

Kaz Dziamka, *ADVENTURES IN FREEDOM*

Reviewed by Richard Bozarth

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When Kaz told me he was publishing *Adventures in Freedom*, I didn't have a single doubt about enjoying it, so my enthusiasm to read it was there immediately. Kaz took over as editor of *The American Rationalist* in 1996, so I've been reading what he has published in the magazine for a very long time and have liked all of it because we're philosophical siblings. It would have been quite astonishing for me not to like his book; hence I wasn't surprised to like it as much as I do. Every person in the philosophical family of Freethinkers and Secular Humanists will like this book.

Who will not like this book? The Secular Humanists manqué who, like Christopher Hitchens, believe W. Bush's War on Terror is practicing Secular Humanism's principles will not like this book. Religionists definitely will not like this book. Flag-waving jingoists who believe the United States possesses cultural supremacy and therefore has a right to global hegemony will not like this book. The members of the boards of directors and the senior officers of corporations will not like this book.

Kaz is a Polish American who arrived in the U.S. in 1981. Before experiencing the real United States, he had believed all the PR bullshit about it being a Land of the Free. All those lies were quickly exposed, which is why *Adventures* often expresses the betrayal that all Freethinkers and Secular Humanists in the U.S. resent—sometimes sadly, sometimes bitterly, sometimes angrily, but also with the hope that there's still time to change the road we're on. His academic career as a college professor was distinguished for having taught the first two courses on Secular Humanism in the U.S. and being fired each time for being uppity enough to do it, by the same college!* *Adventures* has essays about this "achievement." Any reader who believes the U.S. is a Land of the Free should read this tale and honestly ask this: could such punitive suppression of information *in a college* have happened in an authentic Land of the Free?

The essays in *Adventures* are eclectic because Kaz has

often thought that one of the main reasons the humanist movement has not done well and is still far behind in popularity as compared with the fraudulent and silly religious dogmas of Christianity, for example, or Islam is that humanism does not offer much beyond exposing such fraud and silliness. (p. 30)

Kaz understands that Secular Humanism is a life-philosophy, meaning it is a way of living instead of solely an intellectual analysis of culture and/or the cosmos. *Adventures* is as much about living the principles of Secular Humanism as it is about what those principles are, which is why there is content that is usually not found in the average Freethought book ("Try Yoga, Try Science," for example). However, for those Freethinkers who enjoy and understand the importance of exposing "fraud and silliness", there is plenty of such exposing to make them happy. After all, the greatest obstacle to Secular Humanism is religionism's "fraudulent and silly religious dogmas."

Religious readers will probably seize on an apparent contradiction to discredit *Adventures*. On p. 9, Kaz writes,

Every human being has a right to religious sentiment that helps him or her deal with the mystery and cruelty of life. It is never my intention—as it isn't, I believe, the intention of my colleagues from The American Rationalist—to ridicule such personal, private religious feelings.

Religionists will cry either "Liar!" or "Hypocrite!" and cite numerous examples, such as this one on p. 87:

You cannot believe in “God’s Son” and consider yourself a mature, responsible, intelligent, educated human being. If you do believe that “Christ is your savior,” then you are as intellectually sophisticated as a 4-year-old child who believes in Santa Claus.

The “triumphant” religionist will miss the importance of the adjectives “personal” and “private” and probably not think of what Kaz says on p. 8: “You have every right to worship in privacy as you wish, but you don’t impose your religious views on anybody else, including your children. Your religion is your private business.” As soon as religionists start imposing—and don’t they seriously get off on imposing?—then they make themselves public targets for rebuttal from all of us who do not want to live in the theocracy theofascist religionists wish to impose upon us. Indeed, when religionists are energetically trying to inflict theocracy on us, our intentions, no matter how good, cannot be obstacles to our *vigorous* self-defense. *Adventures* does not advocate that Freethinkers and Secular Humanists offer only lenitive resistance to the theofascists to avoid hurting harmless religionists’ feelings.

Like any collection of essays, each reader will like some more than others. Some of the ones I enjoyed the most were about Native American culture, which Kaz has studied for many years, specializing in the Chiricahua Apaches, the tribe Kaz admires the most because they were the “last free Americans.” However, “Iroquois Democracy: A Legacy of Rational Politics” is the most fascinating. The democracy created by the Six Nations (Oneida, Seneca, Onondaga, Cayuga, Mohawk, and Tuscarora) was an amazing accomplishment. He selects the virtues of this union that clearly illuminate the most distressing vices of U.S. politics. Iroquois women didn’t need a Feminist Movement. An assembly of Iroquois leaders was distinguished by mutual respect, courtesy, and a requirement that a public speaker learn the art of public speaking if he or she wanted political influence. If the Iroquois had not been destroyed by the Christian invaders, they would not have needed an Environmental Movement. But the Iroquois goal that surely must make a moral person admire it the most is this fact: the most important reason the Iroquois created their democracy was a “commitment to securing peace.”

In the U.S. our leaders have always talked about the U.S. being a peace-loving nation (see “We Are, We Are ... A Peaceful Nation: An Open Letter to U.S. News & World Report”), but the walk our nation walks is war to protect and expand our nation’s economic influence. “We should never forget that the business of America is business, sometimes at any cost” (p. 65). In other words, the “peace” all too many U.S. leaders and citizens want will only come when all other nations submit to a U.S. hegemony.

