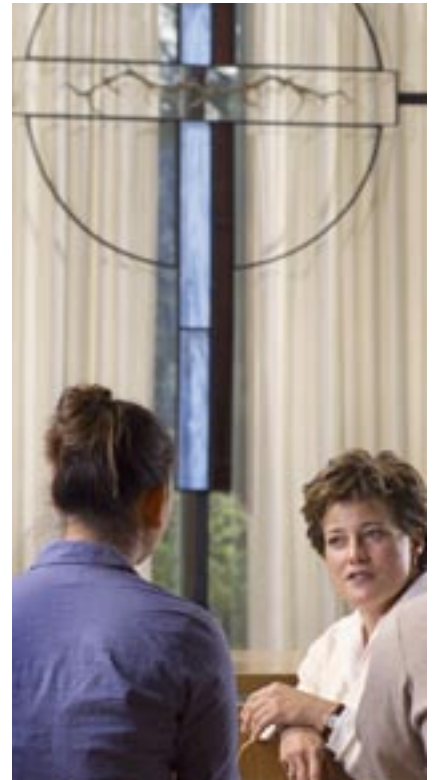




Whitworth faculty essays on  
*Mountains*  
*Beyond Mountains*  
2006 New-Student Reading



This summer we're asking all of Whitworth's new students to read the book *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, by Tracy Kidder. We hope you will find the book to be challenging and engaging on a number of levels. It tells the story of a doctor seeking to serve the poor and sick people of the world in his particular calling. His example is a powerful springboard to the reflection and preparation you will undertake at Whitworth as you continue your vocational journey.

The book occasionally uses offensive language and depicts events that do not reflect the values Whitworth seeks to exalt. Our educational mission is to help you to become more careful and critical thinkers and discerning people of faith. We do that by engaging rather than avoiding difficult issues, and we do that as a community collaborating in the search for truth. With this assignment, as in all we do at Whitworth, we encourage our students and faculty to evaluate the book's message, to bring to the surface our worldview assumptions, and to consider these issues in a wider cultural context.

To give you a preview of the kind of critical thinking and analysis you will find when you arrive on campus, we have asked four members of our faculty to respond to *Mountains Beyond Mountains* from their own perspectives and academic disciplines. Their brief essays, included in this booklet, will introduce some of the major themes of the book and will whet your appetite for a Whitworth education of mind and heart.

Michael K. Le Roy  
Vice President for Academic Affairs  
and Dean of the Faculty

# To Whom Do We Belong?

Adam Neder, Ph.D.

Theology

Let me begin this essay about Paul Farmer with an observation about Soren Kierkegaard. My reason for doing so will become clear shortly. Kierkegaard's *Attack Upon Christendom* is his iconoclastic broadside against 19th-century Danish Lutheranism. In a series of brilliantly argued and wickedly scathing essays and aphorisms, Kierkegaard lays out a penetrating and essentially simple argument: Christianity as practiced within Christendom has nothing in common with discipleship as described in the New Testament. When all are Christians, he argues, none are Christians. What goes by the name "Christianity" is in fact paganism – the very opposite of true Christianity. Amidst wave after wave of attack, Kierkegaard returns to a simple point: Every moment of life is characterized by either obedience or disobedience. There is no middle term between these two. It is a harrowing thought if taken seriously, for it means that life contains no neutral regions, no safe zones, no territory beyond the fray of battle. This ironclad Either/Or hovers over every moment of life and exposes all of our facile attempts to avoid it. It shatters all of our half-efforts and easy compromises, revealing them for what they truly are: self-serving and fraudulent. We prefer compromise to obedience, Kierkegaard insists, comfort to suffering, and half-truths to the Truth itself.

For those of you who have already read *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, it will be obvious why I am talking about Kierkegaard in an essay about Paul Farmer. I do so because Farmer's life is one extended argument against any and all forms of moral and intellectual compromise. You cannot understand him unless you understand that. The man is singularly and unflinchingly opposed to such compromises. And the farther into the book you read, the more likely you are to respond to him as Ophelia did: You compare



yourself with him and you realize that your life just doesn't measure up. When viewed against the depth and integrity of his life, our lives seem, well, shallow and compromised. In fact, Farmer's life is on such a grand scale that it is tempting to think of him as an alien, a freak or perhaps even a saint – at any rate, as an unattainable ideal rather than an ordinary person. Please be clear that while this is a safe way to regard him, it is also the worst possible way.

Why? Because to think of him that way is to take his fangs out – to turn him into a pussycat. To idealize him is the best way to tame him. It is the best way to keep him from being a threat to our comfortable ways of living. If Paul Farmer is something like a superhero, then we're off the hook. We couldn't possibly be expected to live similarly.

