

THE WHEEL OF DESTINY

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[2014 prologue:

This article has been available on the web for many years and has taken on a life of its own. Its context and meaning may have shifted over time, as with all creative works. It may nevertheless be useful to provide the background to its original creation:

An editor requested on the web contributions from scholars for a book on the reception of black students into major universities during the late 60's/early 70's – a period in US history when Black students arrived at universities in large numbers. I asked her if she was interested in a piece about the reception of Black students at Cambridge University at this same period which may shed some light by comparison. She wrote back enthusiastically encouraging me to write it and giving me 2,000 words. Subsequently she wrote to me saying she was unable to proceed with my article but strongly encouraging me to publish it elsewhere (giving a suspicion that powers above had found the article 'too hot' to handle).

A few copies were sent to friends who passed it on their friends - a web process with which we are now all too familiar. Eventually one of them requested permission to arrange its formal publication in a Nigerian newspaper which was granted. This article was clearly not conceived as a short bio which as a stand alone piece is how it must now read.

Shortly before its publication I wrote to Wole Soyinka saying I was about to launch a nuclear missile towards Skip Gates and requested he stay away and not get involved. He responded by asking me why I was doing this. I explained that in the mid-1980's I had discovered while at business school that African economies were about to suffer their greatest calamity in over a hundred years bar none and Skip had refused to help. Forward projections from US and Japan assumed there would be few signs of human life on the continent. I asked my cousin, a leading professor of Economics at the University of Ibadan and a graduate of University of Pennsylvania, what were Nigerian models telling them. He explained that no modelling of the future was being done in Africa and if any such information such as nation aggregate statistics were needed one would have to go to the UK to obtain it.

I felt an urgent need to raise the alarm. I wrote to Skip Gates asking that he help me to raise the alarm about an impending catastrophe in Africa. With his academic credentials and position and my business background and role in the City of London we would be able to demand attention. I received no reply. I sent Skip a chaser only to receive a reply telling me how well his own personal career was progressing. The catastrophe I feared rolled out in what appeared to be slow motion before my eyes. I have not forgiven Skip Gates.

My comments on Anthony Appiah were driven by some stories I was told by mutual friends. They told me that Anthony was telling everyone that at Cambridge as a student he had been a fervent pan-Africanist and had since 'grown up'. This story I was told was also in a personal bio he had written. His description of a young and fervent pan-Africanist was accurate and convincing – merely for the fact that he was describing myself and not himself. That needed correction.

I was aware that my comments on Skip Gates would be immediately taken as motivated by simple jealousy in some quarters so it was essential that I should be demonstrably successful in my own career when it was published. I was then a partner in a major City firm so the timing was right.]

Call Skip!

A clear bright light flooded into my room. It was a warm sunny day in Cambridge with the soft sounds of people gently chatting outside. I looked outside my window. Another day beckoned, and I quickly skirted about my rooms in College, avoiding the piles of books and papers strewn across the floor. Philosophy books and papers cluttered my rooms in Clare College like so much litter. Ever since I was a child I had been in love with philosophy and with writing and here I was - in heaven, doing the only thing I cared about in all the world - studying and writing philosophy. My parents who had wanted me to do something useful that might earn a living (at that time there was no philosophy department in Nigeria) had given up the struggle for a lost cause. I picked up a large volume on Kantian metaphysics, removed my notes and filed them away, and placed the book next to Wittgenstein's Tractatus. This was just another day in heaven - or so I thought.

