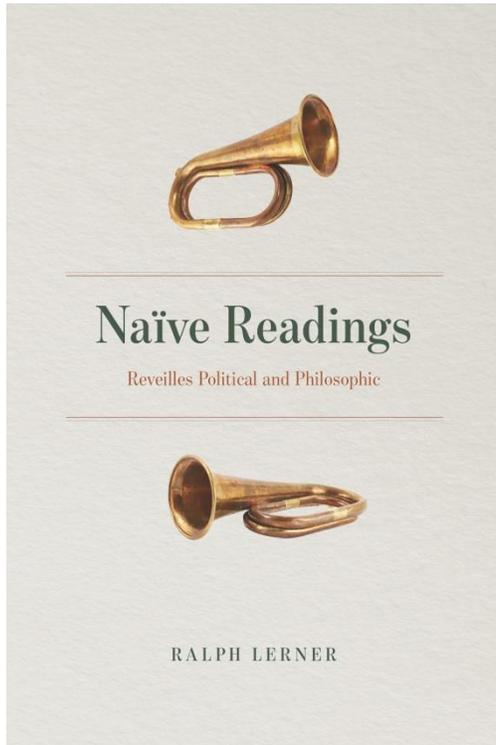


# Naïve Readings

## *Reveilles Political and Philosophic*

Ralph Lerner



“Lerner has written an outstanding book in which he shows the legitimacy and fruitfulness of concentrating, above all, upon the surfaces of texts. This approach is applicable to different periods of time and diverse sorts of works. If anyone doubts that there is a similarity between, say, reading Maimonides and reading Francis Bacon, they will be in for a surprise.”

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“Each of these readings is in an interpretative gem that provides an essential key to the thinker and text explored. The collection as an ordered and integrated whole builds a massively compelling case and model for the recovery of an art of reading whose ‘naiveté’ is in fact the energetic receptivity to authors whose works reach out, subtly and seductively, for partners in revelatory dialogue.”

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One sure fact of humanity is that we all cherish our opinions and will often strongly resist efforts by others to change them. Philosophers and politicians have long understood this, and whenever they have sought to get us to think differently they have often resorted to forms of camouflage that slip their unsettling thoughts into our psyche without raising alarm. In this fascinating examination of a range of writers and thinkers, Ralph Lerner offers a new method of reading that detects this camouflage and offers a way toward deeper understandings of some of history’s most important—and most concealed—messages.

Lerner analyzes an astonishing diversity of writers, including Francis Bacon, Benjamin Franklin, Edward Gibbon, Judah Halevi, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Moses Maimonides, and Alexis de Tocqueville. He shows that by reading their words slowly and naïvely, with wide-open eyes and special attention for moments of writing that become self-conscious, impassioned, or idiosyncratic, we can begin to see a pattern that illuminates a thinker’s intent, new messages purposively executed through indirect means. Through these experimental readings, Lerner shows, we can see a deep commonality across writers from disparate times and situations, one that finds them artfully challenging others to reject passivity and fatalism and start thinking afresh.

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