calculated exposure of some populations to premature death — through which that decision is exercised.²

This is a genuine anticipation of what this paper calls the downgrading of cosmological standing: necropolitics names the outcome of that downgrading with rare precision. However, it is, by design, an account of sovereign power and its instruments; it does not, in itself, offer a phenomenological explanation of how those exposed to premature death, or those who expose them, come to perceive the arrangement as anything other than an exercise of power over life. Judith Butler's account of the psychic life of power comes closer still, since it argues that subjection is not merely imposed upon a pre-existing psyche from outside but is constitutive of it: the subject is brought into being through the very power that subordinates it, which is why that power cannot simply be refused from a position external to the self it has formed.³ This is the clearest existing anticipation of what this paper calls managed perception. Where it stops short is at the level of cosmological standing: Butler's account concerns the formation of the subject as such, and does not distinguish, as Psycho-Cosmocide does, between the shared finitude of the first cage and the constructed hierarchy of the second, nor does it extend the analysis to the non-human. Taken together with the four concepts already discussed, necropolitics and the psychic life of power confirm rather than undermine the case for a further term: each supplies one dimension of the pattern — the machinery of exposure to death, or the formation of the subject under power — that, on the argument advanced here, must be held together as one structure to be recognised at all.

'Psycho-Cosmocide' is the term coined to describe what happens when three things that existing vocabulary treats separately — the reorganisation of perception, the downgrading of cosmological standing, and the machinery of civilisational reproduction across generations — are considered together as a single, self-sustaining pattern rather than being distributed across several partial accounts. No existing term is designed to do this simultaneously, which is why the pattern has been so difficult to name and has remained unnamed for so long. The table below illustrates this schematically.

Concept	Primary target	What the concept leaves unexplained
Genocide	The physical destruction of a people	The prior downgrading of cosmological standing that makes destruction feel, in advance, like something other than a crime
Epistemicide	Systems of knowledge and ways of knowing	The perceptual process by which the destruction of a knowledge system comes to feel, to perpetrator and victim alike, like correction rather than commission
Coloniality of power	The institutional and infrastructural persistence of racialised hierarchy after formal empire	The phenomenological claim: why the hierarchy stops being perceptible as a hierarchy at all, rather than merely persisting as an institution
Ideology / hegemonic common sense	Belief content that secures consent to an arrangement of power	The difference in kind, not degree, between holding a false belief and losing the capacity to perceive that a belief was ever in question
Necropolitics	The sovereign power and infrastructure that exposes some populations to premature death	The perceptual process by which that exposure comes to be experienced as an exercise of power over life, rather than as the downgrading of cosmological standing that licenses it
Psychic life of power	The formation of the subject through subjection to power	The distinction between shared cosmic finitude and historically constructed hierarchy, and the extension of that structure to non-human life
Psycho-Cosmocide	Perception, cosmological standing, and civilisational reproduction, held together as one pattern	Proposed as an integrative framework rather than a partial explanatory concept.

This comparison is not offered as a claim to originality for its own sake, nor as a replacement for the concepts on which this paper relies. Its purpose is to show something more than a gap between them: each of the following fields — phenomenology, ontology, decolonial theory, political theory and philosophy of history — has, from within its own vocabulary, described adjacent facets of a single structure, but without a framework designed to hold those facets together as one whole. Psycho-Cosmocide's contribution is that integrative framework: not another entry alongside coloniality, epistemicide and ideology, but an account of how the perceptual, ontological, historical and political dimensions of the second cage form one structure, while each illuminates only one dimension of the same phenomenon. Whether this integration succeeds is ultimately for readers to judge, but the concept should be evaluated on that claim.

This First Cage/Second Cage distinction is developed into a fuller seven-part architecture in Yamin Kogoya, “The Given and The Constructed: Seven Existential Cages of Psycho-Cosmocide Theory,” Working Paper No. 29, and into a parallel seven-cage ontology in “The Seven Existential Cages: A Speculative Decolonial Ontology,” Working Paper No. 3, both *Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series* (PhilPapers, 2026).⁴

The First Cage: The Finitude We Cannot Escape

The first cage requires only attention, not argument. No organism chooses the circumstances of its own birth. The fish does not choose the water it depends on, nor does it foresee the net that may end its life. The bird does not consider winter to be a fundamental feature of its world but simply endures or fails to endure it. Human beings share this condition entirely: birth is imposed prior to consent; embodiment is inherited rather than chosen; mortality is certain rather than probable; and the direction of time forecloses every attempt at reversal. What distinguishes the human condition is not exemption from these terms, but rather a capacity — partial, unevenly distributed and philosophically ambiguous — to conceptualise them.