I walked out into the hallway and suddenly noticed that everyone was avoiding me. I walked towards the Philosophy Dept and no one spoke to me. It was usual to pass a compliment. A mere greeting, "Hi, Dapo" was a low point. A Professor might enquire whether I was coming to a seminar, my tutors about whether I would complete certain papers on time or had read this or that article. My fellow students would enquire as to my views on 'Prof X's paper I mentioned to you last week - have you read it yet? Yes? Did you share my opinion?' Moral Sciences as Philosophy was called in those days was a small intimate department. Everybody knew everybody. Life was your interaction with others. Suddenly I found myself cut adrift. Not only was no one talking to me, but Professors were crossing the street to avoid coming close to me. Yes I had washed recently, and it could not be my aftershave as people were avoiding me at a hundred paces. I was stunned and hurt. I examined my conscience - there was nothing there. It was empty. The next day I hastened to the University Library to avoid the shame of exclusion. I kept my head down and stayed away from public spaces. As I walked back to my rooms Albert Weale, a friend and fellow student, (later Professor Weale) shouted 'You must be thinking a bit of yourself', smiled and disappeared.

Later that afternoon there was a message from the porter, 'Call Skip Gates, urgently'. Perhaps Skip could shed some light on this issue. "Have you seen the papers?" Skip's voice was excited. He is American, they are so excitable I thought. "No". My deadpan answer took him back. "You're famous," he exaggerated. "A Nobel prize-winner has written praising your work! You must get hold of a copy!"

In many ways these events became a perfect metaphor for my relationship with Cambridge University.

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As a child I had a voracious appetite for reading and writing. I had been born in Nigeria in 1951 and came to Britain when I was 5. Among my earliest memories is one of importuning my father for reams of blank paper. When I was 7 I was asked what I wanted for my birthday. I answered a 'typewriter'. My parents bought me a bike to my disappointment.

At 7 I was sent to a private boarding prep school. In retrospect I believe it was one of the best prep schools in England and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. By the end of my career I had a Centenary scholarship to my public school and I had been captain of cricket of an unbeaten side. There is a photo of me on Sports Day. I could barely hold all my prizes. Someone once said that nothing in later life compares to the adulation a child can receive at a prep school as a successful sports

warrior. He may be correct.

Intellectually I had to fight against the English stereotype that if you were good at games you would not be interested in the Arts. At Holmewood House this was never a major issue, just an irritant. My interest in the arts was nurtured and flourished.

On one of my frequent visits to my parents in Nigeria, at the age of 11 I came across the works of Bertrand Russell in the library of Mr Asabia (later Chief Asabia and Head of Nigeria's largest bank). I devoured the works of Russell like a famished sailor. My interest in philosophy was established. Having read everything by Russell that I could lay my hands on I began reading existentialists. I started with books on Existentialism and then went on to Kierkegaard and Sartre. This was followed by Socrates and Plato. My father had arranged for me to have an account at Poole & Sons, the Charing Cross bookshop (later made famous in a film 84 Charing Cross Rd). I seriously sought to bankrupt my father with my demands until the account was closed. One year I kept a record of all the non-school work books I read - it came to over a hundred. At one time my eyes hurt and I stopped reading in my spare time for a year and restarted on the anniversary. I visited an elder cousin in Edinburgh when I was 12. He was studying for a PhD in entomology at Edinburgh University and his home was full of science books. He was later Professor of Entomology at University of Ife. I devoured these science books like candy. My eyes were opened to experimental psychology, anatomy and the medical sciences.

I also discovered detailed explanations of sexual reproduction - a matter of keen interest to pre-teens. So much so that at my public school I would give lectures after lights out regaling my fellow students with detailed scientific facts that I had gleaned from the medical text books. Needless to say I was rarely interrupted in my lectures. Anyone familiar with a boys boarding school will acknowledge the rareness of this event.

My father was deeply interested in science and sent me books on science from wherever he travelled. These books were often 'borrowed' by my teachers. I also had special coaching in the holidays from post-graduate students.

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When it came time to choose a university I chose Cambridge. I wanted to study philosophy and all my research pointed to Cambridge as having the greatest reputation. Russell and Wittgenstein. I had toyed with Harvard, but when I asked a white American teacher how to get in she said "That is an Ivy League university, you can't go there."

My first application to Cambridge was turned down. My second was accepted on condition that I did not study philosophy. I accepted and then applied to change course to philosophy. This caused an outrage. In response I appealed to several academics who had come to know me - Prof David Wiggins and Dr Wilfred Hodges, who put pressure on Dr Smiley, the College tutor in philosophy. He relented resentfully.

