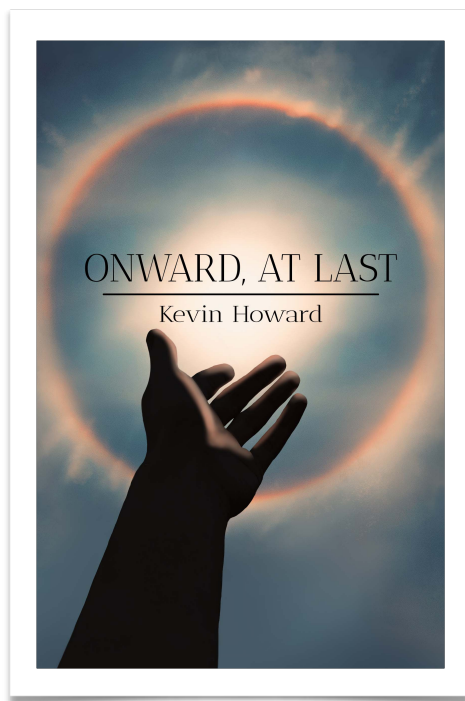




## “Book Review: *Onward at Last*”

Reviewed by Elana Sztokman



**A collection of musings on capitalism, individualism, greed, and the materialism that threatens to destroy humanity and the planet**

Kevin Howard does not tell us much about himself in *Onward, At Last*, preferring to introduce himself as an “average American man,” but he does include that he has been working in banking—a vague reference that appears in some advance endorsements—and this provides a curious backdrop to this work which is, at its core, an unapologetic



take-down of American economic cultures. Howard has dedicated his professional life to a system that he no longer aligns with. This intrigues me.

*Onward, At Last*, is a thoughtful critique of espoused American values such as capitalism, free-markets, and rugged individualism. Howard believes that these so-called ideals have had a destructive impact on people as well as the earth and have eclipsed vital practices of interdependence, care, and compassion.

As he writes:

***“Why is modern life not more fulfilling today? We have simply exchanged spending most of our time producing what we need to survive with spending most of our time earning the money to survive. Given all the technological advances and the abundance of natural resources, we now have the capability to provide all of humanity with the resources each of us can use to reach our full potential. What stands in our way? A system of economics that encourages us to take unto ourselves as much as we can. A value structure that indoctrinates us into believing we are separate, independent, self-interested individuals who can expect only what we earn in life.”***

Howard courageously takes on many aspects of American life that have unfortunately held a central place in American political discourse, such as wealth acquisition and extreme individual liberty, and calls them out for their over-emphasis on selfishness, power, and greed. ***“Well-being has become a function of fierce competition to accumulate money. As a consequence, the universal desire to provide for ourselves and our families is reduced to a zero-sum aspiration of inhuman, non-sustainable inequality.”***

Howard encourages free, critical thinking, urging his readers to ***“go deeper to challenge the values we hold as truth.... We must resist this urge and come to the realization that the best way to advance our self-interest is to fully serve and support our common interest... We cannot reach the full potential of our physical, emotional, and spiritual selves if we don’t honor our natural interdependence on each other.”***



The book is a compelling take-down of harmful American economic cultures that have left many people with housing insecurity, no health insurance, and mountains of debt, instead of with basic rights to education and medical care.

People should not be sent into poverty or homelessness because they happen to get sick or have a desire to study and learn. Most liberal democracies around the world are able to provide these basic necessities for their citizens without all this harm, mostly because they are not bogged down by an American rhetoric crafted by an exclusive wealthy elite with disproportionate access to power. This book is a welcome addition to the growing literature of Americans who are fed up with this damaging value system.

The author does not practice the kind of interdependence that he preaches about in this book, however. Could we have connected with likeminded people and experts who have dedicated their lives and careers to researching these issues and backing up their claims with evidence? The book could have used some of that kind of support. It is more of a collection of selected thoughts by one man—a man whose credentials and life story are not shared—than a collection of scholarly essays on the subject.

Many of the ideas that are shared in this book are having their moment. America today certainly can use an influx of values of care, compassion, and interdependence as a counterweight to the destructive political forces of hate and greed that have taken over many corners of the country. I hope this book is able to make the impact that it needs to.