This representational capacity has given rise to one of the oldest and most persistent temptations in the history of thought: the inference from awareness of a condition to authority over it. This inference is not obviously valid. Plato’s allegory of the cave provides a classic example of this. The prisoners, bound from childhood, mistake the shadows on the wall for reality. One prisoner is dragged into the light, suffers, adjusts and can eventually look upon the sun itself.⁵ Read as an epistemological parable, the allegory promises escalating stages of clarity, culminating in a vision of the Good. However, reading against the argument of this paper, it is at least as interesting for what it does not resolve: the freed prisoner has left one cave, but nothing in the account rules out the possibility that the outside world is simply a larger enclosure whose walls have not yet come into view. Plato’s ascent narrative assumes a final, stable ground — the Form of the Good — beyond which no further cave is possible. Psycho-Cosmocide rejects this assumption with regard to the first cage, while insisting that a different assumption is warranted with regard to the second cage, as will become clear.

The first cage imposes no hierarchy of its own, which is noteworthy. Mortality does not distinguish between the cattle standing in the rain and the philosopher observing them. Ecological dependency binds them both regardless of species, and the current of time carries each towards an ending neither can negotiate. Any hierarchy that appears to separate them — the philosopher’s presumed superiority due to reason, language or soul — belongs to the second cage, not the first, according to this paper. This is a significant claim rather than a trivial observation: it suggests that the common philosophical tendency to treat non-human life as subject only to necessity while treating human life as subject to both necessity and justice introduces a second-cage distinction into what is presented as a first-cage observation. Cosmic finitude, when properly described, offers no such foothold.

Therefore, the first cage is not the object of ethical complaint in itself. Cosmic finitude is not an injustice because injustice presupposes a choice that was withheld by a capable agent, and no such agent is responsible for mortality, embodiment or ecological dependency. The first cage is the condition of the game, not a foul committed within it. This distinction is important because much of the despair in response to Psycho-Cosmocide is actually misguided: it is a demand for the cosmos to answer for terms it did not negotiate and cannot renegotiate. The proper object of complaint lies elsewhere: in the civilisation that was built inside the first cage and then presented as if it were the cage's own architecture.

The Second Cage: The Hierarchy Civilisation Built

It is necessary to define the term 'civilisation' before it is used, since it carries much of this paper's argumentative weight and cannot be left to accrue meaning by usage alone. Throughout this text, civilisation refers not to organised society as such, but to historically institutionalised systems that classify, rank and reproduce differential worth — of humans and other forms of life — based on a combination of religious authority, political power, wealth, knowledge claims, genealogy, memory, symbols, stories and myths. These systems naturalise the resulting hierarchy so thoroughly that it appears to those living inside it as the order of things, rather than a historically produced arrangement among others. Thus defined, civilisation is not synonymous with Western modernity, the colonial empires that provide the most extensively documented examples in this paper, or organised human society in general. Western modernity and its colonial expansion are treated as the most well-evidenced and consequential example of this pattern on the scale that this paper is concerned with. This is why the argument draws heavily on decolonial theory. However, the term is not restricted conceptually to this example. The discussion of industrial animal agriculture below is partly intended to demonstrate the same classification logic operating in a domain wider than any single civilisation. When the paper states that civilisation has constructed, naturalised or developed something, this refers to the process of institutionalised and naturalised ranking, not to organised human life in general. The second cage belongs to history rather than the structure of the cosmos. This distinction is pivotal to the entire argument. Civilisation did not merely organise human life within the confines of finitude; it created a second enclosure within the first and presented it as the natural order of things. Existence was divided into two categories: civilised and savage, saved and damned, fully human and diminished or provisional, sacred or protected species and raw material, certified knowledge and superstition, heresy or primitivism.

This definition should not be read so broadly that it collapses into a claim that any differentiation of social role or status whatsoever constitutes a second cage; that reading would trivialise the term by making it true of virtually every society that has ever existed, including many that this paper has no interest in indicting. What distinguishes a second cage from ordinary, contestable social differentiation is not hierarchy as such but the joint operation of the three processes examined below — naturalisation, transmission and reproduction — such that the hierarchy ceases to be recognised

as a hierarchy at all and instead is lived as the shape of reality itself. A status distinction that remains visible, arguable and revisable within a society, however unequal, is not yet a second cage in the sense intended here; it becomes one only once these three processes have jointly done their work of concealment.