When I arrived at Cambridge together with a personal testimonial from Prof Basil Bernstein, I was nevertheless treated as some sort of lay novice. Dr Smiley recommended that I attend lectures on many different subjects. This was music to my ears as I had always had broad interests. At the end of the first term he politely asked if I had found another subject of greater interest than philosophy to study. I had believed his advice was genuine academic advice and had not realized that it was a ploy to get me out of the department. This was to me a breach of trust. From then on I could never trust his advice - with negative results for both of us.

Anthony Appiah arrived at Clare College in my second year. He was originally studying medicine but would stay in my rooms talking philosophy till the small hours. Within a couple of weeks I persuaded him to give up medicine and to study philosophy. I remember the puzzled look on Dr

Smiley's face when I stated that there was a new student being wasted on medicine! Professor Dorothy Emmett also importuned on Anthony's behalf and soon he was in the Philosophy dept. This contrasts with the experience of Skip Gates. Skip was a Mellon scholar from Yale. He had applied to study philosophy and Dr Smiley had turned him down sight unseen. I remonstrated with Skip that he should resurrect his plans but Skip had no stomach for this fight.

Why did Skip and I have such difficulty and Anthony find it so easy? Anthony was the grandson of Sir Stafford Cripps, a well known British politician. He was light skinned, and this did seem to matter to Cambridge, and he was decidedly unthreatening. In fact Anthony was a very pretty boy at the time and I may have misconstrued his motivation. His fellow Ghanaians never felt he was one of them and he never considered himself African at all at that time. He said he hated Africans and Africa. Nevertheless I was very fond of Anthony. Self hatred was not his unique preserve. Many friends suggested that I should try and rescue Anthony from the English boys he was hanging out with. I tried to interest Anthony in giving some lectures on African history in London. At one meeting Anthony suddenly turned to me and stated that as he could trace his English ancestry to the 16th Century he did not need to associate with Africans. Without a further word I rose up and left the room. Skip rushed down to try and make amends, but Anthony and I have never really spoken since.

The general assumption, by faculty at Cambridge, that I knew nothing about philosophy (or anything else) until the day after I arrived at Cambridge irked me continuously. Dorothy Emmett at a later date even misremembered the facts and recalled how Anthony persuaded me to change course and study philosophy. It obviously did not fit in with her stereotype view of the world that the dark skinned Dapo should introduce the light skinned Anthony to the wonders of philosophy. Ironically, Anthony arrived at Cambridge with a pretty thorough grounding in philosophy through his own efforts.

It was obvious to me, but not apparently to many others, that the arrival of Anthony, Skip and myself at the same small Cambridge College at the same time was a meeting of truly historic dimensions. I knew this was the workings of destiny.

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One of the kindest persons in my first year in Cambridge was Jenny Teichmann. She avoided the traps others rushed into. During one tutorial she asked me about Nigeria. I responded with a short vituperative and acidic outburst against the Nigerian elite. I assumed she would think my comments were motivated by jealousy and rejection. However she paused, looked at me with deep suspicion and then asked, "What does your father do?" Sheepishly, I answered "He is a Permanent Secretary,"(one of the highest offices in the country).

My view of Oxbridge philosophy had been highly influenced by W E Abram's and his "Mind of Africa". Here was an African who had studied philosophy at Oxford and had been made a fellow of All Soul's, one of the highest accolades in British Academy. When I read "Mind of Africa" I considered it asinine and puerile. I bought the book but would not allow it in my library. I believed it failed of its primary purpose. As toilet paper it was painful to use. If this was what Oxbridge philosophy produced and valued (the book was well reviewed) when trusted, then they had an agenda entirely alien to mine and needed to be treated with caution and scepticism.

