

On Authority and Freedom in the Thought of Giuseppe Renzi

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Introduction¹

One of the skills typically learned in the study of philosophy is how to interrogate a text and ask questions, such as, What does a theory include? What does it exclude? The philosopher is interested, eclectically, in what is represented and what is not represented, between authority and freedom. In this article, a philosophical debate on the nature of democracy will be addressed. The distinction between authority and freedom which I propose is unusual; if human beings were not identical, they could not understand each other, and those who come before could not make any plans for the future to help the needs of people who will come after. If people were not different, each person would be not unique and diverse from the other, and they will never need to think, act and speak in a way that the others can understand (communicate with them). In other words, every individual produces an image, people render themselves visible and naturally of necessity, as an image, to themselves and others. Individual ideas and actions confer their identity, enable them to face their existence, and thus produce either authority or freedom. Therefore, the freedom of the person to become the agent of their actions does not imply that they have control of the consequences of these actions. It is plausible that these actions have a plurality of implications in dynamic human relationships.

Giuseppe Renzi: A Short Biography

Giuseppe Renzi was born in Villafranca di Verona in 1871 and died in Genoa in 1941. He was one of the leading progressive thinkers in the Italian fascist era. After graduating with a law degree in 1893, Renzi worked as a lawyer, but very soon he was involved in politics. He moved to

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Milan and became a socialist activist and a political journalist. He was director of the Italian newspaper *Lotta di Classe* (“The Class Struggle”),² founded in 1912 by the young Benito Mussolini. Rensi also collaborated on both the *Critica Sociale* (“Social Critique”) of Filippo Turati and the *Rivista Popolare* (“Popular Magazine”) of Napoleone Colajanni. However, after the Milanese protests of 1898, Rensi was obliged to leave Italy and to take refuge in the Swiss canton of Ticino. Rensi was in Switzerland for ten years, where he met his wife Loretta Perucchi (with whom he had two daughters), and was deeply involved in and integrated into the political and cultural life of what, in some ways, can be defined his second home. In particular, he was elected in 1905 member of the Grand Council (he also served as secretary of the same Grand Council and the State Council). Along with his political activity, Rensi continued his journalistic writing and contributed to some local newspapers.

Rensi’s time in Switzerland was a crucial formation period; he worked for *Coenobium*, the *Rivista di Lugano* (“Lugano Magazine”) of “independent studies” founded in 1906 by Enrico Bignami and Ghisleri Arcangelo, and was editor in chief for a time. He wrote his first works: *La Repubblica Italiana* (“The Italian Republic”) and the *Cantone Ticino* (1899); *Anciens Régimes e la democrazia diretta* (1902) (“The Ancient Regimes and Direct Democracy”), republished in 1926 under the title *La democrazia diretta* (“Direct Democracy”); and *Studi e note di filosofia, storia, letteratura ed economia politica* (1903) (“Studies and Notes on Philosophy, History, Literature, Political Economy”).³ During his residence in Switzerland, after his naturalisation as a Swiss citizen in 1903, Rensi became an important philosopher against fascism. He was one of the main architects of the reform politics that confronted other prominent ideologies in the time of Mussolini. He spoke against dominant politics (the ruling class) and thus the fascist party, which controlled the masses through militarism and oppression.⁴ Rensi was arrested and prosecuted for his militant socialist ideology (direct democracy) and his open commitment to political struggle, and thus was imprisoned. In 1908, Rensi returned to Verona where he worked as a lawyer and engaged in political battles, for example, he supported the war in Libya in 1911. Rensi became a Professor of Ethics at the University of Genoa in 1918. He also taught modules on Philosophy of Law and Morality at the Universities of Ferrara, Florence and Messina.

² Christopher Hibbert, ‘Benito Mussolini: Italian Dictator’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Benito-Mussolini#ref268363>. Accessed 01 May 2017.

³ Tiziana Giuffrè, ‘Giuseppe Rensi’, at www.filosofico.net. Accessed 06 November 2017.

⁴ Giuseppe Rensi, *La Democrazia Diretta* (Milano: Adelphi, 1995), p. 188.