The second cage is not a speculative construction. Its historical architecture has been documented extensively within decolonial and settler-colonial scholarships, although often under different conceptual vocabularies. Aníbal Quijano's concept of the colonality of power provides one of the clearest accounts of this process. He argues that the classification of the world's population through a hierarchy of race became an organising principle that reordered labour, subjectivity and knowledge following the conquest of the Americas. Over time, this classificatory logic embedded itself so deeply within institutions that it outlasted the formal colonial administrations that first established it.⁶ Sylvia Wynter builds on this, arguing that a specific, historically contextualised conception of 'Man' — namely, the Western, bourgeois, secular-rational one — gradually replaced the concept of 'humanity' itself. Consequently, the parochial began to masquerade as the universal, while other forms of human existence were demoted.⁷ Of the four, Wynter's account comes closest to naming the phenomenological register this paper calls 'psyche': the process by which the colonised are not merely ranked but ontologically redefined as diminished forms of life, such that the ranking ceases to register as a ranking at all. Even so, that literature remains anchored to the human case and to the colonial encounter specifically; Psycho-Cosmocide's contribution is to extend the same structure to the non-human, discussed below, and to identify deferral as one of its principal defence mechanisms, neither of which this literature, on its own terms, sets out to do.⁸ Patrick Wolfe's analysis of settler colonialism provides a complementary perspective: rather than being a discrete historical event, settler colonialism is a persisting logic of elimination. This logic is not merely oriented towards the extraction of labour, but also towards replacing a prior society with a new one that is built on the same territory.⁹ Writing from within the anti-colonial struggle rather than about it from a distance, Frantz Fanon described the colonial world as being divided into distinct zones, governed by different rules of visibility and violence.¹⁰

These accounts, drawn from various archives and theoretical frameworks, converge on the same structural claim that this paper makes: that a manufactured order of value was constructed and embedded in religion, law, philosophy, science, the economy, education, language and imagery until it became indistinguishable from natural law. People ceased to ask who had created the hierarchy because they could no longer perceive it as such — only as the way things are. Walter D. Mignolo refers to this deep infrastructural layer as the 'colonial matrix of power', a substrate that continues to organise knowledge, existence, and governance long after the explicit political machinery of empire has disappeared.¹¹ Boaventura de Sousa Santos names the resulting cognitive process 'epistemicide': the systematic destruction of ways of knowing that accompanied — and, in his view, constituted — the physical destruction of peoples.¹²

Unlike the first, the second cage admits of a genuine ethical complaint because it was built by identifiable historical agents pursuing identifiable interests and because alternatives were foreclosed by force rather than cosmic necessity. The entire argument of Psycho-Cosmocide hinges on this distinction: the first cage is shared equally and without culpability, whereas the second cage was constructed unequally and is sustained by ongoing compliance. Treating the hierarchy of civilisation as an extension of cosmic finitude, rather than recognising the difference between the two cages, is one of the most effective operations of the second cage, since it recruits fatalism appropriate to the first cage in defence of a structure that has no comparable claim to inevitability.

How the Second Cage Reproduces Itself

If the second cage were simply imposed by force and recognised as such, it would be far less durable. Its distinguishing feature is that, to those inside it, it does not feel like a cage at all. Rather, it feels like civilisation, like the given order and the reasonable arrangement of things. This is the sense in which the virus metaphor is used carefully rather than merely for effect. The term is used heuristically rather than biologically: no claim is made of agency, intention or pathology in the organic sense, and nothing in the argument depends on the second cage possessing anything like a biological life of its own. The metaphor borrows only a narrower causal dynamic from virology: a process that conceals its own operation from the system through which it operates, such that the host's inability to detect it is part of how it succeeds. In this interpretation, infection signifies not injury, but a self-concealing causal dynamic whose primary symptom is the host's inability to recognise that infection has occurred.

This dual character — a structure that was constructed by identifiable historical agents and that subsequently sustains itself with diminishing need for any single agent's continued intervention — is not a contradiction but the mechanism's most important feature. Civilisation does not merely provide the setting in which the second cage operates; it manufactures, incubates and sustains it, and it is precisely this transition from manufacture to self-sustaining incubation that explains how a structure born of identifiable interests comes to operate, in its mature form, without requiring any particular actor's ongoing intention.¹³ Ethical complaint therefore attaches most directly to the structure's construction and to the ongoing choice to inhabit it uncritically, rather than requiring that each act of transmission be traced to a culpable individual will.

Three processes sustain this concealment. The first is naturalisation, whereby a constructed hierarchy is encoded into domains such as religion, law, science and the economy, which carry independent claims to authority. This lends legitimacy to the hierarchy. Michel Foucault's account of disciplinary power is relevant here, although it is not a theory of colonial hierarchy itself. He describes how modern power operates less through prohibition than through the production of norms that are so pervasive that people police themselves, mistaking a historically produced arrangement for an objective standard of health, sanity or productivity.¹⁴

The same process can be applied to Psycho-Cosmocide to explain how a racialised and civilisational hierarchy could come to be perceived as an empirical description of relative capacity rather than as a historical artefact that requires justification.

The second is transmission: the passage of the hierarchy from host to host across generations, primarily through language and stories encountered before critical thinking has developed. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's argument about the politics of language is instructive in this regard: the imposition of a colonising language as the medium of thought and education does not merely provide an additional means of communication but also redefines the relationship between a people and their own means of self-definition. This is because the language of instruction carries within it an entire cultural cosmology, which is presented as neutral and universal.¹⁵ A child raised in this language does not first learn about hierarchy and then accept it. The hierarchy is present in the very categories available for thought from the outset, before any moment at which acceptance or refusal could occur.

