

Are We the 'Last Men'?

Perhaps Friedrich Nietzsche's most recognizable title is *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in which he deals with some of the recurring themes in his works such as the "death of God," the will to power, and the Superman.

As I mentioned [the other day](#), Nietzsche had perceived that the foundation of European morality had been undermined with the eclipse of Christianity.

According to Nietzsche, the antidote to this new reality was the *Übermensch*—the "Superman"—the self-mastered human being who would work to create new values for the world.

But Nietzsche's fear, as expressed in *Zarathustra*, was that the West would turn away from this ideal in favor of apathy; that they would reject the Superman in favor of the "Last Man."

In his essay ["Nietzsche, the Crisis, and the War,"](#) Eric Voegelin summarizes Nietzsche's disturbing description of the "Last Man":

Zarathustra preaches the gospel of the superman to the people, and the people are silent. He then tries to arouse them by an appeal to their pride and draws the picture of the most contemptible, of the Last Man, whom they will be unless they overcome their present state. The Last Man is the man without creative love, without creative imagination, without a desire for anything that is more than himself. "What is a star?" asks the last man, and he is satisfied with his little pleasures and the comforts of his existence. What he wants is: some warmth, some neighborliness, not too much work, protection against disease, a sufficient measure of drugs to create pleasant dreams (liquor, movies, radio), no poverty but not too much wealth. He wants to know what is going on

and to thrash it out; all want the same and want to be equal; he who feels different goes voluntarily into the insane asylum; “formerly all the world was insane”—say the most subtle and leer; one has a pleasure for the day and a pleasure for the night—but with restraint, for the last man is concerned about health and wants a long life. “‘We have invented happiness’—say the last men and leer.” At this point of the speech the audience breaks out in enthusiasm: “Oh, give us this last man—make us these last men. You can have then your superman!” and they laughed. “But there is ice in their laughter,” adds Nietzsche, having diagnosed correctly the schizophrenic touch of the man who is last because he is lost spiritually.

Sadly, the above description sounds all too familiar. The question is this: Does Nietzsche describe an ennui and love of comfort to which men of all ages have been susceptible, or does he describe a condition that is most particular to modern Western man?

The question is: Are we the “Last Men”?

Image: LxMelloxNear/gothic-anomie/Deviant Art