One of the lessons I had learnt from my prep school was that once you had mastered the key techniques and have showed excellence in their use, you should then be allowed to break the rules and discover your own style. This however never applied at Cambridge. No matter what skill I displayed every effort was expended to keep me on the 'straight and narrow' of Cambridge orthodoxy. It appeared to me that what they expected of me was to learn the orthodoxy parrot fashion and return to Nigeria to spread 'the Word'. Frankly, I would rather die. My own aspirations

to change the face of modern philosophy were of course absurd and needed to be rooted out and some sense put back into my thick skull.

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My adolescent intellectual trajectory involved a kaleidoscope of different interests. Between 13 and 17 I delved deeply into Kierkegaard and Sartre. To this day I retain a fond affection for Kierkegaard. I read Russell's 'History of Western Philosophy'. I introduced myself to Marxism courtesy of the United States Information Service where I found the works of Sydney Hook. This led me on to Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt school. My father had always reminded me that there were other great cultures than the West, so I studied Buddhism. For many months I carried with me the Penguin Buddhist scriptures, I also delved into Indian Yoga and later Zen Buddhism courtesy of Dr Suzuki.

Islamic philosophers were not ignored either. At one point I emptied the University of Ibadan library of Husserl, Heidegger, and Bergson even though I was a teenage student at a secondary school and not a member of the university. Driven by a thirst for knowledge I knocked on doors and found almost invariably that all the rules were broken to allow me access to these treasured books.

I was not however a Millsian maladjust. I could have been found walking around the playing fields in Brighton with a copy of Dylan Thomas' or T S Eliot' collected poems, reciting them in the Spring air. I played sports, wrote poetry, played classical guitar and enjoyed the company of girls.

My belief that there was a 'secret community of scholars' probably dated from this period where my love of learning opened all sorts of doors. In London I applied for a ticket to the British Museum Reading Room. The same place Karl Marx had researched in. I was 17 years old and filled in the application on the basis that I was researching early medieval philosophy (the game was to prove the books were otherwise unavailable). I still remember the smile on the Librarian's face as he approved my ticket. We were both party to the conspiracy!

In a sense this was my dream world. A community of scholars who loved the craft of scholarship, who admired beauty and creativity, who could as much appreciate a subtle manoeuvre by their opponent as by their supporters. A world beyond politics and racism. A world where one immediately recognised in each other a love of books, of the craft of scholarship.

My greatest scorn has always been reserved for those who on reading my works assumed that I had not checked out my references and my sources. This to me only proved the shallowness of their own knowledge.

I still recall with some astonishment a seminar on science and religion in Clare College. The then Professor of Astronomy gave a short talk. During question time I raised my hand and suggested a novel point of view that I had been trying to develop. My fellow students collapsed in laughter and began to howl me down. Just then the Professor told them to shut up and asked me to repeat what I had said. For the next five minutes a swift discussion followed between him and myself that I found liberating. Before I had finished my sentence he knew where I was going next and interjected a suggestion. Before he had finished his suggestion I countered with a problematic, some downside or possible objection to which he responded with some alternative. Here I was mind to mind with one of the world's leading astronomers. This was my dream come true - a community of scholars in pursuit of truth or creativity, with no consideration for rank or other irrelevancies. Unfortunately that was the exception not the rule.

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Friends have often told me that my life would have been easier if I could have toned myself down a little. But this was as useful as telling a stallion to canter gently. I simply was not that sort of person. Not only that there were many positive experiences. Once when I was fifteen I was taken to see

Maurice Bowra in his rooms at Oxford. Bowra was a dominant figure in British academia at that time. My father was attending Oxford University. The family had been rushed out of Nigeria when threats against our lives were made because my father would not help rig the next elections. That Sunday afternoon we had come from listening to Billy Graham on his tour of Oxford.

Bowra turned to me and asked my opinion of Billy Graham. To my father's horror I launched into an unrestrained assault. I accused Graham of distorting the theories of the existentialists, of giving a false reading of the Bible and of not appreciating Kierkegaard's deep religious conviction. By the end of my diatribe my father was open-mouthed. Bowra paused, looked up at the ceiling for a long while it seemed. Then he said, "...and when would you like to come up to Oxford?"

