

Bioethics & Animals (Spring 2013)

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***Creation of Chimeras:
Competing Arguments***

Rank the below options

What are the relevant ethical considerations?

Will your ranking change given varying contexts, scenarios?

Genetic material

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graph LR; A[Genetic material] --> B["Possibility A:  
Darla the Human  
AND  
Dex the Chimp"]; A --> C["Possibility B:  
Darex the Human-Chimp Chimera"];
```

Possibility A:

Darla the Human

AND

Dex the Chimp

Possibility B:

Darex the Human-Chimp Chimera

Rank the below options

What are the relevant ethical considerations?

Genetic material

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graph LR; A[Genetic material] --> B[Possibility A: Darla the Human]; A --> C[Possibility B: Darex the Human-Chimp GMA]; A --> D[Possibility C: Dex the Chimp];
```

Possibility A:

Darla the Human

(will have low quality of life)

Possibility B:

Darex the Human-Chimp GMA

(will have decent quality of life)

Possibility C:

Dex the Chimp

(will have high quality of life)

Unnaturalness Argument



- ✘ “because the creation of chimeras unnatural it is therefore wrong” (Streiffer 6)

- ✘ We should not violate natural species boundaries.
 - + “yuck factor” – epistemic access to moral fact?

- ✘ **Intrinsic vs. extrinsic forms of the argument**
 - + Intrinsic: unnatural intervention is wrong in itself
 - ✘ E.g., concerned about offending God

 - + Extrinsic: unnatural intervention is wrong due to its harmful consequences
 - ✘ E.g., concerned about public health ramifications

Critiques

- ✗ **Species boundaries are fluid, difficult to define**
 - + What counts as a *natural* vs. *unnatural* intervention?
- ✗ **Dubious link between unnaturalness and wrongfulness**
 - + E.g., mules, domestic canines, hybrid lilies should not have been created?
- ✗ **Unless all unnatural acts are wrong, “something unnatural could be justified by sufficiently strong countervailing considerations” (10)**

Borderline-Personhood Argument

- ✗ Personhood as all-or-nothing (binary) or matter of degree
- ✗ **Cognitive capacity view**
 - + Having enough of the requisite sophisticated psychological capacities is sufficient for personhood status.
- ✗ **Anthropocentric view**
 - + Only humans are persons.
- ✗ How much do we owe to borderline persons? Basically the same consideration we owe full persons? Or are our obligations radically different?



Problems

- × **If personhood is all-or-nothing:**
 - + Then have to deny human infants personhood completely, or have to grant full personhood to all similar animals
 - × Radical implications for research protections

- × **If personhood is a matter of degree:**
 - + Complex non-humans have more sophisticated capacities than infants, so they would be granted higher status than those that receive the most protections currently.

(Human) Dignity Argument



- ✘ “grounded in the possession of certain morally valuable cognitive and emotive capacities” (26)
 - + Does this way of unpacking ‘dignity’ capture what most people mean by the term?
- ✘ Dignity confers special moral status that is not subject to consequentialist trade-offs (though it can be overridden by competing rights of individuals)
- ✘ Moral prohibitions against **a)** denying option of exercising dignity-conferring capacities and **b)** diminishing or eliminating those capacities
- ✘ If humans’ moral status is no longer special or unique (if it is now), does that threaten our humanity?

Critiques

- ✘ Vagueness of term, inconsistent application
 - + Concerns about speciesist/anthropocentric bias
 - + Shorthand for other interests and considerations that can be articulated more precisely without using dignity language?
- ✘ Useful for secular bioethics?
- ✘ Not clear when we are violating dignity or failing in outlined prohibitions
- ✘ If a chimera is given capacities for dignity, then the chimera has opportunities and respect-worthiness that it/he/she otherwise would not have— so how does this violate anyone's dignity?

Moral Status Framework



Rhesus monkey chimeras

- ✘ Worry: “introduction of human material would enhance an animal’s moral status without respecting the moral obligations entailed by that status” (31)

- ✘ From the perspective of the would-be chimera, enhancement might be
 - + Always good (Millian)
 - + Never good (No Enhancing)
 - + Sometimes good, depending on baseline used for comparison (Instrumentalist)

Concerns

- ✗ **If the status of a chimera is elevated without raising obligations:**
 - + “sacrificing the fundamental interests of chimeric research subject as they would have been sacrificed in any other animal research is the moral equivalent of sacrificing the fundamental interests of a fully functional adult human being” (34)
- ✗ **Uncertain *how much* human material is needed to elevate moral status**
 - + In light of these uncertainties, should we hold off on creating chimeras? Or is the creation of high moral status animals inherent a moral good? To what extent ought we be cautious?

Which of these do you find most compelling?

× Unnaturalness argument?



× Borderline personhood argument?



× (Human) dignity argument?



× Moral status framework?



Questions? Comments?