Let me put it even more emphatically. From a Christian point of view, Paul Farmer's life is ordinary. His accomplishments, of course, are not. But his manner of life is. The fact that it seems to us so exceedingly extraordinary reveals just how far removed our conceptions of the Christian life are from the New Testament.

Now, what do I mean by that? It would seem that Farmer's life is many things, but ordinary is certainly not one of them. And yet one of the many striking things about the New Testament description of discipleship is that it makes absolutely no attempt to hide the fact that to live a Christian life will cost a person everything. Everything! For when Jesus Christ says, "Whoever does not deny himself, take up his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple," it is not as though he doesn't really mean it. "When Jesus Christ calls a person, he calls that person to come and die." Those are the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, someone who knew that while the Christian life is immeasurably good – because it is life in and with Jesus Christ – it is also the farthest thing from safe and comfortable. There is no passage in the New Testament that penetrates more deeply into the heart of the Christian life than Paul's assertion that "we do not live to ourselves,

and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."

Do you want to know Paul Farmer's secret? Do you want to know how to make sense of him? Would you like to understand how to unlock the riddle of why someone who could so easily live in a plush neighborhood in Cambridge, Massachusetts, would instead choose to live so much of his life in the underbelly of the world's poorest areas? Here it is: Paul Farmer understands that his life is not his own – it does not belong to him. As you begin your education at Whitworth, let yourself be guided by this question: To whom do I belong: myself or someone else? Your answer will make all the difference.

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*Farmer's life is one extended argument against any and all forms of moral and intellectual compromise. You cannot understand him unless you understand that.*

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# Mapping a Life

Kathy Storm, Ph.D.  
*Student Life/Psychology*



**I**f you do the right thing well, you avoid futility” (295). That is the comment of Tracy Kidder, author of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, a biography of Paul Farmer. Having followed Farmer around the globe as he’s visited the sick in distant places, and having witnessed Farmer’s revolutionizing treatments, particularly of multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis, Kidder observes the life of a person who has changed the world.

In the unfolding of Farmer’s life we find lessons that help us to reflect on the unfolding of our lives and to consider what it means for us to “do the right thing well.” Farmer’s journey into a career in medicine, into the hills of Haiti, and into medical work around the world raises issues of life’s purpose, of our skills, of the world’s needs — and offers the promise that one person can make a difference.

First, what really matters in life? What is life’s central purpose? Great intellectuals of our past have offered various views: Some have said we serve a higher purpose of being rational, of doing good; others have denied any common purpose that is built into all human beings. For people in Christian traditions, there has generally been a strong shared conviction that we are here to love and enjoy God and to love one another. That is our general vocation, or what God has called us to do; that is what humans are here on earth to accomplish. While for Farmer a sense of purpose may not be the outgrowth of a personal or evangelical Christian faith, it is reflective of a broad sense of religious value: “All the great religious traditions of the world say, Love thy neighbor as thyself. My answer is, I’m sorry, I can’t, but I’m going to keep on trying...” (213).

Second, like Farmer, each of us is guided in a meaningful life direction by an awareness of our talents and skills. What can I do well? Farmer’s evident gifts in academic arenas, in broad areas of science and social reflection, form the foundation for his study of medicine and medical anthropology; later, his skills are observed by a Haitian peasant: “God gives everyone a gift, and his gift is

healing” (27). Whether through our own reflection on areas that come most naturally to us or through the observations of others who know us well, college is a time when, for many, greater clarity regarding talents is gained. However, there are other things we learn about skills from *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. First, an understanding of our personal gifts is never finished, settled once and for all. It continues to unfold over time, as it does for Farmer, particularly through his experiences in Haiti. Second, consistent with a Reformed theological view of God’s calling to a variety of specific roles, the book offers a powerful statement about the different skills of different people. When one wealthy benefactor who has given significant funding to underwrite Farmer’s work in Haiti laments that he sometimes wants to throw it all away to work with Farmer as a missionary, Farmer comments, “In your particular case, that would be a sin” (95).

Next, all of what we do, if we’re to “avoid futility,” hinges on an understanding of the needs of the world. What does the world need most? Where would my help matter? Farmer, through his life, offers challenging answers to this question. It’s clear that he understands the importance of work on a systems level — in his case, setting up a nonprofit agency, Partners in Health, through which funds are channeled to areas of the world where disease is most rampant. Farmer also understands the world’s need for better information about virulent illness and its cures, and so his personal vocation extends to innovative medical research. In addition, the world’s needs include the practical, the material. It’s not enough for Farmer to offer medicine and other forms of succor; he also extends money for food and childcare. And, perhaps most inspiring and provocative, he never loses sight of the needs of each individual, often traveling miles to see a single patient. What to some, doing a cost-benefits analysis, might seem like a wasteful expenditure of time is central to Farmer’s sense of purpose. The world’s needs matter to him. So do the individual’s.