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The other side to all this is the pain felt at rejection. I was 18 or so and invited to join P F Strawson at a dinner after he had given a talk. Discussion was in the English manner amiable and as Hideko Ishiguro was present turned to Buddhism. Hideko was in fact a Catholic. Someone asked why was a branch of Buddhism called Mahayana Buddhism? Nobody knew. Gently, I volunteered that Mahayana meant Great Wheel or Circle. Then surprised, someone - not Strawson or Hideko - shot back harshly - 'What do you know about Buddhism?' A mere teenager in front of these famous scholars I sulked into silence. But this assumption that I could have no knowledge other than what I was taught by my department was a consistent theme of my university days. I was regularly rebuked if I ever quoted a piece of knowledge the lecturer was not aware of himself.

One part of me was filled with the stories of my heroes such as the Chinese sages, Zen Buddhists, the Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire and Rousseau etc and the Impressionists and Cubists. Small bands of dedicated persons who with pen or brush would change the world. Another part was filled with fear and hostility towards racism, political oppression and imperialism.

One day Skip turned to me after we had had a long discussion on our usual topics and said agitatedly: 'You want to blow away the racists, but you want to do it, not with a gun, but with a pen.' 'Precisely.'

These stories were not unique to me. Tosan Rewane was the son of an important politician and had won an open scholarship to study medicine at Cambridge. He too was at Clare College. While doing his clinical year in London he told me of an incident. The Professor had announced to the class a complicated question. He said that only the very brightest could get the right answer. A swarm of hands went up including Tosan's. Only after everyone else had answered incorrectly did the professor allow Tosan to give his answer. Then the professor paused and slowly and reluctantly said: 'That answer is not incorrect.' Shortly afterwards Tosan abandoned his medical studies.

Another equally tragic incident occurred to another medical student. He was determined to do a brilliant undergraduate project. At the weekends we would visit him in the labs and try and drag him out for a drink or to go to a dance. Invariably he refused and worked and worked. When the results came they gave him a third class degree. The examiners announced that he must have cheated as the work was too good to have been done by an African. Another star destroyed.

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At the time I was at Cambridge the scale of the institutional racism was not apparent to me. What I was aware of was the beautiful surroundings, the engaging personal contacts. Obviously, there were problems but they seemed to be personal. However once I was in the world of City professionals I had something to compare it against. I had decided to train as a Chartered Accountant in preference to a lawyer on the grounds of the portability of the qualification. I discovered in the professions an openness to challenging authority. I recall once being given the opinion of a QC on a topic. I was meant to draft a letter outlining this advice to the client. Instead I drafted a memo rubbishing the

QC's advice and waited for the torrent of abuse. I was summoned. To my surprise I was congratulated, told I was correct and asked to advise the client along my lines. This would never have happened at Cambridge.

When the department at work had a social I found myself included not merely as a spectator. I was expected to participate, to show my personality. At Cambridge at socials I had been relegated to obscure corners where almost no one spoke to me. Very quickly in the professional world I earned respect. I was not an African accountant, I was an accountant like everyone else. This was illustrated on one of my rare visits to Cambridge. A retired partner in Price Waterhouse was also invited to dinner by Margaret Masterman. We were introduced and within minutes we began talking 'shop'. This caused consternation among my philosopher friends. I quickly realized that he had been invited to 'smoke me out' and prove that I was not a real accountant in the City. Once he had served his purpose the retired partner was unceremoniously excused. At a tenth year reunion dinner (I do not normally go to these things and after this one I realized why) Professor Epstein asked me what I was doing? 'I am an accountant in the City'. 'Did you pass your exams?' he asked. Now in the City this would count as the height of insulting dialogue, of crass mannerless behaviour. In Cambridge it was normal.

