

School meeting

Thursday September 7th 2021 – 13:00

Room 2A – Psico2 – Via Venezia, 12

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***A neglected page of the history of psychology:
Roberto Ardigò's first experiment on
theadaptation to inverted vision***

According to the Marhaba's book on the early history of Italian psychology (1870-1945) the contribution of Italian scholars to the establishment of the discipline is considered, in light of contemporary international standards and with the only exception of Benussi's and Aliotta's works, as irrelevant. More recent studies have revised this opinion, and have paid greater attention to the overall cultural and academic national context in which the new science has been introduced, independently from its actual success and subsequent influence. The opposition between these two evaluations can be explained on the basis of the conflict between 'internalism' and 'externalism', 'presentism' and 'historicism', which dominates the debates in the history of science.

A particular case of the conflict between similar opposite interpretations is the historical judgement about the contribution of the philosopher Roberto Ardigò, the father of Italian positivism, to the foundation of scientific psychology in Italy. Despite cursory anecdotal appreciations with regards to his effort to promote psychology "as a positive science", the actual role played by Ardigò in experimental psychology seems to have been widely ignored. Although not trained as a natural scientist, Ardigò was himself occasionally involved in empirical research. In particular, at least ten years earlier than Stratton, he performed the first experiment on the adaptation to inverted vision, anticipating the same aftereffect results later described by the American psychologist.

The importance of integrating historical complementary approaches, taking into account both the material bases of the science (i.e., institutions, laboratories, instruments, experimental techniques), and the more traditional history of scientific ideas, is finally discussed with special consideration to the case of the history of psychology at the University of Padua, in the timeframe going from Ardigò to Metelli.