

Your last book is, as you confess, a quest for your own roots as a French militant intellectual. What are the lessons one can learn from the errors of your predecessors?

I don't believe one can learn anything from history. As I demonstrate in this book, making mistakes is not a matter of lacking clear-sightedness, but the yield of a drive stronger than truth. In the face of such an irrational phenomenon, there is no lesson one can learn. The obsession with "Life" and "Youth" was, for instance, a component of fascism in the 1930s. I'm not sure that being aware of it rules out the specter of such a theme recurring.

Wasn't the attraction of power among the passions you name as being the driving forces behind the intellectuals' commitments to totalitarian ideologies?

Power is a drive, but not a dominant one. Intellectuals do seek honor and glory, but don't particularly seek power.

What about the intellectuals' power of influence on public opinion?