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My time at Cambridge University was also a social occasion. I met students from all over the world, fell in love with a beautiful Burmese princess, cried my heart out when she returned to Burma (she later married the Head of State's son). There was one evening which sums up this part of Cambridge for me. David Ignatius (whose father was connected to the Washington Post), Christopher Davis, a collection of other Americans, Greeks and other nationalities, Ying and myself. Over dinner someone suggested we all give a low down on some secret aspect of our own countries. There followed the most astonishing in depth resume of the inner workings of the politics of ten different countries. It was pure 'inside', off-the-record, on the nail stuff. It was bliss to be alive.

There were other sides to Cambridge. Let us start with a small scene: I am walking down the quad of Old Court shortly after the exam results were posted. Dr Wright wanders up to me and smiles, "Well done. We thought you were a playboy not a scholar!" What lay behind these remarks is of some interest. I grew up in England, I knew the score. I expected my fellow English students to ignore me until I was brow beaten into social submission. To avoid this I invited friends to come and visit me in Cambridge every weekend of my first term. As it happens most of the people who accepted were girls. No Black male accepted my invitation though two English and one Chinese male did. The net effect was that every weekend I had a different but stunningly beautiful girl come and stay with me. Somewhat naively I had not considered the implications and was blissfully unaware of the stir I was causing. I became aware of it when late in the term one girl cried off due to family engagements. I wandered down for breakfast on the weekend by myself. There was consternation among the staff serving breakfast. Suddenly someone shouted -'Where is she?' I have never blushed so thoroughly in all my life. I did not live down that reputation. A year later the secretary of the African Society came to give me a draft report. As she entered the porter's lodge and before she could open her mouth the porter said 'He's in H7!' I had not ever laid a hand on her.

My ploy certainly had the intended effect. After six weeks my English colleagues begged to be invited to my parties. One English boy came up to me and asked if he could have the telephone numbers of any of my cast off girl-friends. He assured me he did not wish to interfere with any girls I was still interested in - only those that I no longer required.

The ambiguities and ambivalences of my old school friends was also a theme of my days at Cambridge. We had been at school together but once at Cambridge most of them 'cut me off' with one notable exception. Not that I cared.

One day I dropped by Christopher Sokol's rooms. Five other old Brightonians were there. Suddenly there was anxiety - 'should Dapo be allowed to stay?' Chris said 'Yes'. I had no idea what was going on. A few minutes later Jamie entered. Jamie was Lord Moran's grandson. His first words were "Dapo, I didn't expect to see you here." To which I replied that I was not expecting to see him either. Jamie and I had become friends long before. This however was a major social introduction for my old school friends! This sort of comedy of errors repeated itself on many occasions.

A ridiculous example occurred when Skip asked if I went to 'white' parties. I said 'No' - meaning I went to parties of my friends and their colour was irrelevant. Skip felt sorry for me and promptly obtained an invitation to a party by some 'white' students. In my terms they were unacceptable - they were neither bright, beautiful nor entertaining - the key criteria for Cambridge's 'beau monde'. I do not think the penny ever dropped for Skip.

On a personal and social level I have only fond memories of Quentin Skinner, David Mellor, Ian Hacking. I took these people to my heart.

In many ways I was in and out of the key social networks. I knew Fiona Weaver because our parents got on. I also independently met Eve and Emily. New Hall's H-staircase set became the glamour set of Cambridge. One would be importuned for invitations. If someone asked me if I knew anyone in the H-staircase set I denied all knowledge, even though everyone saw me with them. One day an oaf-type public school boy took to publicly ridiculing me on a social and racial level. The next day one of the beautiful girls in the H-stair case set told me that this boy had asked her for a date and wanted to know if she should accept, so I told her what he had said to me. I made sure that word got back to him as to why and how he was rejected.

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The key theme I wish to highlight is the institutional racism and oppression of Cambridge University. At an individual level many of the scholars were admirable. Collectively they were something else.