The third factor is reproduction under economic dependency, where the organisation of material survival ensures that compliance with the hierarchy becomes a prerequisite for continued life. This converts living beings — both human and non-human — into units of productivity, treating anything that resists conversion as waste. This is where Psycho-Cosmocide's diagnosis extends beyond the human case, since the same logic that classified certain peoples as beneath full consideration is continuous with the logic that treats non-human life as raw material. In contrast, Robin Wall Kimmerer's account of reciprocal, gift-based relationships between human communities and the living world offers a working demonstration that the hierarchy is not a natural feature of human relations with the non-human world, but rather one particular historical configuration among many others.¹⁶

Let us return briefly to the cattle with which this paper began. Industrial animal agriculture provides a particularly clear example of the third process because its victims cannot engage in their own naturalisation through language or narrative. Consequently, the process operates on them solely through economic and infrastructural arrangements: breeding schedules, price curves and slaughter timetables that determine the value and end of a life before it has even begun. The moral gravity of this situation is not reduced by the animals' inability to understand it. In fact, their lack of potential complicity isolates the process from the complications that arise in the human case, where language always raises the question of whether the host is reproducing the hierarchy. This non-human example demonstrates the economic logic of the second cage operating in its purest form, uncomplicated by any question of the victim's consent, participation or resistance.

The distinction between Kimmerer's reciprocal economy and the extractive logic of industrial agriculture is also the distinction this paradigm elsewhere formalises as Cosmobian and Synthobian modes of being—worlds generated by relationality and reciprocity against worlds generated by extraction, production, and consumption.¹⁷

Together, naturalisation, transmission and reproduction constitute what this paper terms '*managed perception*'.

This term has been chosen in deliberate preference to the clinical language of psychosis, as the latter carries a particular psychiatric meaning that this paper neither intends nor wishes to borrow. Managed perception describes a civilisational condition, not a clinical diagnosis of individuals, in which perception has been systematically organised to prevent the recognition of its own structuring. The tragedy this produces is not confined to the historical record. Entire species have been extinguished; languages silenced; and coherent accounts of the relationship between consciousness and cosmos — entire cosmologies — suppressed, ridiculed, or absorbed. The verb tense is important here: the processes described above are not artefacts of a completed past, but ongoing operations, which is why the diagnosis is offered as philosophy rather than history.

Four Philosophers and the Two Cages

Psycho-Cosmocide does not claim to be the first philosophical account of confinement. Its relationship with four canonical figures — Plato, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Camus — is worth clarifying, since each of them provides a partial anticipation of the diagnosis, but none of them make the central distinction. As discussed above, Plato's cave anticipates the structure of the second cage strikingly: the prisoners mistake the constructed shadows for reality. The shadows are cast by artefacts that are carried past a fire by unseen agents — in other words, the illusion is manufactured, not natural.¹⁸ A dedicated study applies this same reading of the allegory directly to a specific colonial case, treating the cave itself as the manufactured environment and the shadow figures projected on its wall as a colonised elite presented back to their own people as models of realised humanity.¹⁹ From the standpoint of this paper, what the allegory lacks is any suggestion that the ascent out of the cave might terminate in a larger, outer enclosure. While accepting Plato's diagnosis of manufactured illusion, Psycho-Cosmocide rejects his confidence in a final, stable vantage point beyond all caves. Nietzsche's concept of the human being as a rope stretched between animal and Übermensch — a bridge rather than a destination — captures the dual nature of humanity proposed here. Humanity is positioned mid-passage, defined by what it is moving away from and towards, rather than by any fixed identity.²⁰ Yet Nietzsche's concept of 'overcoming' is oriented towards a future figure who has not yet arrived. This paper identifies this future-oriented 'overcoming' as one of the characteristic defences of the 'second cage' when it hardens into a doctrine of deferral, rather than remaining a spur to present transformation as it does in Nietzsche. No account of the first cage can ignore Martin Heidegger, whose analysis of Dasein predicts its structure with a precision that previous figures cannot match. 'Thrownness' (Geworfenheit) precisely describes the condition that this paper refers to as the 'first cage': Dasein finds itself delivered into a world, a body and a history that it did not choose and cannot escape, and which are only disclosed to it after its arrival.²¹

Similarly, Being-toward-death treats mortality not as one fact among others, but as constitutive of the structure of existence itself. This forecloses any possibility of standing outside of finitude to survey it from a neutral vantage point, a view that this paper's account of the first cage shares without reservation. The concept of worldhood also aligns with the arguments presented in this paper: for

Heidegger, as for the author, there is no uninterpreted world to which meaning is subsequently added; Dasein always finds itself within a world that is already structured by significance.