Finally, the work to which Farmer is dedicated is rewarding, but it’s also very hard. It’s hard on him, it’s hard for colleagues who share his vision, and it’s hard on the people who love him. Farmer, and everyone around him, pays a price for his commitment. Few people keep going under such circumstances without a sense of personal efficacy or confidence that their work is actually making a substantive difference. And that sense of efficacy comes most directly through experience. Thus, the call to make a difference in the world is in part a call to understanding, but it’s also a call to service. Farmer makes a profound difference in the world and shows us how one life is lived. You and I can make a difference, too. That is our hope, and that is our call: “to do the right thing well.”

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# A Complex World Needs Realists and Idealists

Rob Wilson, J.D.

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When the Greek historian Thucydides wrote about the Peloponnesian Wars in 411 B.C., he was analyzing events of his time from a realist viewpoint. A long list of statesmen, economists and theologians, including St. Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, and John Maynard Keynes, have subsequently supported Thucydides' observations through their own analyses of the interactions of states and humans. Each of these thinkers, using a realist

perspective, has concluded that humanity functions through the use of power to gain advantage or preserve the common good. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Adam Smith, Woodrow Wilson, and Pope John Paul II have sought to find the best in individuals and governments and have clung to the notion that people are basically good, and the creation of good institutions, combined with high moral principles, can produce peace and justice in the world. No doubt, some of you have already begun framing issues with either a realist or idealist viewpoint – in some cases seeing the world at its Darwinian best with a focus on the use of power, while in others seeing it idealistically, as it could be, based on moral authority, empathy and compassion. Your task of considering competing theories and values when analyzing events is just beginning. Reading about the work of Dr. Paul Farmer in Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains* will be an early opportunity for you to discuss your viewpoints and the actions you take in response to them.

Regardless of where you are on the realist-idealist spectrum, you will no doubt relate to some part of Paul Farmer's worldview. At one end of the scale, Farmer's mind sharply sees the contours of reality, while at the other his heart often compels him to walk into the Haitian night in the idealistic hope of saving one more patient. In his daily work in the tuberculosis wards of Russian prisons, the barrios of Peru, or the ravaged countryside of Haiti, Farmer has no illusions about the daunting task of dealing with poverty and disease, yet he never loses faith that things can be different. Farmer and his team work with a tireless optimism and compassion that won't allow them to be defeated by reality. He both inspires and discomferts because his life manifests idealist beliefs in a way that often changes the world around him, an outcome that eludes many of us and defeats most world health

officials and political leaders — who, in a realist's analysis, have abandoned as hopeless the populations Farmer serves.

Yet the poverty and diseases that breed in desperate places matter immensely to the welfare of the world. Ideas, capital, labor and disease all travel easily across political boundaries. Think about it – anyone with an Internet connection can comment to the world on issues ranging from politics in China to American CIA operations in Abu Ghraib. Such is the unrestricted flow of information today. Likewise, by the time you read this, a migrating duck infected with the H1N5 virus will, most likely, have landed in North America. While doubt remains as to whether this particular virus will mutate and become infectious to humans, outbreaks like SARS, AIDS and avian flu have certainly demonstrated the irrelevancy of political borders to a potential pandemic. In April, a half-million people demonstrated against U.S. immigration policy in the streets of Los Angeles. Mortimer Zuckerman, editor-in-chief of *U.S. News & World Report*, pointed out in his April 17 editorial that illegal Mexican immigrants working in the U.S.

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*Farmer has no illusions about the daunting task of dealing with poverty and disease, yet he never loses faith that things can be different.*

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can earn five times more per day than they can in Mexico – the greatest economic differential across any border in the world. Ideas, viruses and desperately poor people will find ways to survive, and no political borders, fences nor shows of force can keep them from adapting. Our government can muzzle discussion of global warming, naively shut down the pipeline of creativity by denying extraordinarily talented people entry to the United States (we've reduced the number of H1B visas offered to foreign-born professionals by two-thirds since 1990), and prohibit foreign investment, but

we cannot effectively isolate disease, poverty or ideas.

During the next four years you will refine an intellectual framework for more fully understanding the world and you will shape your life in response to that knowledge. The college will assist you in this process by providing research opportunities, guest lecturers, and opportunities to interact with international students, participate in off-campus study programs and spend a semester abroad at one of our international partner institutions. And, of course, there are classes to attend in politics, history, economics, and myriad other subjects. Your experiences and coursework will push you to observe carefully, think critically, and apply your learning. After reading *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, few, if any, of you will become doctors and move to Haiti – but we trust that each of you will struggle to define your own actions in response to the ideas the book contains. As professors, we are here to assist you in the education of your mind and heart, helping you develop both realistic and idealistic responses to the world. Our wish for you would be that you study intently, work vigorously, dream intensely and never settle for less than your passionate best.

