

## **The Noble-Man and the Mass-Man in Gasset's Philosophy and the Quest for Development in Africa**

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### **Abstract**

The discourse examines the problem of development in Africa, especially as Africans have been unable to ensure a peaceful, decent and standard life. The ideas of the mass-man and the noble-man in the philosophy of Ortega y Gasset are closely examined in engaging the problem of development in Africa. This discourse proposes the mindset of the noble-man as what is lacking in Africa's battle against the problem of development. An incorporation of the noble-man's mindset will ensure better sustenance for the African.

**Keywords:** Mass-man, Noble-man, Africa, throes, invention, development and sustenance

### **Introduction**

The idea of development is a very topical issue in Africa. It has been viewed from different perspectives. It is held that the invasion of the African continent by forces of colonialism is the reason why the continent has not been able to rise and take good care of the African. Various ways have been suggested to resolve this problem in order to ensure a continent of good life. Despite the decades that have passed since this debate started, no significant impact has been made with regards to providing the good life for the African. The consequence has been a repeated story of failure in respect of the sustenance of the African. This discourse proposes a new way to look at the problem through the philosophy of Ortega y Gasset on the mass-man and the noble-man.

### **The Mass-man**

Ortega y Gasset divides society into two: the group of the minority and the group of the majority. He calls the group of the minority as the noble-man. He calls the majority

group as the group of the mass-man. For Gasset, through the right training, the mass-man is able to change his group from mass-man to minority. For the noble-man to change his place to the group of the mass-man is to embark on degeneration. So, who is really the mass-man for Gasset?

According to Gasset, the **Mass-Man**<sup>1</sup> is that person who is satisfied with just being like everybody else in the society. He does not bother him to distinguish himself or herself. The task of trying to be different from all others is too tedious for him. Consequently, he merely remains like all other uncultivated people in the society. Without training, the Mass-man aspires to places of authority. He/she likes authority, not for anything else but for the power that is involved. He wants to use the power to his advantage, to oppress those who go contrary to him; he crushes them with the power that comes from the authority that he has. The mass-man likes the benefits that accrue from holding authority; he sees the privileges of the office but never the responsibilities.

He thinks that the good things of life like houses, perfumes, clothing, money etc grow on trees. In this fashion, he thinks if you want any of the good things of life, you simply pluck it from the tree. In the words of Gasset, the mass-man thinks that life is some **Edenic** tree where you pluck everything that you desire.<sup>3</sup> He is not aware, according to Gasset, of the hard work that has gone into bringing about the good things of life.

In essence, the mass-man does not know about the nature of life as insecurity that led to the invention of culture as a solution (i.e security). He does not know how to conceive human life as a problem and to invent culture as a path to escape the problematic nature of life.

The mass-man detests all challenges and confrontations. He avoids dialogue. He cannot dialogue because he does not have the understanding of the real issues in human life. As he cannot engage in dialogue as a means of resolving misunderstandings and issues, he resorts to violence for settlement of issues.<sup>4</sup> He uses his power to crush those who go against him or who differ from him. This is the reason why the mass-man cannot draw any program of life in the form of activities in the society. He is unable to formulate policies for the sustenance of the human community.

In the opinion of Gasset, as the mass-man is ill-equipped to rule or lead, he/she should never be allowed to occupy places of authority because he will not only rule against the interest of others but also against his very own interest too. Gasset observes that in modern time, this group of the mass-man has expanded as some members of the minority group have fallen into it. This is the group that Gasset refers to as the "**learned ignoramus**".<sup>5</sup> Gasset sees that some learned professionals only know their small fields. Professionals like doctors, engineers, lawyers, economists, physicists, and chemists, to mention a few. They may know

their areas of specialization very well but they lack the knowledge of the nature of human life and culture as the intervention for the peace and satisfactory living of the human person. Gasset submits that the understanding of culture is crucial to satisfactory and comfortable human existence. Thus, he refers to professionals without the understanding of life and the essential ability to create culture as "**learned Ignoramus**".

### **The Noble-Man<sup>6</sup>**

Who is the noble-man for Gasset? The noble-man is that person who is not contented with himself or herself; who is always exerting himself/herself to be more. He/she has the urge to be different from all others by working on himself/herself in order to be more useful to the society. He/she is able on his own to sustain the discipline that will make him to be different and relevant to his society. He willingly accepts and makes sacrifices to achieve the discipline that makes him different and relevant. In fact, the ability to make this sacrifice for better result is the reason he is called "**noble**". For Gasset, the noble-man is not complacent. He is able to make the tedious sacrifice of understanding human existence and accordingly inventing culture to adequately tackle the problem of human existence in order to ensure satisfaction and comfort in human existence.<sup>7</sup> The noble-man understands that the good things of life like houses, cars, perfumes, designers' clothing, etc do not grow on trees. To have them, the person has to make certain personal sacrifices. The noble-man, therefore, is the direct opposite of the mass-man.

As the noble-man is the man of ideas, he is not scared of dialogue. Dialogue is the means he uses to resolve conflicts with others unlike the mass-man who resorts to violence at the slightest provocation,

especially in things that are in conflict with his opinion. The noble-man, apart from being a specialist in his profession, has a good knowledge of his existence and the intellectually sound direction that communal human existence must go in order to guarantee peace, satisfaction and comfort of all constituent members.