In response to the rise of fascism and Mussolini, Renzi wrote a political work, *Filosofia dell'Autorità*, 1920-1921 ("The Philosophy of Authority"). One year later, he regretted this work and changed his mind radically, abandoning his former political views to become an adversary of the despotism of Mussolini. Renzi advocated new political ideals, such as relativism and national revolution and fought against Mussolini. Although the philosopher in the *Philosophy of Authority* was for a single political authority (the Mussolini regime) that could control and maintain order in Italian society, Renzi's *Apologia dell'Ateismo*, 1925 ("Apology for Atheism"), revealed his changed views and opposition to Mussolini. Hence, he worked alongside Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) who was writing a manifesto against Fascism.⁵ As a result of his political ideas and critical writings, he faced many difficulties and even dangers in life (he was arrested in 1930 and also imprisoned). He lost his university position in 1934, and was attacked for his political activism, idealism and views.

Renzi: A Voice from Veneto, Italy

Behind the study of ethics, there is a social and political aspect to Renzi's ideas. Renzi was an active socialist who struggled against the materialism of society, which, according to him, is based on the logic of hegemonic relationships and the diplomacy of lies (what tactfully is called secrecy/discretion). He was indubitably "the philosopher of free thinking" and was considered by contemporary critics as an unsystematic "irregular" for his approach to dealing with various themes: from politics and philosophy to religion. However, he promoted a series of liberal ideas working for the transformation of Italy from the corruption of a fascist regime and in defence of the civil rights of subalterns. So Renzi demonstrates a profound intellectual contribution to society. He had a passionate interest in social problems and certainly his liberal-radical behaviour rested upon a humanitarian basis.

Giuseppe Renzi was without doubt an Italian critical philosopher and we may consider him as a unique and innovative voice from Veneto who lived in a different time, but in a similar political context. In his book, *The Philosophy of the Absurd* the epistemological analysis of authority and freedom sketches some controversial themes that express the idea that there are no rules that govern the growth of human knowledge. Renzi's thought - which is evident from his manuscripts and books which are not yet translated into

⁵ See Fabio Fernando Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 87-90.

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English such as *Autorità e Libertà*, 1926 (“Authority and Freedom”), *La Democrazia Diretta*, 1926 (“Direct Democracy,” the first edition of which appeared in 1902 titled *Gli Anciens Régimes e la Democrazia Diretta*, “The Ancient Regimes and the Direct Democracy”), and *La Filosofia dell’Assurdo*, 1937 (“The Philosophy of the Absurd”) - focuses on the idea that authoritarian politics are unrealistic, pernicious, and detrimental for the progress of each individual, and to freedom itself. Indeed, Renzi’s writings aim to interpret and discuss themes of politics that have a monopoly on truth or freedom. Renzi once said that because there is no true democracy, hegemonic ideologies grow in politics. Renzi felt that the principle of authority has been applied in politics; accordingly some elites have imposed their will upon others in a relationship of subordination. This has a negative impact on democracy. Renzi drew a comparison between one social conservative system triumphing over or superseding another, in the same manner that a leader is adapted and superseded by a successor. The Venetian philosopher also noted that the success of totalitarian politics is not solely due to its methods, but because society is still ruled by barons, bosses and corporate plutocrats who put the people in the process of public debt and impoverishment.⁶ As a result, a dominant group takes advantage of power to manipulate and coerce an individual into a certain subordinated condition. Therefore, the majority of young, women, and marginalised people are affected by this supremacy; the minimum wage, insurance and benefits do not exist, the black-market labour is an open secret, regulations which protect the poorest are the least enforced, homelessness is ignored, and illegal immigration occurs. This cultural, social and economic inequality, oppression and the increase of sexual abuse in our societies, is the representation of inefficient politics and economics. Indeed, these do not create opportunities for a flourishing education, investment or citizenry. Considering Renzi’s writings and his political thought, we can certainly demonstrate the complexity of a socio-political setting in which Italy, Europe and the rest of the world are still silent and helpless.

