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I am, above all else, a traveler. It is thus no surprise that my academic career has led me into the field of anthropology. I am deeply interested in almost all fields in the academy, from chemistry, to philosophy, to economics, to linguistics, to psychology and neuroscience; it is, however, in anthropology that I have found my home, because to me this field is a rhizome, a network of theory and method, that can link all fields in the academy into a wonderfully integrative whole. I have two major interests in anthropology. Theoretically, I am interested in the intersection of philosophy of mind, evolutionary psychology, and neuroscience; my applied research focuses on the intersection of conservation policy, human motivation, and economic policy.

Commencement Speech

When asked to give this commencement speech, I was initially unsure of what I should say: I am far too realistic to give a speech brimming with glittering generalities - of the joyful futures that we will all surely have. Yet, I am too optimistic to treat such an opportunity with cynicism. So I began by reading what others have said at commencement speeches:

Kurt Vonnegut famously said *“Things are going to get worse unimaginably worse and they are never, ever, going to get better again!”*

Ayn Rand said - *“Do not let your vision of man be distorted by the ugly, the cowardly, the mindless. Do not lose your knowledge that man’s proper estate is an upright posture, an*

intransigent mind, and a step that travels unlimited roads. The world you desire can be won, it is real, and it's yours."

Desmond Tutu said – *"We are created for the Beautiful, for the Truth, for the Good. We know it! We are aware that this is a Moral Universe that Good and Evil matter, that Life and Truth matter. And yes, there are frequently many many times when it seems that evil is going to have the last word. Then, it doesn't isn't that exhilarating?"*

Kurt Vonnegut's mother committed suicide when he was 22. As a soldier he spent over a year in the German POW camp, unimaginatively called Slaughterhouse Five. He later wrote a book, by that same name, an anti-war novel of black-satire, frequently voted one of the best in history.

Ayn Rand grew up in Russia during Russian-revolution. Her father's business was confiscated by the Soviets. She immigrated to New York City with nothing but her philosophy and her passion. At first, her novels were derided then they became classics - due to the power of her vision.

Desmond Tutu is a famous opponent of apartheid. In spite of the horrors he has witnessed, he has dedicated his life to the defense of human rights, and the fight against AIDS, homophobia, poverty and racism.

To me, there is a beauty and a brutal honesty in the words and stories of each of the aforementioned – the Cynicism of Vonnegut - the Realism of Rand - the Idealism of Tutu. In their own way, they each shed light on the struggle of the human condition, the blackness and the light. None of them remained camped in a zone of light and comfort – No – They traversed the darkness. With only the small lanterns of their vision, they walked unknown territories. They laid down new roads. They did not fear the darkness. They brought light where there was previously none.

From what I have learned as a student here, I have only one suggestion for the graduating class. Travel – not just outside of this country - this culture - but outside of your own feelings of comfort and security. Climb mountains, because with each and every step we take coldness sinks in, and pleasure fades. The air grows thin with altitude. Our muscles scream with pain. We march toward an unfriendly and alien world, toward rock and frost. Yet, with each step we take, we can see more of the world. At each step human consciousness is elevated. To stand on a mountain top is to take the human heart, mind, and will and make them the Pinnacles of Earth,

the only place they have ever belonged. Some mountains are made of stone, others of emotion, others of invention, and still others of the great mysteries and challenges of our world. Find your mountains – conquer them. For you too will lay down new roads armed with only the small lanterns of your vision. May you all bring light where there previously was none.