

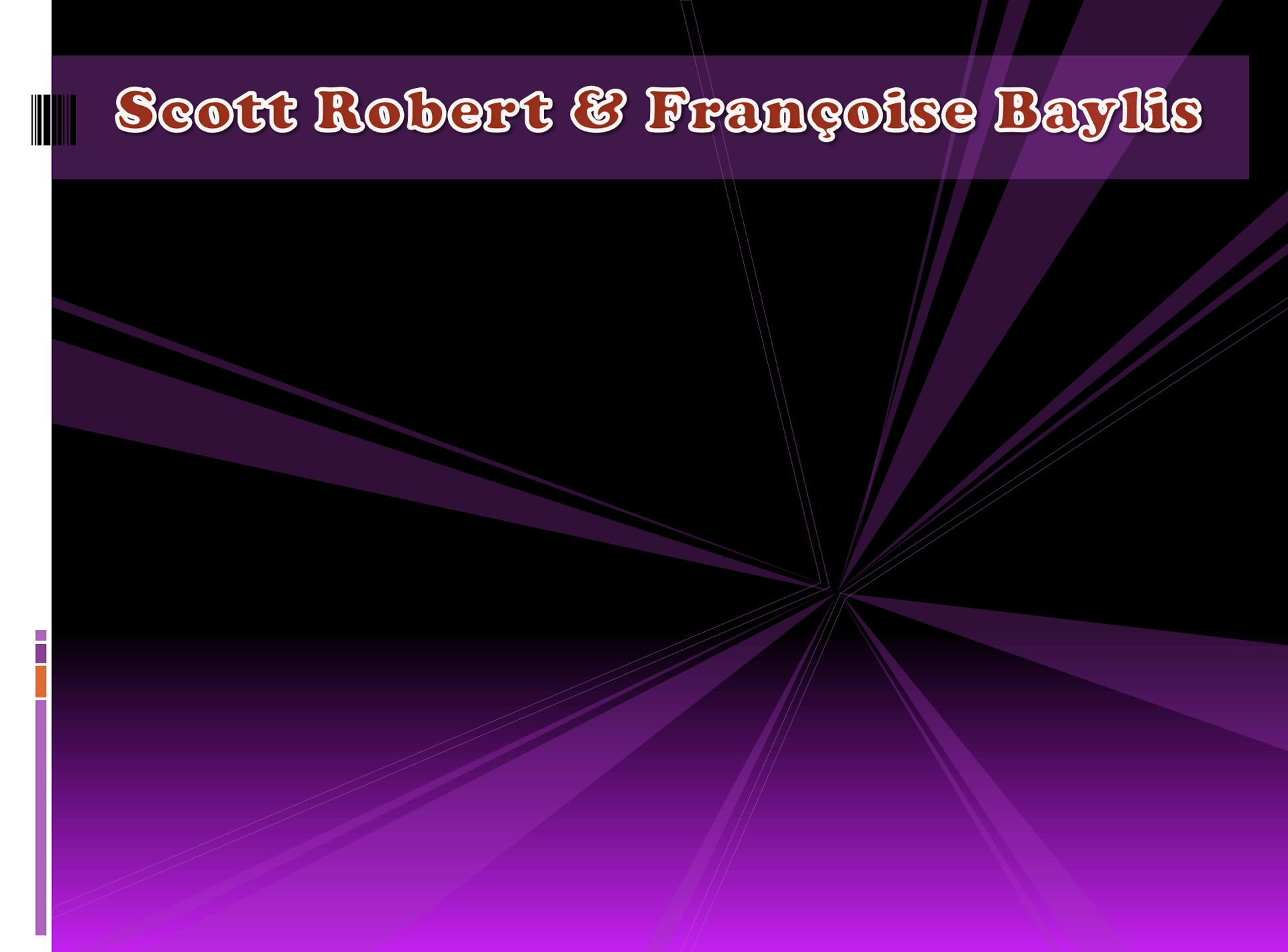


Bioethics & Animals (Spring 2013)
Laura Guidry-Grimes

MORAL CONFUSION FROM CHIMERAS



Scott Robert & Françoise Baylis



Two Refuted Claims on Species Identity

1. Species identity is fixed.

- Plurality of concepts and models for 'species' used, depending on explanatory context (9-22 published definitions!)