Furthermore, Renzi criticises philosophy for not having evidence for its theoretical concepts in politics: “We have to realise that all forms of governance in the political sphere, are kept hands of small political class (the

⁶ Giuseppe Renzi, *Autorità e Libertà* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2003), pp. 119-125. For a useful discussion on the theme of the authority in politics see also Hannah Arendt, *La menzogna in politica: Riflessioni sui “Pentagon Papers”* (Genova and Milano: Marietti, 2006), pp. 19-24. For detailed analysis of this, see the English version, *Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

oppressors) who controls people (the oppressed)."⁷ This theory serves as a vehicle to enter the geo-economic landscape of political controversy in Italy, Europe, and the rest of the world, where peoples' memories are the reflections of a divided Western civilisation, which is in crisis. In a way, Rensi also includes the theme of the oppressor and oppressed psychology, such as colonialism, power, sexism, discrimination, exile, poverty and *subalternity*.⁸ Subaltern theory has been used in postcolonial studies. In 1992 feminist scholar and literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak said:

Subaltern is not just a classy word for "oppressed," for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie... In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference. Now, who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern.... Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus; they don't need the word "subaltern"... They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They're within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern.⁹

Similarly, Rensi argued for this concept of subaltern people within the mechanism of hegemonic politics. Indeed, he insists on the inescapable consequences of subjugation and marginalisation in a depressed and stagnant economy. When we talk about corruption and turmoil in politics and the economy, we should remember that lies do not characterise politics by accident of "human sinfulness."¹⁰ Willed human action has continued to cause enormous change, controversy and crisis. Thus, Rensi's distinction between authority and freedom is somewhat reminiscent of how contemporary societies live. We are the result of a blind and dominant economy in a world where people are bitterly divided.

⁷ Rensi, *La democrazia diretta*, p. 29.

⁸ The theory of subalternism comes from Antonio Gramsci's prison notebooks. It then became an accepted way to describe the southern Italian social condition. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971). In Marxist and postcolonial studies, "subaltern" is used to indicate the socio-economic status of marginalised peoples.

⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, interview with Leon de Kock, 'New Nation Writers' Conference in South Africa', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1992), pp. 45-46.

¹⁰ Giuseppe Rensi, *La Critica della Morale* ("The Critique on Morality") (Catania: Etna, 1935), p. 160. Rensi remarks on the relations between God/law and human sinfulness that serve to understand how some financial, political and cultural measures are taken by a government (God) for the interest of their governing elites in this current phase of civilisation.

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It is interesting to think that when the oppressed of a marginalised culture and society strike back, it is an explosive return. Seen from this viewpoint, we can ask: Are all people able to make decisions and act for themselves in order to enable them to have equal say and freedom in a popular sovereignty (direct democracy) in a global market? What is the value of freedom? What does freedom mean? Such interrogations call into question the meaning of freedom and authority in controversial politics. In Rensi's discourse, our politicians oppress us. However, as he points out, our political institutions have been created by new forms of democracy, referendum, and right of initiative that go against the interest of "political class/the elites."

The Philosophy of the Absurd

The etymology of "absurd" is from Latin *absurdus* (the prefix *ab* plus *surdus*, meaning deaf or dull), which means dissonant, or "out of tune/harmony with reason."¹¹ In a figurative sense and as a philosophical approach, the absurd refers to what is contrary to logic, what is unreasonable, nonsensical, and ridiculous. In *The Philosophy of Absurd*, Rensi develops his sceptical mode of thinking. In particular, he drew upon the concept of the absurd, which is closely connected to a reality that is irrational and illogical, and therefore incomprehensible. From this, the pessimistic intuition emerges for Rensi; precisely because reality is absurd and irrational, reality is painful and desperate.¹²

Rensi also adapted the absurd concept to human existence in which people, who seek meaning in life, freedom and justice, reveal their incapacity to find these vital qualities. For instance, the realm of human affairs consists of the "web" of human relationships that should provide equal opportunities, tolerance, racial, and cultural parity. According to Rensi, it is impossible to find meaning in life and therefore freedom and truth, because we live in a world of things that culturally, socially and racially constrain the people who move amid these things. As Rensi says, we are not free because some people are constrained by their specific worldly interests and truths. Thus, each person experiences difficulty in attempting to become free, because reality is so intricate and unclear. Rensi's philosophy ends by moving paradoxically through pure negation and pure affirmation: negation of reason, affirmation of

¹¹ H. W. Fowler (revised), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1934), p. 6.

