

## Scientist Wants Law to Prevent Creation of Humanzee

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Staff Writer

(April 30, 2008) A leading scientist in Scotland is warning that a new species of “humanzee,” created by breeding apes with humans, could become a reality unless the government takes steps to prevent it. The warning came on the same day that U.S. Rep. Chris Smith introduced a bill that would prohibit the practice in the United States.

Dr. Calum McKellar, the director of research at the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics, told *The Scotsman* that the controversial Human Fertilization and Embryology Act prohibits the placement of animal sperm in a human, but does not prevent human sperm from being inseminated into animals. Thus, if a female chimpanzee was inseminated with human sperm, the two species are related closely enough that a hybrid could be born alive.

The resulting creature would raise ethical dilemmas, such as whether it would be treated as human or animal, and what rights it would have.

“If it was never able to be self-aware or self-conscious it would probably be considered an animal,” he said. “However, if there was a possibility of humanzees developing a conscience, you have a far more difficult dilemma on your hands.”

He said fascination would be enough of a motive for scientists to try crossing the two species.

The motivation for creating these creatures in order to “humanize” organs for transplant into humans might also be present. “There's a desperate need for organs. One of the solutions that has been looked at is using animal organs, but because there's a very serious risk of rejection using animal organs in humans they are already trying to humanize these organs.

“If they could create these humanzees who are substantially human but are not considered as humans in law, we could have a large provision of organs,” Dr. MacKellar said.

Dr. MacKellar has written to the Department of Health to ask that the gap in the draft legislation be addressed and the department confirmed that the bill does not prohibit the insemination of an animal with human sperm.

The Department also claimed that “Owing to the significant differences between human and animal genomes, they are incompatible and the development of a foetus or progeny is impossible. Therefore such activity would have no rational scientific justification, as there would be no measurable outcome.”

Dr MacKellar disagrees. “The chromosomal difference between a goat and a sheep is greater than between humans and chimpanzees,” he said.

Other scientists, such as Professor Bob Millar, director of the Edinburgh’s Medical Research

Council Human Reproductive Sciences Unit, also believe offspring would be possible.

“Donkeys can mate with horses and create infertile offspring; maybe that could happen with chimpanzees,” Professor Millar said.

But he would oppose any such attempt, he said. “It’s unnecessary and ridiculous and no serious scientist would consider such a thing. Ethically, it’s not appropriate. It’s also completely impractical. Chimps would never be a source of organs for humans because of the viruses they carry and the low numbers.”

Hybrids of humans and animals have never been created, but other creatures have been successfully cross-bred such as the ligar, a cross between a lion and a tiger, and a wholphin, created by cross-breeding a whale and a dolphin.

Scientists in the UK have already created a human-animal hybrid by inserting human DNA from a skin cell into a hollowed-out egg shell. The embryo lived for three days.

Meanwhile, U.S. legislators are already taking steps to be sure human-animal hybrids cannot be created on our side of the Atlantic.

On April 29, Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) introduced the Human-Animal Hybrid Prohibition Act, H.R. 5910 which will ban the creation of part-human, part-animal hybrid beings.

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