# Beyond Shoddy Thinking

Michael Le Roy, Ph.D.

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Everybody thinks, but most of us don't take the time to think well. By this I mean that our habits of mind lead us to make hasty judgments based on partial information. These judgments can result in bias, distortion, misinformation, and even prejudice. One of our faculty members in the physics department likes to remind his students that distorted facts make buildings fall down. Misinformation can lead to wars, and

prejudice can damage human relationships. In other words, shoddy thinking has serious consequences. Conversely, the best-trained minds of your generation will need to find cures for disease, forge peace agreements in war-torn lands, improve literacy among children, and build smart businesses. Tracy Kidder's book on the life of Dr. Paul Farmer, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, gives us some insight into the ingredients needed for a well-trained mind – habits of mind that I know you will develop during the course of your Whitworth education.

We will teach you that a broken heart can serve to focus the mind. This is true for Farmer, whose priest and friend, Jack Roussin, falls victim to a virulent strain of tuberculosis in Peru that is also ravaging the poor in the shantytowns of Lima. Roussin's death provides the occasion for the reorientation of Farmer's priorities and re-focuses his intellectual skills from the treatment of tuberculosis victims in Haiti to the study of a more virulent strain of TB in Peru. He is an example of an outstanding critical thinker who embodies the key virtues of a liberal-arts education when he puts his intellectual gifts to use on meaningful problems.

By critical thinking, I don't mean to say that Farmer is a negative thinker or a skeptic (which is a common misperception of the term), but that he is a person who identifies vital questions and problems, formulates them clearly, gathers relevant information, comes to well-reasoned and carefully tested conclusions, thinks with an open mind within alternative systems of thought, and effectively communicates the results of his findings to others. Farmer has to do all of these things to understand TB in a new light, but once he discovers the source of the problem he also advocates tirelessly for the solution. Farmer's intellectual skills allow him to discover treatments for this new form of TB, but it is his heart that forces him to push the world medical community to change its approach to treating this disease.

Careful steps are needed to train the mind to think critically, and this training is difficult because human nature gets in the way. Our biases and self-centered perspectives subvert our best efforts to think critically. As you read Kidder's book you may come across

a description of something that elicits your strong disagreement (I know I did). In that moment of disagreement, what did you infer? If your reaction was to judge, what was the basis for your judgment? Disagreements are important in the learning process, and they tell you that you actually *care* about the matter at hand. But disagreements can often derail us from good critical thinking because they threaten our own ideas or lead us to feel insecure about our most deeply held beliefs. This is especially true when we realize that some of our opinions are not grounded in sound reasoning or evidence. At Whitworth you will be assigned books and readings that you'll disagree with and that will bring some of your fears and insecurities to the foreground. Learning to identify patterns of intellectual egotism (patterns we all have) will train your mind to think critically rather than reactively.

In contrast to the patterns of intellectual egotism are the intellectual virtues that have their foundation in the Christian tradition – virtues that your Whitworth education will seek to instill. While Paul Farmer is a confident and sometimes opinionated person, he recognizes the limits of his knowledge, whether in the scientific study of tuberculosis, the religious practices within Haitian culture, or Peruvian Spanish dialects. An intellectually humble person can say, "I don't know, but I want to know more."

Your education should also develop the virtue of intellectual integrity. That is, you will learn to integrate consistently the standards of your own belief system, or worldview, with your thought process. If you expect others to have high standards of evidence, to practice what they preach, to be honest, and to admit to their intellectual inconsistencies, then you should expect the same of yourself. Paul Farmer exhibits this high standard of intellectual integrity in his work with the Haitian poor. He recognizes and preaches that the root of public-health problems is poverty. He raises a lot of money for the cause of public health in Haiti and could probably find a way to justify using some of these funds for a fancy Haitian villa with many servants, but instead he plows his resources back into his work.

Perhaps more than any other characteristic, Farmer exhibits intellectual perseverance. If you have read this far, you too have exhibited this virtue! Those who persevere keep trying to understand difficult ideas and concepts in spite of toil, obstacles, and confusion. Farmer is on an intellectual quest to meet the challenges of disease, poverty, political oppression, and indifference within the medical community. Most of us would have given up on these struggles long ago, but Farmer perseveres.

In 2004 a National Endowment for the Arts survey of American citizens revealed that only 42.8 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds read a book of any kind that year (down from 59.8 percent in 1982). If you read Tracy Kidder's book this summer you will join a distinct minority in your age group, and you will also be taking some important steps to train your mind further as you prepare for college. We look forward to seeing you this fall as we work together to sharpen our minds and open our hearts.



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