¹² Giuseppe Rensi, *La filosofia dell'assurdo* (Milano: Adelphi, 1991), pp. 27-31.

will.¹³ Within the will must emerge freedom, which is seen as causality.¹⁴ Freedom is related to the idea of being, which is the explicit and direct basis of knowing: both the idea of being and freedom are like two faces of a single medal. Reason needs the intervention of freedom for its explanatory power; while freedom, when it is fully realised, it is totally autonomous, and this also contains knowledge itself. That it is love and justice.

In *The Philosophy of Absurd*, Renzi reveals a significant moment of Italian politics in the twentieth century. Crucially, it also analyses his point of view regarding the theoretical and the ethical. In fact, this book is not only an example of original reflection, which is the fruit of the spirit of an activist philosopher in his realism and scepticism, but it is also a break with the dominant philosophical tradition. In Chapter Three, “The Art of Masking the Contradictions,” Renzi points out how the early civilisations in Greece, Egypt and Persia had their own beliefs and convictions.¹⁵ What was right and true for some people was not for others. Therefore, all peoples have their own traditions and customs, which are different from one place to another. What it is an absolute value for one culture is not universal for another, and also what it is beautiful or right or ethical for one is not so for others. Renzi has taken these ideas from the moral relativism of the ancient Sophists, who discussed knowledge and the truth of each human being. Indeed, one of pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras’ most famous sayings is that human beings are the measure of all things (DK, 80B1).¹⁶ In following this assertion, Renzi takes a relativist position on human relations, and concludes that someone who has power tends to manage, manipulate, and buy political influence to benefit a particular elite group, versus the weaker, the minority, the unemployed, or any other who becomes a “non-person.”

Thus, under totalitarian rulers, who align their power-conviction to the political line of the present moment or eliminate truths and data that do not fit their ideology or status, the result of this art of lying is terrible. The evidence of this in Renzi’s writings is too striking to be ignored, and is an expression of the philosopher’s suffering which is associated neither with philosophical optimism, nor with the regime of dictatorship. This was the path that led him to scepticism, understood as a “philosophy of life/or the absurd” and as “a

¹³ Renzi, *La filosofia dell'assurdo*, p. 20. See also Tiziana Giuffrè, ‘Giuseppe Renzi’, *Filosofico.Net* (2017), at <http://www.filosofico.net/renzi.htm>. Accessed 10 November 2017.

¹⁴ Renzi, *La filosofia dell'assurdo*, pp. 178-187.

¹⁵ Renzi, *La filosofia dell'assurdo*, pp. 43-58.

¹⁶ Carol Poster, ‘Protagoras’, *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/protagor>. Accessed 09 November 2017.

dissident and existentialist philosophy.”¹⁷ What Rensi had in mind was a simple vision of human and cultural desperation that selects people as separated cells or units. Critically, Rensi’s thinking may be called “the philosophy of absurd,” where there are only conflicting situations in “an irrational world,” in a capitalist, imperialist and patriarchal world, where there is no place for the poor, the oppressed, and the excluded (the other), and therefore there is no freedom.¹⁸

Direct Democracy

Rensi developed a specialisation in ethical matters, and was a moral reformer and polemicist, involved in a struggle to break the chains of cultural and religious hegemony imposed by the Italian fascist regime. His protests consisted in a struggle for liberation from a society that undermines and excludes the “other” (oppressed people who are relegated to a subaltern status). The ideological-ethical journey of Rensi exiled him from power. Although he asked what virtue is, given the human condition, what the future holds, and how various forms of domination affect people, Rensi came to the conclusion that there was no possible resolution or any real social progress.¹⁹ “The philosophy of the absurd” dominated life, which meant that there is no freedom, a view expressed strongly in *Direct Democracy*:

We must put ourselves in the shoes of those people who feel no benefit, who belong to a different class from ours, who have neither the education nor the means nor the style and charm of the ruling class, nor friendly relations with it, and which an abyss therefore divides from that class and the state officials who come from within it.²⁰

