



# Shakespeare as a Way of Life: Skeptical Practice and the Politics of Weakness

*James Kuzner*

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*Shakespeare as a Way of Life* shows how reading Shakespeare helps us to live with epistemological weakness and even to practice this weakness, to make it a way of life. In a series of close readings, Kuzner shows how *Hamlet*, *Lucrece*, *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *Timon of Athens*, impel us to grapple with basic uncertainties: how we can be free, whether the world is abundant, whether we have met the demands of love and social life.

To Kuzner, Shakespeare's skepticism doesn't have the enabling potential of Keats's heroic "negativity capability," but neither is that skepticism the corrosive disease that necessarily issues in tragedy. While sensitive to both possibilities, Kuzner offers a way to keep negative capability negative while making skepticism livable. Rather than light the way to empowered, liberal subjectivity, Shakespeare's works demand lasting disorientation, demand that we practice the impractical so as to reshape the frames by which we view and negotiate the world.

The act of reading Shakespeare cannot yield the practical value that cognitive scientists and literary critics attribute to it. His work neither clarifies our sense of ourselves, of others, or of the world; nor heartens us about the human capacity for insight and invention; nor sharpens our ability to appreciate and adjudicate complex problems of ethics and politics. Shakespeare's plays, rather, yield cognitive discomforts, and it is just these discomforts that make them worthwhile.

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