2. “species boundaries are inappropriate objects of human transgression” (3)

- Inconsistency: mules, rhododendrons not viewed as morally monstrous creations...



Species Identity: *Homo Sapien*



- “not even a complete sequence of *the* human genome can tell us what particular set of traits of *homo sapiens* distinguishes human beings from all other species” (4)
- Share most of our DNA with distantly related creatures (e.g., worms)
- But is there something *essentially* or *universally* human that we look for in all human-candidates?
 - Tremendous diversity among human population
 - “essentialism [...] is at odds with evolutionary biology” (5)

Species Boundaries & Moral Judgments



- Recalcitrant beliefs re: human essence and fixed species lines affect everyday moral thinking
- Concerns about crossing conceptual boundaries and creating an *abomination*
 - “the line [between *us* and *them*] must be sharp and socially significant if trespassing across it is to generate a sense of abomination” (8)
 - “threaten to break down the social dividing line between human being and nonhumans” (8)
 - Who has rights? How many humans are in the room?

Moral Confusion



- Creating GMAs “would introduce **inexorable moral confusion** in our existing relationships with nonhuman animals and in our future relationships with **part-human hybrids and chimeras**” (9)
- Classified as human  categorical, full moral status
- Classified as non-human  contingent moral status
- Classified as human/non-human ... ?

Moral Confusion

- Human/nonhuman chimeras and hybrids “are threatening insofar as there is no clear way of understanding (or even imagining) our moral obligations to these beings” (9)
 - Would need to revise or overhaul current moral attitudes, patterns of behavior, institutional policies...
- **Do you agree that we cannot even *imagine* our moral obligations towards these creatures?**
 - **Is there philosophical value to having our moral judgments track classification systems like species boundaries?**
- **Would these changes to our attitudes, behaviors, and policies be drastic? Is that problematic? If so, how and why?**



Josephine Johnson & Chris Eliot



Offense to Human Dignity

- ‘Dignity’ as a term often criticized for being vague and ill-defined
 - BUT it still captures many moral intuitions, so we should investigate its meaning rather than abandoning it
- Concerns about dignity:
 - That of the chimera, correlated obligations
 - Threatened collective sense of humanity

Compromised Humanness: Concerns

- Cruelty to chimeras (e.g., increased abilities but in trapped in cage)
- Poor reflection on scientists, societies that engage in or are complicit with creating compromised humans
- Possibility of using human or part-human as mere means

Implications for a Chimera with an Undignified Existence

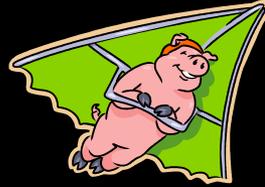
- Violating its rights? (those that it *should* be granted...?)
- Exclusion from moral community? (e.g., part-human chimera not treated as an accountable person)
- Lowered worth of the title “human”
- **Have Johnston and Eliot articulated moral concerns that you think are uniquely captured with dignity talk?**



Andrew W. Siegel



Being a Human, Being a Person



- For human/nonhuman GMAs to cause **moral confusion**, these creatures must pose difficulties for our moral classification:
 - **Person / non-person** is the crucial moral distinction.
- Despite common use of the word ‘human’ and ‘person’ interchangeably, **“there is good reason to think that no one really believes humanness is logically necessary for personhood”** (33)
 - Do not treat all humans as having full personhood status; can imagine treating non-humans with certain traits as persons

Chimeras and Personhood

- Only when GMAs demonstrate personhood traits (e.g., higher-order cognitive functioning) do they demand special respect.
- “That some chimeras might command such respect does not entail a shift in how we view animals that do not possess the requisite traits” (34)
 - Is Siegel too quick to dismiss this concern? Are all of our behaviors and practices based around a cluster of personhood traits?

Threat to Our Personhood?

- Adding more members to the “personhood club” does not make anyone in the club less of a person
- No reason to think that being human is **necessary** for personhood
- Can still believe being a human is **sufficient** for personhood
 - Or can ditch that assumption too...
- Not left without moral guidance or moral foundations
 - Can use existing moral philosophies (e.g., Kantianism, utilitarianism) to address issues that arise with chimeric persons



Questions? Comments?