¹⁷ Here, the word “dissident” is used for two reasons. Giuseppe Rensi’s thought can be compared with the dissident feminist psychiatrist Nawal El Saadawi’s ideas. These thinkers have been imprisoned and excluded by their governments for their incommensurable positions regarding politics and religion. Their sceptical nature is similar, even if they are of different genders and from different backgrounds. In a way, Rensi and El Saadawi belong to the school of thought that is in opposition to or works against the mainstream, imperialism/authority, governmental power and mainline religions. Their dissident approach is to investigate meaning in things and search for the truth through critical thinking. For further discussion, see Mark Redhead, ‘Dissident. Political Theory’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2014), at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dissent-politic>. Accessed 10 November 2017.

¹⁸ Rensi, *La filosofia dell’assurdo*, p. 135.

¹⁹ Rensi, *La democrazia diretta*, pp. 18.

²⁰ Rensi, *La democrazia diretta*, pp. 18-20: “Noi dobbiamo metterci nei panni di coloro che nessuno vantaggio risentono, di coloro che appartengono ad una classe diversa dalla nostra, che non hanno né l’educazione, né l’istruzione, né i modi, né la foggia di vestito della classe dirigente,

Rensi's enterprise was to consider what features of conservative politics have contributed to human alienation from the world. While liberating us from a lack of consciousness, Rensi's purpose was to provoke thought and debate about past and current political complexity and controversy. His analysis has brought a message of hope to oppressed people. Rensi's criticism is an example of Italian postcolonial literature and philosophy, which helps to judge other forms of colonialism/a sort of polite apartheid (i.e., the current problem of economic and cultural segregation of women and other minority groups). He joined liberal and humanitarian causes. Rensi sought laws to protect minorities, legalise labour unions, and curb business monopolies. His liberal ideas are those of a philosopher/critic who rejected and dominant politics. Rensi was a humanist, in whose role as critic, was sympathetic to with ordinary and oppressed people, opposing the entrenched power of the dominant classes and the church. He sought freedom from any political and religious influences of the time that, in his opinion, contributed only to deprivation, oppression, and exploitation.

Rensi's philosophy helps us to interpret and reread critically and historically what Western politics has done globally, and it help us to understand how the oppressed still live. It also gives an idea of how world politics is part of a scenario, which is absurd/illogical, divisive and unstable. Political entities are eager to find formulas, preferably expressed in an elaborated system of regulations, and they apply procedures, which predict historical and political facts as necessary and natural phenomena to be followed. For instance, what this politics has in common with lies is to get rid of facts by opinion manipulation. In the case of the European politics of integration, the European Union programme has been an obstacle to the prosperity and welfare of many young people, professionals and intellectuals. Instead of recognising multiculturalism as a possibility/exchange in developing/progressing a global economy, and integrating/promoting cultural diversity, this current political scenario puts stresses on new cultures, and immigrants as invisible "others" who should not have the same opportunities as local people.²¹ Considering how Italy, the rest of Europe, the United States and the United Kingdom are

né i rapporti di amicizia con questa, e cui quindi un abisso separa da tale classe e dai funzionari dello Stato che escono dal seno di essa.”

²¹ Peter Gale, 'The Refugee Crisis and Fear: Populist Politics and Media Discourse', *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2004), pp. 321-340.

nowadays; there are beliefs and policy positions that blame the excessive arrival of immigrants and refugees and see them as a possible danger to society. Needless to say, there is an increase in extremist attacks committed in Europe. Though these crimes are unacceptable the crucial point is that politics should not be aimed at the “enemy” through anti-immigration propaganda, but should work for human rights and allow all people to determine their future. With the weight of such social and cultural inequality, it is inevitable that policy is deliberately planned to increase exclusion, discrimination and annihilation of people from diverse backgrounds.

