The Relevance of 3R for the Ethical Evaluation of Animal Research

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The introduction of the concept of "replace, reduce, refine"was a milestone in evaluating animal research from an ethical standpoint. More precisely: when it comes to judge whether an *individual* experiment can be ethically justified (not animal research as a whole). 3R is considered to be the cornerstone and even the general answer to moral questions about the use of animals in science. Although the importance of this "mantra" should not be diminished or underestimated, it is questionable whether 3R is the whole story about the moral problems we face when we have to decide which experiment can possibly be justified. The main issue of this presentation shall be to precisely assign the function of the concept and its limitations within a broader perspective. It shall become clearer that the proof that researchers have tried everything possible to ease the burden of animals in experimental procedures is just half the story. To refer to "3R" is not enough to balance animal suffering against scientific or medical interests. It is a *prerequisite*, although a very important one. After having shown that researchers have diminished animal suffering it still remains an open question whether the *remaining* loss in animal well-being can be weighed against our benefits. So we still have to take a closer look to these "benefits" in scope and nature. In the end we have to establish criteria for assessing the "balance" of harm and benefit as demanded by the EU directive 2010/63/EU.