

# Nuova Rivista Storica

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## Abstracts

EUGENIO DI RIENZO – FRANCESCO LEFEBVRE D'OVIDIO, Valutare la valutazione. Qualità della ricerca scientifica e «scientometria»

The Authors analyse the conceptual premises of the use of “bibliometrics” for the evaluation of scientific publications, both in general, for any scientific field, and, more particularly, for social studies and humanities. The Authors do not disagree that it would be desirable, in an ideal world, to “measure” objectively and mathematically the quality of scientific (and particularly historical) research, but they contend that there exists no such method to attain this result. Bibliometrics have been introduced to “measure” with numerical and mathematical methods the “dissemination” of scientific literature, not to evaluate the quality of such literature. The principle underlying the use of bibliometric methods, such as “impact factor” or similar methods, for the evaluation of researchers is both conceptually wrong and misleading and causes distortion in the development of scientific research and publications, placing emphasis on the quantity of publications and on the purpose of obtaining citations – which may be increased, as is well known, through the recourse to reciprocal citations, or similar practices – rather than on the intrinsic quality of the research and the importance of its results. Moreover, the Authors contend that the use of valuations of research publications based on the ranking of the journal on which they are published, rather than the valuation of the publications on their own merits, is also the cause of distortions and that it damages the diffusion of less known publications. In the end, the Authors contend that the use of bibliometrics to evaluate scholars tends to limit freedom of thought and of scientific research, by entrusting implicitly the power to judge the authors of the papers to the members of panels of reviewers who tend to apply their own ideas and concepts in the selection process. In principle there is no reason to consider peer reviews by a single anonymous reviewer, selected by the editors of journals, as preferable to public and collective peer reviews by panels of scholars appointed by universities or public bodies. Still less acceptable, in the opinion of the Authors, is the principle – which has recently been adopted in Italy – to assign higher evaluations to research products that are published abroad and in foreign languages, on the wrong assumptions that it is deemed more difficult to publish in a foreign language and that such publications automatically reach a wider audience. Both these assumptions are considered by the Authors to lack any evidence and to be unfounded.