Thanks to Renzi’s picture of these lies that proliferate in democracy, we can learn how political controversy; discrimination and cultural superstition are intensified in infinite ways. The point is that in this current world-picture, the subalterns still have no voice in the society; due to the hegemonic power structure there is nothing that can be exposed and discussed critically.²² However, Renzi attempts to assess how the subalterns have been affected by patriarchal and colonialist politics, how they have been silenced, discriminated against and excluded on the basis of their identity, race, sex and social status. He states:

The popular will always faces the obstacle of the “dominant political class” that, in fact, has exclusive power overall ... The head of state (the president) is the representative not only of political dominance but also of a family; s/he has not just to protect the interests of that family, but s/he also driven to maintain and, perhaps, to expand the power allotted to the dynasty to which s/he belongs. S/he will have to transmit this power to their children (nepotism)... thus, the conservative classes live by interest and profit, and have defended their interests against the ordinary people (the subalterns).²³

Renzi’s theories and critiques can enhance our capacity to interpret everything self-consciously. The truth is that in Western and non-Western societies, there is still no equality in the professions, in politics, and in

²² One example, education and jobs training, is examined in Charlotte Chadderton and Casey Edmonds, ‘Refugees and Access to Vocational Education and Training Across Europe: A Case of Protection of White Privilege?’, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2015, pp. 136-152.

²³ Renzi, *La democrazia diretta*, pp. 55-60: “... la volontà popolare si trova sempre si trova davanti all’ostacolo della “classe politica dominante” che, di fatto, esercita sempre esclusivamente il potere... Il capo dello Stato è il rappresentante non solo della politica dominante, ma anche di una famiglia; egli non solo deve proteggere gli interessi di quell, ma è altresì spinto a conservare e possibilmente allargare il potere toccato in sorte alla dinastia cui fa parte, che dovrà trasmettere ai figli (il nepotismo)... Quindi, le classi conservatrici vivono di rendita, di interesse e profitto, e hanno difeso i propri interessi contro la massa del popolo (i subalterni).”

education. The question of human rights and opportunities first raised in the Italian Renaissance and continued through the Enlightenment is still unresolved, but “other voices” have emerged as against “the first voices” of the dominant Western culture.

The World of Contradictions²⁴

The Rensian motto “what is real is irrational and what is rational is unreal,”²⁵ draws attention to the problem that philosophy has been unable to disclose and change the meaning of contradictions. Only speculative minds have attempted to understand how the world works. For Renzi, what is irrational is real and what is rational is unreal, and this insight can be applied to human history. It is evident that people have never known the truth, since people have never had a complete vision of truth. Renzi seeks to interpret reality and also to see history, customs and religious beliefs. As Renzi said, “reality does not need to be criticised but it has to be understood.”²⁶ The mind, which is logical/rational and conscious, is inseparably connected with conscience and reality. This mind, which is detached from subjective opinions and judgments searches for the reality of things and accepts objects as they are. This analytical aspect and the processes of the mind to ascertain facts, exists itself in the mind, not in the objects. Therefore, the things are as they are, and the mind is independent from these things. By retrieving the Socratic work upon the matter of justice, discussed in the *Memorabilia*, Book IV, in one of dialogues by Socrates’ student, Xenophon, there is an open debate about the meaning of justice and uprightness/honesty (Natural Law). From a Socratic standpoint, words can change facts and thus subjective opinions can commit injustice, spread malicious information, and stir up conflict and political dissent. With the emergence of common conservative world politics, this eminent political life in the different states, it should be admitted, has not been beneficial for the spirit of existing communities or incoming foreigners.

²⁴ Renzi, *La filosofia dell'assurdo*, p. 59. See Chapter Three, ‘l’arte di mascherare le contraddizioni’ (“The art of masking the contradictions”), pp. 40-53. In this section Renzi analyses the role of philosophers, and their difficulties in understanding how biases, contradictions, and lying statements work in society.

²⁵ Renzi, *Autorità e libertà*, p. 157: “Cio’ che e’ reale e’ irrazionale, e cio’ che e’ razionale e’ irreale.” This is the motto of Renzi’s philosophy, written by him underneath of one of his portraits/images.

²⁶ Renzi, *La filosofia dell'assurdo*, p. 59.

