



CHIMERAS, GREAT BRITAIN, AND THE BRAVE NEW WORLD

by Colin Mason

In Greek mythology, the *chimera* was a vicious beast born of the unholy union of the monsters Typhon and Echidna. With body parts liberally borrowed from goats, dragons, and lions, this mixed-up monster surely haunted the dreams of many a Grecian child, and has sparked the imaginations of countless storytellers since. The term has been picked up by the medical profession, however, and carries an even more sinister connotation.

In what is the stuff of apocalyptic science fiction, modern scientists are experimenting with ways to combine human and animal genes. Often this is done for the purpose of stem-cell research, medical advances, and transplants. Often, however, the research ends with the creation of strange human/animal hybrids, or chimeras.



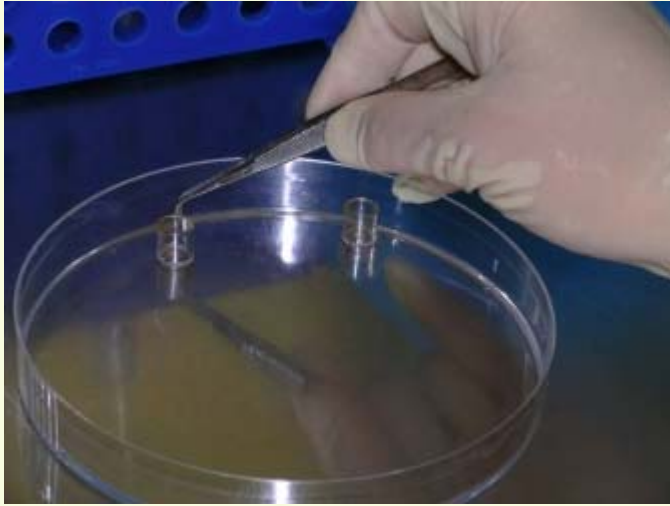
A classical chimera.

According to a 2005 article in National Geographic: "Scientists feel that, the more humanlike the animal, the better research model it makes for testing drugs or possibly growing "spare parts," such as livers, to transplant into humans." Apparently so, because scientists have since produced several weird specimens of human/animal genetics, including pigs with human blood, embryos created from human DNA and rabbit eggs, and mice with partially human brains.

This type of *laissez-faire* medical experimentation has always been cause for concern among conservatives, even those who wouldn't necessarily consider themselves "pro-life" in name. This concern reflects a greater common discomfort with scientific tampering of this nature, a discomfort reflected in Great Britain's 1990 "Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act," which forbade researchers from experimenting with hybrid embryos. However, the British government has been considering legislation that may push mankind's patience with this sort of scientific irresponsibility over the edge.

Great Britain's health minister, Dawn Primarolo, is pushing a new bill that will sweepingly liberalize British laws related to human/animal genetic experimentation. To the delight of the *Washington Post*, Britain's top scientists have reviewed the cause and are seriously considering it. The *Post* reports that the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Authority, "which oversees human embryo research in Britain, means that two previously submitted proposals to create hybrid embryos . . . will be evaluated in detail. Decisions on those proposals, widely anticipated to be positive, are expected in November." Although Parliament has yet to

vote on the issue, it seems that the measure is not meeting the resistance it met in 1990.



The birthplace of the modern chimera.

According to Britain's *Daily Mail*, if this resolution passes, it will allow scientists to "take an animal egg—such as a cow or rabbit egg—remove the genetic material and replace it with human DNA. It can then be turned into an embryo from which stem cells—the body's master cells—can be harvested." This will be done in the hopes of researching and possibly curing such diseases as Alzheimer's and type-1 Diabetes, even though the continuing work with embryonic stem cells has consistently proven futile. In this vein, it is likely that combining animal and human cells in this way will prove just as useless to medical research.

Notwithstanding the countless touted benefits to such research, it seems that the collective stomachs of modern everymen have finally been turned. A casual perusal of the web shows that blogs and discussion groups resound with concern.

What does this tell us? Nothing we don't already know—the supposed "cutting edge" of science is not only out of touch with traditional morality, but with the society it purports to represent. Simply put: most human beings are not ready to intermingle our genes with those of animals in any way, shape or form. The fact that normally liberal nations like France and Germany have completely outlawed the procedure should tell us something about the nature of this debate. Leftists cannot comfortably pigeonhole this as a "conservative" or "pro-life" issue; it is manifestly obvious that it is a question that addresses our very humanity itself.

British scientists are seeking permission to perform medical experimentation on a level that would have been unthinkable only 10 years ago . . .and the government seems eager to give them this permission. How far behind will the United States be? People are not ready for this type of scientific tomfoolery, and we in the pro-life cause must never allow them to grow comfortable with atrocity.

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