Author’s response to reviews

Title: Ethical Arguments Concerning Human-Animal Chimera Research: A Systematic Review

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Author’s response to reviews:

Anne Menard
Editor
BMC Medical Ethics

Subject: Submission of Revised Manuscript METH-D-19-00062R1

Dear Mrs. Menard,

Thank you for your email dated 19 December 2019 enclosing the new reviewers’ comments. We have carefully reviewed them and have revised the manuscript accordingly. Please find our responses in a point-by-point manner below. Wherever possible, changes to the manuscript are shown with reference to a specific line number.

In addition, one of the co-authors, who is an English native speaker, has amended the manuscript again with regards to the English language. Furthermore, the editorial changes have been addressed.

We hope the revised version is now suitable for publication and look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Koko Kwisda

Reply to Reviewers
Please find below our detailed response to the reviewers’ comments.

All line numbers refer to the manuscript file with tracked changes.

Response to Reviewer #3:

Reviewer comment C.3.1:

Authors make mention of the methodology of Strech and Sofaer (lines 180). I agree that using a reasons based methodology is adapted in this case. Can authors confirm that this was a reasons based review? If yes, the research question needs to be changed or modified.

Author’s response:

This is indeed a reasons-based review, modelled after Strech and Sofaer’s proposed methodology.

In “How to write a systematic review of reasons” (2018), Strech and Sofaer provide the following guide to formulating a research question:

“Our […] model for writing systematic reviews of argument-based literature proposes that the review question should be not an ethical question but the factual question of which reasons have been given when discussing the ethical question and how they have been used. We call such systematic reviews of argument-based literature systematic reviews of reasons. […] A tentative general form of review question is: ‘Which reasons have been given for the views that action or policy X is, or is not, permissible […]?’"

Our research question follows this suggested format: “What ethical reasons have been given for or against conducting human-animal chimera research, and how have these reasons been treated in the ongoing debate?”

Reviewer comment C.3.2:

The results are extremely cumbersome, in the abstract and main manuscript. Lines 503 - 511 as well. What specific ethical arguments/reasons did you find? In my opinion, I do not find an answer to the questions: This paper attempts to remedy this, by providing a systematic review of ethical reasons in academic publications on human animal chimera research [lines 39-41]

What ethical reasons have been given for or against conducting human-animal chimera research, and how have these reasons been treated in the ongoing debate? [105 - 107]

Author’s response:
We have streamlined and significantly shortened the text in the results section (in both the abstract in main text), to make it easier to read.

Amongst others, we have deleted a paragraph elaborating on the various disciplines of journals which have published our analyzed articles, and the lines reciting the two most prominent reasons per category.

We have also split the table containing the results (previously table 5), and integrated the smaller tables into the results section, so the full results are immediately apparent to the reader as they are reading this section. We have explicitly indicated that the full list of reasons, and how they are treated in the debate (i.e. whether they are endorsed, rejected or mentioned), can be found in the tables (209-211).

The presentation of the results in the form of a list in the tables follows Strech and Sofaer’s proposed methodology in “How to write a systematic review of reasons”:

“the results […] will be a list of all the types of reasons mentioned in the literature reviewed. […]This list is the answer to the review question.”

Some information was added in lines 503-11 (now lines 473-478) in response to a request by reviewer 2. We have attempted to make this paragraph more straightforward and have moved reviewer 2’s requested addition to a footnote.

Reviewer comment C.3.3:

Methodology: A lot is said here regarding the strengths and limitations of the paper, which is more appropriate for the limitations section of the paper.

Author’s response:

We have cut all discussion of strengths and limitations from this section.

Reviewer comment C.3.4:

Limitations section: This section is extremely extensive. Authors have to carefully summarize this section, and provide only the most necessary facts.

Author’s response:

We have moved a pared down version of the requested additions from reviewer 1 from Methods to the start of the Limitations section (see previous comment), which unfortunately adds a bit of text at the start, but we have significantly shortened this section by cutting 24 lines.
Reviewer comment C.3.5:

Line 54: I am struggling with the justification of the use of the word "conspicuous" here.

Author’s response:

The word “conspicuous” has been deleted.

Reviewer comment C.3.6:

It is unclear why authors delve into a theological-legal-political discussion here. This is a systematic review with clearly defined research questions.

Author’s response:

We added this additional information at the request of reviewer 1. We have left this in for now but would not mind deleting it again.

Reviewer comment C.3.7:

Line 618: what are these categories?

Author’s response:

We have added the names of the categories in brackets.

Reviewer comment C.3.8:

Lines 617-628: The intention was NOT to provide a framework as authors claim in the conclusion section of the paper. To me, this is untrue.

Author’s response:

We have deleted this sentence from the conclusion.