However, the departure occurs in exactly the same place as the departure from Plato, Nietzsche and Camus: For all its power, Heidegger's analysis is focused on Dasein as a whole, treating the concealment of authentic existence beneath the anonymous 'they' (das Man) and everyday 'falling' (Verfallenheit) as a near-universal structure of existence, rather than a historically specific, unevenly imposed and identifiable hierarchy. Das Man is everywhere and the result of no particular person's actions; this paper argues that the second cage is somewhere in particular and was built by identifiable historical agents pursuing identifiable interests. While Heidegger's existential analysis explains why any Dasein is prone to lose itself in an inherited interpretation of the world, it does not distinguish between an interpretation that is simply part of the human condition and one that was constructed by a particular civilisation to the disadvantage of particular peoples. This is precisely the distinction on which Psycho-Cosmocide depends. Furthermore, this paper declines to adopt Heidegger's framework wholesale for the following reason: Heidegger's political involvement with National Socialism was not incidental to his philosophy of thrownness, world and historical destiny. A paper concerned with the naturalisation of civilisational hierarchy should draw on his analysis of finitude while remaining wary of his politics of belonging.

Camus provides the closest precedent. According to him, the absurd arises from the confrontation between the human demand for meaning and a universe that offers none. The distinctive response he commends is not suicide or philosophical evasion, but revolt: a clear and ongoing refusal to turn away from the confrontation while continuing to live within it.²²

Like Camus, Psycho-Cosmocide rejects both escape routes and insists that lucidity is the first step towards an adequate response. However, it departs from Camus in its refusal to locate the entire problem within the first cage. For Camus, the absurd is a confrontation between consciousness and a cosmos that is indifferent by its very nature. It does not distinguish between confronting cosmic silence and confronting a historically constructed hierarchy that merely wears the mask of cosmic necessity. Without this distinction, applying Camusian revolt risks directing lucid defiance at conditions that cannot be otherwise, while leaving undisturbed a structure that could be otherwise.

Against this backdrop, the contribution offered here is not the discovery of confinement as such — a discovery that philosophy has made and remade many times — but the insistence that confinement is not univocal. There are two cages, not one, and the philosophical task is to keep them analytically distinct, even though they are experienced as a single, seamless condition from within.

The Cage of Tomorrow: Bridges, Paradises and Saviours

If the second cage is sustained by naturalisation, transmission and reproduction, then at the level of collective imagination it is defended by a fourth process: *deferral*. Civilisation has rarely suggested that its hierarchy should be confronted directly.

Instead, it has proposed that confrontation be postponed pending the arrival of a bridge to a paradise on the other side or a saviour — prophetic, political or technological — who will carry out the confrontation on behalf of the present generation. Eschatological doctrines across traditions share this structural feature, regardless of their theological content: they locate final judgement, restoration or redemption at a point beyond the present, converting the present into a mere waiting room. Walter Benjamin identified a structurally identical pattern in secular history: a homogeneous, empty time in which redemption is endlessly awaited rather than seized, so that each present generation defers its own reckoning to the next.²³ This same structure also recurs in secular form in revolutionary ideologies that perpetually promise transformation on the horizon and in technological utopianism, which locates salvation in an as-yet-unrealised innovation. In each case, the formal function is identical: responsibility for confronting the present structure is displaced onto an imagined future agent. It is this displacement, rather than any particular content of the belief, that permits the present arrangement to continue undisturbed.

This is the sense in which Nietzsche's bridge, discussed above, can become exactly the mechanism that his own philosophy elsewhere resists. A bridge oriented towards continual self-overcoming in the present is one thing, but a bridge whose far shore is constantly pushed further away, always one generation ahead, is another matter entirely. The latter collapses into the very structure of deferral that this paper describes whether the vocabulary is religious, revolutionary or technological.

The material consequences of this deferral are not abstract. Forests continue to be cleared, land is farmed until it is exhausted, species are hunted to extinction, and mineral wealth is extracted at an accelerating cost to the ecological base on which all of the above ultimately depends. Each of these activities is justified, either explicitly or implicitly, by reference to a future good that the present sacrifice is said to be secure. Civilisation, in this context, resembles less a voyage towards a destination than a lost vessel whose crew has been convinced that admitting the loss would be more dangerous than continuing to fuel an engine driving towards nothing.

Technological utopianism deserves a mention of its own because, of the three variants, it presents itself as the least mystical and is, for this reason, often exempt from the critique applied to prophetic and revolutionary deferral. However, its structure is identical: an innovation that has not yet been realised and is always one step ahead in terms of research is proposed as the mechanism by which the costs of the current arrangement will finally be discharged without requiring the arrangement itself to change. Whatever its sincerity, the proposal functions to license the continuation of extraction in the present against a promissory note that can only be redeemed in an unspecified future. Like its prophetic and revolutionary counterparts, it has the practical effect of converting the present into a waiting room rather than a place of decision-making.