“A Lesson From The Apaches” is not primarily about the Apaches. It is actually about U.S. foreign policy and the military actions used to enforce it. It’s presented as a conversation between Kaz and Roger, a Vietnam vet living in Norway. It takes place in an Oslo pub during Kaz’s year in Norway, when he taught American Studies at the University of Tromsø as a participant in the Fulbright Scholar Program in 1998-1999 (see “A Fulbright Adventure”). It’s a scathing critique delivered mostly by Roger. The summary is this:

We order our kids to kill against their will, against their better judgment, and we have them fight the dirty, stupid wars we have invented. The only thing the war pigs care about is their economic interests. They wage their wars to make the world safe—not for democracy, which they despise—but for American corporations, which they represent. And if that becomes impossible, then all they care about is saving face. (p. 17)

Very powerful. Definitely should not be read by God-fearing, Jesus-loving, flag-waving jingoists.

“The USA-DEA Cabal” is an outstanding argument for the legalization of marijuana and its amazingly useful cousin hemp. It offers a concise history of how both plants became illegal in the U.S. and discusses how the war on drugs has become the cancer of fascism in the nation that loves to call itself the Land of the Free. No Freethinker will be surprised to discover that religionism, corporate evil, and the stupidity that is a specialty of U.S. politicians are to blame. At least it is understandable why marijuana was criminalized; it produces a psychoactive substance in amounts that will cause intoxication. Hemp also produces THC, but in amounts so low that it will not cause a high. Kaz shows that the “danger” hemp posed was to established industries owned by some of the most powerful men in the United States in the first half of the 20th century. Because hemp threatened their profits, this astonishingly useful and ecologically safe plant had to be criminalized. The tiny amount of THC it produces was more than sufficient to get it declared illegal. Hemp definitely should be legalized, but Kaz argues strongly for legalizing marijuana: “The idiocy of allowing alcohol and tobacco while banning natural THC is mind boggling. It is a story from the theatre of the absurd” (p. 70). Ah, but the *inexpensive* medical benefits

marijuana provides threatens the profits of the powerful pharmaceutical corporations, so those benefits must be ignored. Of course, the justification used to ignore them is the delightful recreation marijuana also provides, so this relatively harmless high has been distorted by lies that claim marijuana smoking is *more dangerous* than drinking alcohol even though booze's annual body count is 150,000 and "there is no provable case of a single death due to marijuana use" (p. 61)!

I was delighted by "Reason's Sharp Edge: A Study of *The Razor's Edge*" because W. Somerset Maugham is my selection for the greatest writer of the 20th century. His two greatest novels are the one Kaz discusses and *Of Human Bondage* (my favorite, with *Edge* being a close second). Kaz proves that the novel ought to be required reading for all Secular Humanists. *Edge* is "an unforgettable novel" that makes an "eloquent statement of the power of reason" and offers readers a way to "free ourselves from the stranglehold of religious superstition and cleric-made nonsense" (p. 129). Any reader who has not read *Edge* will want to read it after reading this essay. Any reader who read the novel decades ago (me, for example) will want to read it again (and I will). This essay definitely accomplishes its mission.

"Back To The Past: Poland's Experiment in Theocracy" is another excellent essay that has only one fault: *it is too short!* It is an excellent exposé of Poland's foolish remarriage to the Vatican after being liberated from Communism. Poland's previous enslavement to the Roman Catholic Church, which began in 996, was a disaster that culminated in Poland's disappearance as a nation in 1795. It had become so decadent and weak after eight centuries of theocratic subjugation that it couldn't defend its sovereignty. It was eventually resurrected as a nation, suffered decades of misery under Communism, and then, almost like the punch line of a Polish joke, collapsed into the Vatican's arms again as soon as its divorce from Communism became final. And now the nation is suffering again from having the fangs of an ancient religious vampire penetrating its neck. Kaz shows that Poland refused to learn one of the most obvious lessons its history teaches, thus is doomed to repeat the class.

I did find flaws in *Adventures*. Some of the essays, especially the ones about Native Americans, should have been longer. "Chasing Loons ... in A Subaru" is good, but it is like a cat in a dog show. No matter how excellently a cat represents its breed, it does not belong in a dog show. "Loons" is well-written and amusing, but it's still an inappropriately located cat. "Saint Paul or Insane Saul?" is about the life of Saul of Tarsus, the real inventor of Christianity, as it can be pieced together from what little information, all of it questionable, we have. It's very good, but is flawed because it leaves out one extremely important fact about Saul that is essential to understand his theology: he was an eschatological loony. He believed he was living in the last days; hence his theology and morality commandments were profoundly influenced by that silly belief. Leaving that fact of Saul's life out was a major mistake. Those are all the flaws I could find, and I'm not surprised, because Kaz and I are philosophical siblings.

Kaz's book is an outstanding contribution to the Secular Humanism bookcase in Freethought's library. Every person who enjoys publications like *The American Rationalist*, *Free Inquiry*, *The Moral Atheist*, and *The Secular Humanist Press* will enjoy this book, and be rewarded with plenty to think about. The goal of the Freethought Movement is to make the dream of a Land of the Free come true. The road to that paradise of eunomy is paved with books like *Adventures in Freedom*.

* *Editor and author's note:* CNM has never officially stated the reason(s) why I was fired in 1996, soon after I taught "The American Humanist Tradition." Since I was fired again last year, CNM has officially given 3 different, consecutive reasons: a complaint by a war veteran, a threatening email, insubordination. Again there was no reference to the course in secular humanism I taught in 2009. In my book and recent *AR* articles, I have explained in more details what happened.