

Review of: "Bioethical Assessment of Research with Humanoid or Humanized Biological Entities with Uncertain Moral Status"

Roger Gil¹

¹ Université de Poitiers

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The authors have provided an excellent update on the state of research into humanized or humanoid biological entities. They have chosen to organize their ethical discernment around the uncertainty of the moral status of such entities. This is an interesting approach. However, we must insist on the anthropological roots of this uncertainty, which stems primarily not from scientific realities but from the diversity of ethical opinions on the status of the human embryo. Today, there is no ethical consensus on the status of the human embryo: for some, it is already a human person, for others it is a potential human person, and for others it is a cluster of cells with an uncertain future.

This cacophony of ethical opinions on the embryo has given rise to "ethical compromises" which vary from country to country, and which have defined a "legal framework" for embryo research. Some research may be accepted, or rejected, from one country to another, but also from one moment to another in the same country: the authors give some examples. If uncertainty and ethical divergences concern research on human embryos, it is understandable that they are all the more relevant to research on biological entities combining animal and human. So what is the fundamental question? Is it the question of defining the quantitative threshold of genetic inheritance that would tip a research project into the wrong direction? Is it a question of defining the qualitative threshold of genetic inheritance that would tip an animal entity into a human entity? Or should we consider that the limits are qualitative, and that it is therefore unacceptable for research to result in the introduction into the animal world of cognitive or emotional skills that belong to the human brain? At what limits does research engage the dignity of the human person?

The authors have chosen the prudence principle. It's not embryo research per se that's being challenged, it's the expected results of the research. Chimeras are ethically acceptable, since producing pigs with humanized livers does not compromise the animal status of the pig. On the other hand, all research that risks producing viable animals whose human content would make their moral status uncertain must be avoided. This choice may be contested, but it has the merit of helping to open up debates on complex subjects which, in their own way, commit the future of humanity.