For the understanding of human existence that the noble-man has, he is able to draw a realistic, effective and sustainable program of existence for his society, a program that represents the interest of all and has justice as its base. It is because of this that Gasset thinks that only the noble-man should occupy the place of authority. Gasset proposes that if the noble-man rules, he will rule in the interest of the society and its constituting members unlike the mass-man who will rule on the basis of selfishness, detrimental to himself and others.<sup>8</sup> It should be known that according to Gasset, the primary mission of a university is to transmit culture in order to ensure that society lives by the best of ideas ever possible.<sup>9</sup> For him, when the university studies science, it is with the aim of assessing the ideas it can borrow from science in order to invent the best of culture to enable society live by the best of ideas. He sees the university graduate as one who should understand the principle behind the creation of culture as he is a member of the directive class. The directive class refers to all those who have finished from the university. They are the directive class because their education in the principles of culture for survival separated them from the class of the mass-man. Consequently, in the thinking of Gasset, the university graduate is a member of the minority group, the group of the noble men.

### **The African Condition**

Africa has been struggling with the issue of development. This issue of development is based on African leaders' inability to guarantee a good life for the people. By good life, we mean the peaceful, decent and standard life that befits human dignity. What we have in the continent as the lot of the people is misery, poverty, war, corruption, catalogue of bad roads, poor state of social infrastructure, corruption, poor and ineffective administration of societies, etc. The picture is generally one in which a lot still has to be done for the good life of the ordinary African.

Many reasons have been given for this scenario in Africa: from the invasion of the traditional African society by forces of colonialism to corruption of its current leaders. For the resolution of this impasse in the African continent, all sorts<sup>10</sup> have been suggested: the traditionalists suggest that we escape the influences of modernity and return to what we were in times past. It has been asked if there is actually any traditional life that still exists somewhere intact that we can return to today. Has the purity of the past not been eroded by exigencies of the time so much so that we can no longer get the traditional as it existed? The professionals have asked that we embark on the selection of values from the traditional and modern times that will constitute our new culture into the future. The pitfall of this position is that it has not been able to provide a parameter that will be the basis on which values are to be selected from the traditional and modern to constitute a new culture that is to guarantee the good life for all in Africa. The discussion on how to achieve development in the African continent is still ongoing today as the yearnings of the larger population of Africa bothers on development that will transform their lives from the lowest to the best.

### **The Mass-Man and Noble-Man in the Philosophy of Gasset and the Quest for Development in Africa**

In the light of the imbroglio of development in Africa, it is pertinent to appreciate that our problem is mental. Once the mental state is right, it manifests outwardly in the society with things working properly. What is currently manifesting in the African society is evidence of what is in us. If what is in us changes, what is outside in our society will also change. Here, the idea of Gasset on the mass-man and noble-man becomes handy and relevant. Looking at our approach to life in the continent currently, for instance, with the problems of poor administration of societies, corruption and misery, it is clear that there are issues with the handling of affairs in the continent by the leaders. This condition is not inflicted on the continent by external bodies. They are situations that can be turned around by the leaders and people of Africa. In this condition therefore, our mentality seems to be the mentality of the mass-man who does not comprehend the insecurity of his existence. Only a conscious and sincere effort to redirect life and happenings in his environment can change state of affairs to what we desire. It is because we have the mentality of the mass-man that laws are made and they are not obeyed; funds are made but used for wrong purposes other than ones that guarantee our good life. We should not be surprised of the so much wars and violence in our environment when there is clearly the option of dialogue; this is why we spend close to ninety percent of our time talking politics and using only one percent for the practice of politics.

Africans need to appreciate, drawing from the idea of the noble-man, that life is simply what you make it. If we have the idea of the mass-man that life is some Edenic tree where you pluck the things you need from the tree, in no time we shall have a serious

shortage of everything. We shall consequently be in need of everything: targeted human capital, targeted leadership, funds, as well as goods and services, to mention only a few. Is this not the state of affairs in the continent of Africa today? Are we not complaining of almost everything? The state of affairs cannot be different as long as we have the mass-man mentality that does not create and invent.

The noble-man's idea should instruct Africans leaders and people that the condition we currently living in is within our control. Therefore, we can change the story from a continent of poverty, want and hazards to a continent of peaceful, decent and standard living. Africans have to, in the spirit of the noble-man, conceptualize insecurity as it is currently in our continent and on the basis of the life that we want for our people, create ideas and materials to transport us to this desired destination. This automatically creates a culture.

It comes down to the fact that culture matters. Culture is the program of sustenance that we have in our continent as a people.<sup>11</sup> If we neglect culture, we neglect our sustenance as a people. If we neglect our sustenance, we logically have in-sustenance which comes in forms of all the throes that we have in the African continent. As the mentality of the mass-man is against sustenance, it has to be killed in our society and the mentality of the noble man has to be promoted in order for the African continent to experience peace and prosperity.

### **Recommendations**

1. There has to be the realization having a peaceful, decent and standard life in the continent is not by chance but by hard work.
2. In bringing about the peaceful, decent and standard life in the continent, we need to be very

conscious of the direction of our culture.

3. Leaders are products of our societies and if they are defective, it is a sign that the entire society has to get rid of them.
4. The mass-man's mentality is real, just as the noble-man's mentality is real
5. The ugly situation in the African continent can be put behind us.

However, we have to do what we need to do- install the noble man's mentality in our society -actions follow ideas as the wheel of the cart follows the hoof of the ox.<sup>12</sup>

6. Finally, there has to be a re-orientation of Africans in order to dislodge the mass-man mentality and install the noble-man's mentality.

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