This is not simply a case of inheritance, however. Every generation that built its portion of the second cage did so with the knowledge available to them at the time, lacking the planetary, ecological and comparative historical data that is now accessible.

Responding to a qualitatively different moment — one in which the scale and reversibility of the damage are known with a precision no prior generation possessed — with the same inherited doctrines and institutional reflexes that produced the damage is not fidelity to tradition. It is repeating an error under conditions that no longer excuse it.

Naming the Cage

At this point, an objection arises: is psycho-cosmocide, for all its conceptual detail, anything more than an especially elaborate counsel of despair? This requires a direct answer, since the practical implications of the paper depend on it.

According to the account offered here, despair is only available to those who still believe that the second cage might have redeemed them had events gone differently — a belief that presupposes the very structure under critique. The argument of this paper is not that redemption failed to arrive, but that redemption, when understood as a future event awaiting a saviour, was never a coherent response to a historical rather than cosmic structure. Therefore, it was never going to arrive in that form, regardless of how events had unfolded. This is not fatalism, but rather the rejection of a false hope in favour of a different kind of action — one that is directed at the actual workings of the second cage rather than the deferred horizon that the machinery manufactures.

This different action begins with naming, and this is not merely a rhetorical claim. A structure that is not given a name cannot be the object of deliberate resistance because it cannot be reliably identified across its many local manifestations; each manifestation is mistaken for an isolated problem rather than being recognised as one expression of a general pattern. Paul Connerton's account of social memory is relevant here in an unexpected sense. He describes how societies forget through bodily habit and unreflective practice as well as through explicit erasure. This implies that recovering what has been forgotten requires more than correcting the historical record; it requires deliberately cultivating robust counter-practices that can survive the same ambient pressures that produced the original forgetting.²⁴ Naming the second cage is one such counter-practice: a term precise enough to be recognised the next time the pattern recurs in unfamiliar dress.

Glen Coulthard's account of Indigenous resurgence provides an alternative practical approach. He argues that politics centred on seeking recognition from the structures that caused dispossession perpetuate the conditions of that dispossession. In contrast, politics based on rebuilding Indigenous relationships with land, language and practices are not dependent on the coloniser's approval.²⁵ In the context of the current debate, this implies that rejecting the second cage is not primarily about petitioning the hierarchy to reform itself, but rather about rebuilding the cosmological and relational resources that the structure worked to dismantle, alongside the act of naming. This is a task for which West Papuan and Lani cosmological traditions, among many others, provide resources that the colonising order cannot offer from within its own framework.

A further question deserves a direct answer here: what, in principle, could count against this diagnosis? The claims made in this paper operate at two levels that are worth distinguishing precisely because they answer to different standards. At the level of the first cage, the claims track a broadly uncontested inventory of finitude, embodiment and ecological dependency shared across biological and phenomenological literatures, and are not offered as empirically contestable in the same sense as the second. At the level of the second cage, however, the claims are historico-structural and therefore answerable to evidence: a documented case in which a society's pre-existing cosmological and relational order persisted substantially intact alongside an imposed hierarchy — without naturalisation, intergenerational transmission or economic reproduction operating to conceal that hierarchy as such — would count as disconfirming evidence and would require the argument to be narrowed accordingly.²⁶ The paper does not claim that every documented hierarchy meets this description; it claims only that, where naturalisation, transmission and reproduction operate jointly and undetected, the pattern named here is present, and that West Papua, discussed below, is offered as a case in which this can be checked rather than assumed.

Before closing, it is important to acknowledge a further risk: that naming, pursued as an end in itself, can become a substitute for the practice it is meant to enable. This is a hazard to which academic treatments of structural harm are especially prone, since producing an increasingly precise vocabulary can feel like progress, even if there is no change in the conditions it describes. The safeguard against this outcome is not a disclaimer, but rather an ongoing commitment to practice: a name is only worthwhile if it remains accountable to those affected by the structure it describes and can become a practical resource rather than being retained as a credential. This paper is offered in that spirit, as one contribution to a longer collective project, rather than as its conclusion.

None of this guarantees that naming and rebuilding will succeed, and the paper does not claim otherwise. It claims only that the alternative to the second cage is not a bridge to guaranteed paradise, but rather an ongoing, uncertain process of perception and reconstruction, undertaken without the consolation of a future redeemer. In this respect, it is closer to Camus's lucid revolt than to any eschatology. However, it is directed at a target that Camus's own framework does not distinguish from the cosmos as such.

West Papua: Where the Second Cage Becomes Visible

For a philosophical diagnosis to prove its explanatory value, it must be able to shed light on concrete historical realities, rather than merely organising other abstractions. A framework that is ambitious enough to integrate phenomenology, ontology, decolonial theory, political theory and the philosophy of history risks becoming difficult to test, even where it is sound in principle, if it is left at that level of generality. Rather than retreating from the generality, it should be pressed against a case that is documented in enough independent, non-philosophical detail that the fit could, in principle, fail to hold. West Papua is offered as that case.