As an undergraduate I shared the general social habit of inviting a mix of exciting people to tea and standing back. One tea time one of my guest announced that his father wrote poetry. Bad move. The other two girls chirped up that so did their fathers. One of the girls was the granddaughter of Sir John Buchan and the other was the daughter of the then poet laureate! At these teas generally one was expected to sparkle - no taboos, no authorities. One day a Black American arrived. Someone had told him he should meet me. Conversation turned to B F Skinner. The assembled studentry excoriated his behaviourist psychology. My Afro-American friend looked on in horror - " but he is a Harvard Professor!" he exclaimed. It did not surprise me that he should later obtain a PhD and get top grades and get a top job in McKinsey and the law. It did not surprise me either that he never became the source of exciting new ideas. The institutional objective for Black students was to turn out able 'parrots' who would not challenge the dominant authority figures. Just the right sort of person for the Federal Reserve.

Some may argue that I exaggerate the concerns of the establishment. I think not. Dr Patrick Cole, who was a Nigerian fellow of King's College, Cambridge was approached by a shadowy figure to report on fellow Africans and their political tendencies. He asked this strange English man on whose behalf he was working - 'The Nigerian Government' he said. I later recounted this story to Philip Agee, the ex-CIA officer. He told me it was a well-known technique called 'flying a false flag'. If one needed any further evidence there is Brzinzsky's memo.

Skip was at one point entirely different to this Black American. He wanted to produce new ideas, challenge authority etc. Later Skip told me that for his pains Cambridge rejected his PhD. It was Yale who by threatening to give him a Yale PhD forced Cambridge to appoint new examiners and his PhD was granted. Cambridge scholars know where their bread is buttered. Skip from that point

on appeared to learn a lesson. Never again did he challenge the intellectual status quo. From then on he remained as conventional as the Black American and was as well rewarded. Absolutely.

This sense of the futility of challenging the status quo corrupted all aspects of human relationships. I remember returning to Cambridge to start my doctoral studies. I had been rejected by the Philosophy department but accepted by the Sociology department. On the train up was Skip who was unaware of my re-admission. For an hour he deluged me with stories of how exciting it was to do doctoral work at Cambridge, how he missed me, how he was awfully sorry I had been thrown out, how he felt for me, how he would always support my reputation, how if only I had been accepted we could do so much together, and how he was going to do great things because he himself had been accepted. I kept silent. As we got off the train he suddenly asked me: "...and why are you coming back to Cambridge?" "To start my doctoral studies, Skip" I answered. Skip walked away without saying a word.

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My relationship with Skip was a curious one. On his arrival at Cambridge he knew next to nothing about Africa but was keen to learn. For several months I gave him almost daily tuition in the history of Africa. It was from this time he was at all able to see Africa other than through Afro-American eyes. I introduced him to Wole Soyinka when Wole was at Churchill College. Wole and I come from the same hometown. I saw Skip as someone who could possibly do great things. I admit it, I was mistaken. I invited Skip to give a lecture on the Harlem Renaissance on my Black Studies lecture series in London. This text was developed largely by a girl-friend of Skip's. She had discovered after a row with her mother that she had Black ancestry and had got involved with Skip to rediscover her roots. Poor move. Skip, in explaining all this to me told me that he could not stand Black girls and that he and many other Ivy League Blacks had decided not to date Black girls. Clearly he started dating her assuming she was white! At some point the girl broke off the relationship with Skip but passed him her paper on the Harlem renaissance to do with as he pleased. For Skip that meant taking sole public accreditation. Skip had joined an elite fraternity at Yale and was a part-time journalist for Time magazine while at Cambridge because Luce's daughter or granddaughter was one of his fraternity. What I never knew at the time was that Skip considered himself coloured and not Black. In his autobiography he describes himself as very dark for a coloured person.

I think the above illustrate some key themes in Skip's life: his relationship with academia and power. Skip has a weak sense of intellectual property and a smell of plagiarism hangs over much of what he does. He is capable of hustling the major power brokers in American society, Black people are items to be manipulated for his own gain and he sees himself as coloured and superior to Blacks. These themes are reinforced by the failure of every attempt of his to play any other game or by any other rules. To that extent I would place considerable responsibility on the institutional academic framework in which he worked.

American conservatives may want to criticize Skip for his poor scholarship, lack of originality and general hustle. But my question to them is: where were you when he was being failed for trying to be a genuine innovative scholar? Nowhere to be found.

