The transcript excerpts below are from my recent conversation with Brian Chau (aka Cactus Chu) on his podcast From the New World. They have been lightly edited.

[Steve Hsu - The Future of Human Evolution Sept 19 2022](#)

1. The prospect of predicting cognitive ability from DNA, and the consequences. Why the main motivation has nothing to do with group differences. This segment begins at roughly 47 minutes.

2. Anti-scientific resistance to research on the genetics of cognitive ability. My experience with the Jasons. Blank Slatism as a sacralized, cherished belief of social progressives. This segment begins at roughly 1 hour 7 minutes.

1. Starts at roughly 47 minutes.

Okay, let's just say hypothetically my billionaire friend is buddies with the CEO of 23andMe and let's say on the down low we collected some SAT scores of 1M or 2M people. I think there are about 10M people that have done 23andMe, let's suppose I manage to collect 1-2M scores for those people. I get them to opt in and agree to the study and da da da da and then Steve runs his algos and you get this nice predictor.

But you've got to do it on the down low. Because if it leaks out that you're doing it, people are going to come for you. The New York Times is going to come for you, everybody's going to come for you. They're going to try to trash the reputation of 23andMe, they're going to trash the reputation of the billionaire, they're going to trash the reputation of the scientists who are involved in this.

But suppose you get it done. And getting it done as you know very well is a simple run on AWS and you end up with this predictor which wow it's really complicated

it depends on 20k SNPs in the genome with a particular weight for each of the 20k SNPs, but literally you could run it on your phone. You know it could run it on your TI30 ancient calculator from 1980. You could run it once you have it. …

At the end of the day you have something that's very simple but it's extremely valuable, because it summarizes some information about nature in a very distilled form.

Okay, so I have this thing. Well then I quickly call my friend the social scientist who, on the down low, is NOT an intellectual fraud. I say can I look at that longitudinal study that you guys did in Wisconsin? You know, that has 3000 people and you have their genomes and you have their life histories and none of those people were used in our training set. So it's true out of sample validation and maybe the people in your longitudinal study are much older than the people that we trained on so they even grew up in a different America.

Let me just run my predictor on your 3000 people who are now 80 years old, so we have their whole life history. Let's see how well I predict what happened to them in life based on my cognitive predictor. Or maybe let's just see how well I predict their own SAT scores that they took in 1970 or something right? You'll find that it's accurate plus or minus ten points of IQ.

The moment you release that information to the world there will be a huge pitched battle where the bad guys try to suppress that scientific information. They don't want anybody to know that this is possible. On Twitter and other places people will be shit-posting saying – hey look at this graph! Look at this graph! This was done out of sample; people who were raised in a different generation. Wow they can predict IQ plus or minus ten points!

You'll end up with this bifurcated world just like you said: i.e., software founders think the New York Times is trash. That population is going to get wind of this and say yep I guess crazy scientists like Steve were right! We can predict cognitive ability from DNA. It is highly heritable. It's not an unsolvable complex genomics

problem. It's actually a solvable machine learning problem. They solved it.

…

For anybody with an ounce of intellectual integrity, they would look back at their copy of The Mismeasure of Man which has sat magisterially on their bookshelf since they were forced to buy it as a freshman at Harvard. They would say, "WOW! I guess I can just throw that in the trash right? I can just throw that in the trash."

But the set of people who have intellectual integrity and can process new information and then reformulate the opinion that they absorbed through social convention – i.e., that Gould is a good person and a good scientist and wise – is tiny. The set of people who can actually do that is like 1% of the population. So you know maybe none of this matters, but in the long run it does matter.

…

Everything else about that hypothetical: The social scientists running the longitudinal study, getting the predictor in his grubby little hands and publishing the validation, but people trying to force you to studiously ignore the results, *all that has actually already happened*. We already have something which correlates ~0.4 with IQ. Everything else I said has already been done but it's just being studiously ignored by the "right-thinking" people.

…

Some people could misunderstand our discussion as being racist. I'm not saying that any of this has anything to do with group differences between ancestry groups. I'm just saying, e.g., within the white population of America, it is possible to predict from embryo DNA which of 2 brothers raised in the same family will be the smart one and which one will struggle in school. Which one will be the tall one and which one will be not so tall.

… For the people who want to misinterpret me: I'm not saying anything about group differences or racism.

Let's just pretend we're just talking about one family. Or one ancestry group – a bunch of white people from Ireland or something. It's still interesting that I could predict which of the white people from Ireland are going to be smart and which ones are not so smart.

2. Starts at roughly 1 hour 7 minutes.

I've been in enough places where this kind of research is presented in seminar rooms and conferences and seen very negative attacks on the individuals presenting the results. I'll give you a very good example. There used to be a thing called the Jasons. During the cold war there was a group of super smart scientists called the Jasons. They were paid by the government to get together in the summers and think about technological issues that might be useful for defense and things like war fighting.

…

I had a meeting with the (current) Jasons. I was invited to a place near Stanford to address them about genetic engineering, genomics, and all this stuff. I thought okay these are serious scientists and I'll give them a very nice overview of the progress in this field. This anecdote takes place just a few years ago.

One of the Jasons present is a biochemist but not an expert on genomics or machine learning.

This biochemist asked me a few sharp questions which were easy to answer.

But then at some point he just can't take it anymore and he grabs all his stuff and

runs out of the room. This guy is maybe 60 years old, a famous senior academic in biochemistry, one of the Jasons. He picks up his shit and runs out of the room.

Okay, now of course I'm talking to the other dozen guys that are there so I'm like well whatever he maybe got a phone call and his kid was in an accident or something. But it didn't seem like that was what happened because he got agitated then he ran out. It didn't seem to be a phone call. But, whatever, I have to deal with these other people right? So we finished the seminar and the guy who's the organizer comes up to me and says

"Oh I'm sorry about Sam" – the name is not really Sam. But "I'm sorry about Sam," and I'm like "what's with Sam?"

"Well you know he has very strong progressive commitments and he just can't accept what you're saying and he's so angry that he's not coming back for the rest of the meeting." He flew back to Los Angeles or Santa Barbara or wherever. I'm not going to say where.

Okay now I didn't say anything more outrageous in that talk than anything I've said to you in the last hour actually, probably milder. This is the world that we deal with – this is a guy who is consulting for the fucking Department of Defense. Who knows what kind of shit he's applied his biochemical expertise to in service of the war machine of the United States government.

But he can't fucking take a few new scientific results that have to do with the genetics of how your brain forms itself. You see what I'm saying – and this guy was actually a hard scientist. He's not an economist or some soft social science dude, a political scientist who can't take it. This guy's supposed to be a real scientist. But he runs out of the room.

Now, I've been at other conferences where other people, in this case, not me, but other people I've collaborated with or people who are part of the collaboration that does the EA GWAS stuff, where they're just frontally attacked by people.

Serious people, senior academics who are supposed to be serious people. Attacked for the results that they're giving, told that what they're doing is wrong or evil or you know blah blah blah blah I'm going to do everything I can in my power to stop you.

This is all just descriptive. I'm just describing the level of rationality and ability to process information that harms cherished beliefs in the Academy.

I know for a fact that in the case of this biochemist and some other people, they have cherished beliefs about Blank Slate-ism. They can't accept that I'm going to read out your genome and predict all kinds of stuff about you including your personality or how smart you are.