While the preceding sections have argued at an appropriate level of generality for a philosophical claim, Psycho-Cosmocide is not offered as a purely speculative framework. Its structural claims can be instantiated through documentation. West Papua, the western half of the island of New Guinea and homeland of the Lani people, among many others, provides an example where the aforementioned processes — hierarchy, naturalisation, transmission and deferral — can be traced through a well-documented historical sequence, rather than being asserted in the abstract.

In his history of Papuan nationalism, Richard Chauvel documents how competing colonial and post-colonial administrations — first Dutch and then Indonesian — constructed and contested a Papuan identity from the outside. The 1969 Act of Free Choice was conducted under conditions that left the territory's incorporation into Indonesia disputed in the eyes of many Papuans and independent observers.²⁷ This episode is instructive because it illustrates the general structure described in this paper: external agents made a decision about the status and worth of a people and then represented it as the expression of the people's own will through international recognition of the outcome. This representation has since become naturalised in much international discourse, even though it remains contested on the ground.

In her study of Papuan cultural and political expression, Camellia Webb-Gannon documents the subsequent operation of the processes of transmission and reproduction. She examines the suppression and reassertion of Papuan self-representation through music, the media and public symbols across five decades of contested rule. The study was conducted in conditions of restricted access for independent media and researchers, which shaped what could be documented and by whom.²⁸ This pattern closely matches the paper's account of transmission: successive generations encounter a public order of language, education, and administration organised around a hierarchy of belonging, prior to developing any capacity for critical distance. In this order, Papuan identity is treated as a problem to be managed rather than a status to be respected.

A fuller philosophical development of this same case, working through five further mythic and literary structures—Gilgamesh, Plato's Cave, Sisyphus, Ecclesiastes, and Waiting for Godot—and through the documented archetypes of the colonially-formed Papuan elite, is offered in Yamin Kogoya, "West Papua: Ontological Cages and Colonial Consent: Myth, Power, and the Colonial Structuring of Reality," Working Paper No. 4, *Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series* (PhilPapers, 2026).²⁹

This is not intended to replace empirical claims about a particular territory with the philosophical argument made above. The two are offered as distinct levels of analysis that, in this case, converge. The West Papuan case shows that the second cage, however abstractly it can be characterised, does not only operate in theory. It operates through named administrations, particular silences in international reporting and the tangible loss of language and land. A Lani reader need not be convinced that these are hypothetical. The framework developed here is offered as a vocabulary adequate for naming what such a reader already has older words for 'Wone' and the relationship between a people and their land and cosmos. This is one way in which the second cage was named long before Psycho-Cosmocide gave it this name.

Conclusion: Once the Cage Is Seen

This paper has made the case for distinguishing between two structures of captivity that are all too often experienced as a single, seamless condition. The first cage, comprising birth, embodiment, mortality, ecological dependency and the direction of time, is shared by all and is not the result of any wrongdoing; it is simply the condition of existence. The second cage is the hierarchy of worth constructed by civilisation. This hierarchy is naturalised as inevitable, transmitted through language and stories before the capacity for resistance emerges, and reproduced through economic dependency. It is therefore a legitimate object of ethical complaint and practical refusal. The philosophical tradition from Plato to Nietzsche, Heidegger and Camus anticipates elements of this diagnosis but fails to secure the distinction on which it depends. Each philosopher illustrates a different way in which the distinction can be lost: Plato does so by assuming a final vantage point beyond all cages; Nietzsche by presenting an idea of overcoming that can harden into deferral; Heidegger by presenting an analysis of being-in-the-world pitched at Dasein as such, and thus lacking the resources to distinguish the cosmic from the historically constructed; and Camus by locating the entire confrontation within cosmic indifference, rather than distinguishing cosmic indifference from historically constructed hierarchy. Decolonial and settler colonial theory provides what the traditional canon does not: a precise account of how the second cage was constructed, by whom, through which institutions and at what cost. This paper has drawn on this account rather than merely alluding to it. Once the distinction is seen, what remains is not despair or false consolation, but a sustained discipline of perception, regardless of the outcome. The cosmos imposed the first cage equally on all conscious life. Civilisation constructed the second cage and called it progress. This paper has not been written to console the reader, but rather to remove one of the second cage's more durable defences — the lie that it was a universal truth all along. Once that lie has been dispelled, a more challenging question emerges than any this paper has directly addressed: if a civilisation can build a cage, label it as the shape of existence and perpetuate this belief so effectively that its inhabitants mistake the bars for the sky, how can any generation be certain that it is not currently doing the same? And what could ever be sufficient to uncover the truth?

The second cage does not achieve its greatest power by imprisoning its inmates, but by becoming indistinguishable from the first.