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Lately I have come to recognize that the institutional racism in Philosophy is not merely typical of academia but is worse than in any other subject. As a City professional I can find many opportunities to attend seminars. I have attended lectures/ seminars on almost every subject. Nevertheless it is only at philosophy seminars that the basic courtesies are missing. Whether the topic is Chinese studies or global economics people listen to me attentively. On the other hand when I attended meetings of the Aristotelian Society the same old attitudes resurfaced. If I suggested that

someone's theory might be wrong, quick as a flash they would suggest that perhaps they should repeat it more slowly to help me follow it better. On numerous occasions the speaker would refuse to acknowledge the validity of any of my arguments until the Chairman would gently remind him that his argument 'is in some difficulty'. I have discovered that only in a public forum can British philosopher's behaviour be exposed to ridicule.

Many might suggest that this is simply typical academic behaviour. I doubt it. The major concealment of the racism and pro-slavery views of John Locke and Bishop Berkeley is an apt metaphor for the concealment of the racist assumptions of British philosophy. At no point in my education at Cambridge did anyone ever point out the racism and pro-slavery views of English philosophers while at the same time they lost no opportunity to emphasise their devotion to the concept of liberty. This is academic dishonesty. The rot was and is deep.

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BY WAY OF CONCLUSION...

We return where we started. I had published an article in the major journal called 'Philosophy'. There was a history to this. When I arrived at Cambridge I sought a goal which would set me apart. Getting a first was too trivial. However I soon learnt that only one person in the century had had an article published in a major journal in his discipline while still an undergraduate. He had gone on to win a Nobel prize. That was the goal I set myself.

This particular article, "Flew and the revival of Social Darwinism" incorporated many of the themes of my life - scholarship, politics and literature. It was a response to the work of Herrnstein. The article was carefully crafted polemic with no little debt to Cicero. It was also deeply scholarly and informed by my political engagement. Rather than bringing me good fortune it appeared to have terminated my philosophical existence. A few months earlier I apparently caused offence by telling my department that for 20 years they had gone down a deep blind alley. They responded in kind by giving me exit grades in my exams.

The public recognition that my article obtained only made matters worse. Sir Peter Medawar, Nobel prize winner and doyen of British science, publicly praised the article as the best on the subject he had ever read. My philosophical life was over.

This contrasted with similar events in my later professional life where there was team approval and general pleasure that 'one of us' should attain high accolades.

Anthony Appiah on the other hand conspired with others to root out every original bone in his body. He was rewarded with endless academic accolades. It was too obvious he would no longer go down in history. Originality comes from a 'sacred fire'. While it burns anything might happen. It needs protecting and nurturing more than any other feature of a personality. Without the 'sacred fire' the wheel of destiny cannot be moved. Skip, never of Anthony's pure intellectual capacity, nevertheless kept a fire of sorts going.

As for me I have kept my powder dry, and in retrospect I have bided my time. The sacred fire burns strongly. What is to come of it - only the future can tell.

Are there any conclusions one can draw from all of the above? I believe so. In my opinion Cambridge University has been guilty of an enormous betrayal of trust to Africa. It has deliberately harmed the most talented and promoted the most docile. The rest of the world should recognize that Western institutions cannot be trusted as the final guardians of the world's intellectual heritage. New independent and international institutions need to be created. Africa needs to set up its own institutions of excellence and learn to protect its greatest talents from the wolves at our door. We should not be lulled into a false sense of security by the genuineness of individual scholars. As in

politics, this is a matter of institutions not individuals. The world's canon needs to be established on a consensus of the world's scholars including but no longer exclusively western scholars.

As I sit writing at a table in a 17th century cottage in Somerset, England in April 2002 I am as yet not aware of any happy endings. Looking back - my greatest feeling is sorrow for the many who have fallen or stumbled, great potential needlessly destroyed. This has been written to help stop this outrage, to allow another generation from Africa to fully flourish and flower to the benefit of all mankind.