

Research Project

EXPLOR3R: Exploring 3R with experimental ethics

Third-party funded project

Project title EXPLOR3R: Exploring 3R with experimental ethics

Principal Investigator(s) [Persson, Kirsten](#) ;

Co-Investigator(s) [Elger, Bernice Simone](#) ; [Macpherson, Andrew](#) ; [Bertrand, Julien](#) ;

Project Members [Rodriguez, Christian](#) ; [Shaw, David](#) ;

Organisation / Research unit

Faculty of Science

Ethik / Bio- und Medizinethik (Elger)

Department

Ethik

Ethik / Bio- und Medizinethik (Elger)

Project start 01.07.2022

Probable end 30.06.2026

Status Active

Background and rationale

While there is a considerable body of literature on 3R, its application in practice, and its connection to professional opinion, no project has used experimental ethics to explore how scientists, other animal workers or members of the public perceive the ethics of 3R.

Overall objective and specific aims

If 3R is to remain fit for purpose for the 21st century, a re-assessment of its ethical foundations, application and scope is essential. Such a re-assessment cannot be purely theoretical or purely empirical in nature, but must also challenge all the assumptions made in the development and use of 3R. The EXPLOR3R project aims to provide this essential re-evaluation of these aspects of 3R using the methods of experimental ethics (x-ethics).

Methods

The project will use a mixed-methods approach with three main phases: two series of qualitative interviews with scientists, other animal workers and the public in the first phase, two large quantitative surveys in the second phase, and the parallel development of an x-ethical framework for 3R and the piloting of an x-ethics tool for teaching the ethics of 3R to citizens and scientists in the third phase. In each of these phases, the foundations, application and scope of 3R will be investigated along with participants' more general views on animals. As part of the growing discipline of experimental philosophy (x-phil), experimental ethics uses thought experiments (scenarios) to challenge participants to (re-) evaluate their moral intuitions and establish whether they have a sound foundation or are the result of biases or other factors (see detailed description below).

Results and Impact

By providing a fundamental and comprehensive ethical re-evaluation of the foundations, application and scope of 3R among scientists, other animal workers and members of the public, EXPLOR3R will future-proof the paradigm, ensuring that it remains aligned with key reflective ethical values rather than intuitive reflexive thinking. It will also ensure that future citizens, scientists and other animal workers will remain sensitized to key issues in animal ethics through the development of x-ethics educational

tools. EXPLOR3R will be a major contribution to the scientific literature, but also to the philosophical and bioethical literature as no experimental philosophy project has yet explored the ethics of 3R.

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