Notes

1. This distinction between representing a condition and standing outside is developed throughout; see also the discussion of Albert Camus in "Precedents and Departures: Plato, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Camus" below.
2. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.
3. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 83–105.
4. This First Cage/Second Cage distinction is developed into a fuller seven-part architecture in Yamin Kogoya, "The Given and The Constructed: Seven Existential Cages of Psycho-Cosmocide Theory," Working Paper No. 29, and into a parallel seven-cage ontology in "The Seven Existential Cages: A Speculative Decolonial Ontology," Working Paper No. 3, both *Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series* (PhilPapers, 2026).
5. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), bk. 7, 514a–520a.
6. Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580.
7. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.
8. A fuller engagement with Wynter's coloniality of Being alongside Fanon and Mignolo is offered in Yamin Kogoya, "The Metaphysics of Power: Indigenous Survival and Lani Cosmology," Working Paper No. 5, *Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series* (PhilPapers, 2026).
9. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.
10. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1–20.
11. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2–3.
12. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), 149–150.
13. This formulation of civilisation as an originating and then self-sustaining structure draws on the fuller Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus (CPCV) mechanism developed in Yamin Kogoya, "A Foundational Theoretical Framework for the Study of Psycho-Cosmocide," Working Paper No. 1(b), *Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series* (PhilPapers, 2026).
14. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 170–194.
15. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 4–16.
16. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 115–121.
17. Yamin Kogoya, "Cosmobian and Synthobian — Two Modes of Being: From Ecological Reciprocity to Synthetic Civilisation," Working Paper No. 26, *Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series* (PhilPapers, 2026).
18. Plato, *Republic*, bk. 7, 514a–515c.

19. Yamin Kogoya, “Plato’s Cave and the Architecture of Psycho-Cosmocide in West Papua,” Working Paper No. 8, *Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series* (PhilPapers, 2026).
20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1978), Prologue, §4.
21. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), §§29, 38, 40, 50.
22. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 3–10, 120–123.
23. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), theses IX and XIV.
24. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72–104.
25. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 3–17, 151–179.
26. On the two-level structure of this claim and what would constitute disconfirming evidence at the level of the Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus mechanism, see Yamin Kogoya, “The Seven Existential Cages: A Speculative Decolonial Ontology,” Working Paper No. 3, and “Four Worlds, One Dying Earth,” Working Paper No. 17, both *Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series* (PhilPapers, 2026).
27. Richard Chauvel, *Constructing Papuan Nationalism: History, Ethnicity, and Adaptation* (Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington, 2005), 1–15, 65–90.
28. Camellia Webb-Gannon, *Merdeka in West Papua: Music, Media, and Human Rights* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2021), 1–20.
29. Yamin Kogoya, “West Papua: Ontological Cages and Colonial Consent: Myth, Power, and the Colonial Structuring of Reality,” Working Paper No. 4, *Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series* (PhilPapers, 2026).

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About the Author

Yamin Kogoya is a Papuan philosopher, writer, and independent researcher from the Central Highlands of New Guinea (West Papua), currently based in Australia.

His work investigates one of the most enduring questions of human existence: how worlds are created, transformed, and destroyed. He is the originator of the Psycho-Cosmocide paradigm, an interdisciplinary philosophical framework that examines the destruction of human worlds not only through physical violence, occupation, or ecological devastation, but through the systematic reorganisation of perception, memory, meaning, and reality itself. Within this framework, he argues that words, images, symbols, signs, colours, institutions, and technologies do not merely represent the world—they participate in creating, reorganising, and erasing the conditions through which human beings inhabit it.

Kogoya introduced the concepts of the Cosmobian World and the Synthobian World to distinguish two fundamentally different modes of human existence. The Cosmobian World refers to forms of life constituted through reciprocal relationships with land, ancestry, kinship, memory, ecology, language, and the cosmos. The Synthobian World refers to synthetic, engineered systems of existence organised through abstraction, institutions, technology, production, and civilisational processes. The relationship between these two worlds forms the central philosophical architecture of his research.

Drawing upon Indigenous cosmologies together with philosophy, anthropology, history, religion, mythology, and civilisation studies, Kogoya develops original conceptual frameworks for interpreting the contemporary human condition. His work re-examines humanity's foundational myths, epics, tragedies, religions, and philosophical traditions as enduring civilisational architectures through which societies organise reality, negotiate meaning, confront mortality, remember the past, imagine the future, and participate in their own survival or extinction. Although grounded in the historical experience of West Papua, his research addresses broader philosophical questions concerning civilisation, consciousness, memory, belonging, power, and the future of human worlds.

He holds a Master of Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development from the Australian National University. His academic background also includes Religious Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Asia-Pacific Studies, and he undertook advanced study in epistemology at the University of Oxford. His research and commentary have appeared in *SBS News*, *RNZ Pacific*, *Asia Pacific Report*, *The Fiji Times*, and *The Jakarta Post*.

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