



COMMENT  
LETTERS

[FT Home](#) > [Comment](#) > [Letters](#)

## W Europe drawn into a 'banal' nihilism

By Daniel Aronoff

Published: November 12 2005 02:00 | Last updated: November 12 2005 02:00

From Mr Daniel J. Aronoff.

Sir, The distinction between the Nietzschean vision of nihilism and the passive, banal form it has taken in contemporary art, as elucidated by Harry Eyres ("The heart of nothingness", FT Weekend, November 5/6), helps illuminate the very different responses to the invasion of Iraq by eastern Europe, western Europe and the US.

Western Europe, having nearly destroyed itself in a violent nihilistic rage that still defies comprehension, has been drawn to a "banal" nihilism in which the only positive belief seems to be that it should keep to itself and avoid conflict at all costs.

It feels no moral imperative to intervene on behalf of others and, since its security has been underwritten by the US for the past 50 years, one wonders if it has the capacity to stand up for itself.

Eastern Europe seems more invigorated since its release from Soviet totalitarianism and appears willing to act on behalf of others. The leadership ranks are replete with existentialists able to make distinctions between good and evil and have a deep moral commitment to stand up for what is right.

The US has been less affected than Europe by secular challenges to religious belief. It remains among the most "Christian" countries, a fact that seems to frighten "banal" nihilists who view with suspicion anyone who regularly attends church.

US presidents tend to view foreign affairs in moralistic terms. Thus it was that the Soviet Union was dubbed the Evil Empire by Mr Reagan, and Iraq, Iran and North Korea the Axis of Evil by its current president.

The US has, within the realm of its own self-interest, acted on behalf of others and is doing so in its attempt to promote democracy in Iraq. But US "unilateralism" betrays a moral certitude alien to an existentialist.

Daniel J. Aronoff,

President/CEO,

The Landon Companies,

Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304, US

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2011. You may share using our article tools. Please don't cut articles from FT.com and redistribute by email or post to the web.

W  
h  
C  
o  
o  
t

G  
M  
J  
C  
M

Jc

SI

DI  
Tt