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The global economy has hit hardest the youngest and the poorest, and unemployment in the thirty-five major industrialised OECD countries has surged. The situation in volatile times of many people who feel poorer and weaker has often fuelled anti-immigration sentiment across the United States, United Kingdom and Europe. When people are insecure about jobs and the economic stability of their country, there is a tendency in politics to blame immigrants for economic problems, terrorism and other social and religious problems. What is needed is for governments to look at cultural diversity as an asset of value for Western economy and society; it is indefensible that conservative politics pursue an agenda supporting the elite at the expense of majority. A group of people who live outside the parameters of honesty and seek advancement to a higher social status are unable to help others. These “aspirational citizens” find it profitable to gain success and wealth by exploiting the weak and the poor, who merit equality and welfare. The disparity, inequality and attribution of power in society are very high and the oppression of women and minorities has increased.²⁷ There is a desire for freedom but this is often denied and subordinated by conservatives. In most cases patriarchal conservative politics have always tried to deform and erase the process of social emancipation and inclusion of women, Blacks and people of colour, and diverse faith groups. The prejudices of the masculinist and imperialist elite has been expressed in acts of violence, intolerance and discrimination, which are repeated throughout history, and are resurgent in contemporary politics. People need to relearn what can be achieved by revolutionary change. In this struggle, the creation of meaning in life which results in changes to the world, will emerge.

Without a doubt, it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness.²⁸ In a sense, what determines social and political relationships is the production of material things. In other words, in the course of history, if all social, political and religious systems can only be understood through material conditions; therefore, the human condition is kept within limits and restrictions, and people cannot make any progress. We can find an echo of contemporary politics in the consolidation

²⁷ Dragoş Cosmescu, ‘The Authoritarian Credentials of Populist Presidentialism’, *South-East European Journal of Political Science*, vol. 2, nos. 1-2 (2014), pp. 153-172. See also Bronwyn Winter, ‘Religion, Culture and Women’s Human Rights: Some General Political and Theoretical Considerations’, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2006), pp. 381-393.

²⁸ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1859), p. 136.

of democracy through the history of class struggle and interests. From a Marxist point of view, we can say that social existence determines the collective consciousness. But as an individual we can say that consciousness can change the course of social existence.

As for all philosophers, the definition of human consciousness is crucial to Rensi. For Rensi consciousness works when people are able to identify themselves. This idea also comes from Hegel, who defined consciousness as a process called the dialectic, which develops between oppositions (thesis and antithesis). According to Rensi, this process is important for social relationships, between those with power and those deprived of it (the oppressed). In such an economic and political situation, people's struggle and human consciousness are indispensable for social revolution.

Conclusion

Rensi's originality is the result of his combination of the philosophical speculation of thinkers of the Greek time and those of the nineteenth century, and he has the merit of being one of first hermeneutical-contextual theorists (deconstructionists) against all the forms of dominance which have always secured the positions of the traditional powers (absolutism) through their ideological apparatuses (education, economics, religion and politics). Rensi's analysis is particularly exemplary in regard to contemporary politics and ideologies that still legitimate the interests of the ruling class (elite), those of high status (classism), those of the first race (racism), and of the male sex (chauvinism). Rensi regarded the social condition of the subalterns as something of historical importance for future generations. History is not only of fundamental importance to Europe; it is necessary for all citizens of the world. One cannot therefore, for Rensi, avoid the historical conditions of the subalterns, using them as a "source" for the "benevolent" patriarchal/hierarchical politics that it is based on a divisive society.

His commitment to political struggle and his defence of human freedom cannot be understood without reference to Gramscian and Hegelian critical discourses. While the first phase of Rensi's philosophy is associated with positivism, he later embraced Hegelian idealism. Indeed, Rensi was a militant socialist operating in Verona, Milan and Switzerland. His background and his political and theoretical commitment seems not only to be relevant in the early twentieth century, but could also have an

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impact on the philosophy of the twenty-first century. Renzi's writings are of considerable importance for philosophers, sociologists, economists, and politicians in terms of historical scholarship, literary and rhetorical analysis, and theories of the relationship between power and knowledge. Renzi's ideas concern those who live in silence and are excluded from the dominant, patriarchal and hegemonic systems. However, his philosophy may be redefined today as a philosophy favouring diversity and inclusion of marginalised and oppressed people. Renzi's championing of the moral and spiritual necessity of independence from any form of colonialism and imperialism is as relevant in the twenty-first century as it was during the Italian fascist era.