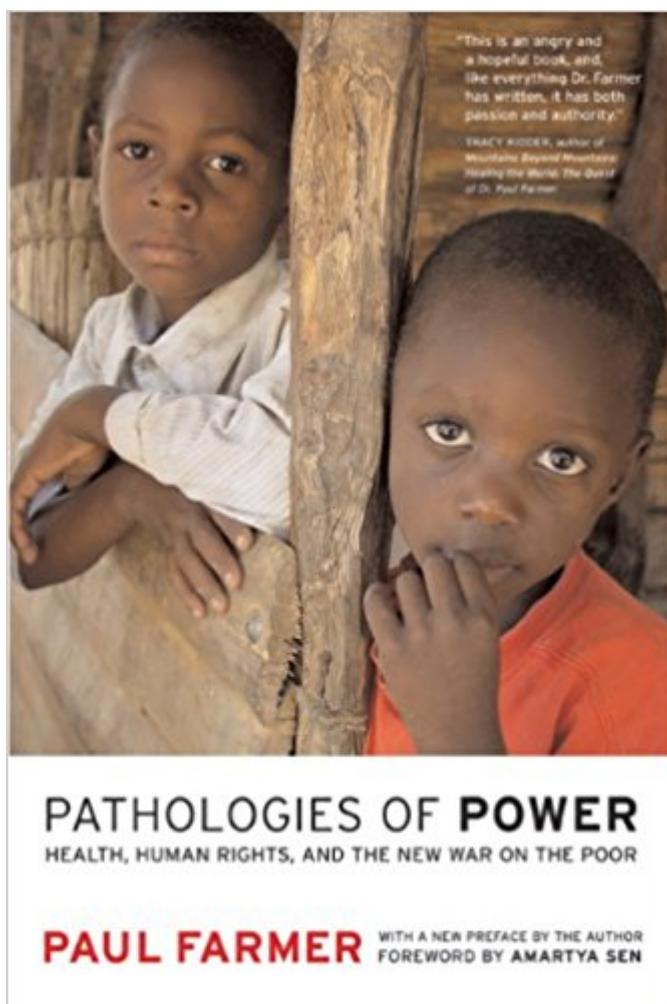


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# Pathologies Of Power: Health, Human Rights, And The New War On The Poor (California Series In Public Anthropology)



## Synopsis

Pathologies of Power uses harrowing stories of life and death in extreme situations to interrogate our understanding of human rights. Paul Farmer, a physician and anthropologist with twenty years of experience working in Haiti, Peru, and Russia, argues that promoting the social and economic rights of the world's poor is the most important human rights struggle of our times. With passionate eyewitness accounts from the prisons of Russia and the beleaguered villages of Haiti and Chiapas, this book links the lived experiences of individual victims to a broader analysis of structural violence. Farmer challenges conventional thinking within human rights circles and exposes the relationships between political and economic injustice, on one hand, and the suffering and illness of the powerless, on the other. Farmer shows that the same social forces that give rise to epidemic diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis also sculpt risk for human rights violations. He illustrates the ways that racism and gender inequality in the United States are embodied as disease and death. Yet this book is far from a hopeless inventory of abuse. Farmer's disturbing examples are linked to a guarded optimism that new medical and social technologies will develop in tandem with a more informed sense of social justice. Otherwise, he concludes, we will be guilty of managing social inequality rather than addressing structural violence. Farmer's urgent plea to think about human rights in the context of global public health and to consider critical issues of quality and access for the world's poor should be of fundamental concern to a world characterized by the bizarre proximity of surfeit and suffering.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There are many kinds of gifted physicians: clinicians, researchers, and those who build institutions. Paul Farmer is the rarest of all: a prophet. *Pathologies of Power* is a jeremiad on how the "structural violence" of denied opportunities, economic deprivation, violent despots (and the powers supporting them), and international financial organizations harm the health of billions of people who are so distant that they are glibly and uncomprehendingly referred to as living in a "third world." This summary does not do justice to the richness of the book. Farmer deftly weaves personal stories from his work with the dispossessed, careful academic notes, and well-chosen quotations from intellectuals, poets, and proponents of liberation theology. These citations introduce marvelous writers who are not well known to readers from the United States. Farmer builds from the 19th century's Rudolph Virchow, who argued that physicians must advance public health through political and social reform as "attorneys for the poor." Farmer's anecdotes about mobilizing the poor on their own behalf echo the work of Norman Bethune. And Farmer extends Jonathan Mann's fusion of human rights and medical ethics to health and human rights. Farmer, a physician and an anthropologist, offers a blistering critique of anthropologists who describe colorful folkways or bits of social problems, such as sexual barter, without illuminating how such practices are sustained by class and political history. This critique and Farmer's advocacy for oppressed persons mark this book as a prophetic work. Therefore, it is also a towering work of medical ethics. Farmer's critique of anthropology applies equally well to medical ethics, with its scholastic focus on moral curiosities and its decorous silence on "political" issues such as the lack of insurance or the ways in which the policies of international financial organizations affect health and health care for the world's poor. The prophetic voice speaks for the marginalized and can strike listeners as shrill, odd, or discomforting. Farmer skirts that risk by careful scholarship and compelling writing. That being said, I think he overrates the competence of Haiti's reelected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the success of Cuba's program to suppress the human immunodeficiency virus. Though he correctly notes the entrenched and mistaken pessimism of the international health authorities about the ability of dispossessed people to complete tuberculosis treatment, he overestimates the capacity of the available infrastructure in many poor countries to manage daily antiretroviral therapy. Such quibbles do not diminish the importance of his larger thesis. Farmer calls on physicians to mount a sustained engagement against human-rights abuses as the roots of disease, disability, and lack of access to health care. Health itself, rather than technical compliance with laws or accords, must be the standard for evaluating governments, foreign policy, and the national restructuring plans of such organizations as the International Monetary Fund. Expanding health services and democratizing

information must be central to the global agenda of all physicians. Academic research and education must use the privilege conferred by their power and independence to articulate specific relationships between human rights and abuses of human rights with health and disease. We live in a time when epidemics keep pace with globalization and when the map of deprivation and human-rights abuses precisely overlays the atlas of war, disease, and terrorism. Farmer's sane prescription is more likely to work than is rationalizing neglect, dribbling charity, averting our eyes, or attempting to build a garrison state bounded by a cordon sanitaire. Pathologies of Power is a profound work; it deserves the widest possible audience. Steven Miles, M.D. Copyright © 2004 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The New England Journal of Medicine is a registered trademark of the MMS. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

"This detailed analysis of public health draws on perspectives from anthropology, history, liberation theology, sociology, law, and medicine. From this broad platform, Farmer takes us back through the causative underpinnings of disease-ridden lives and paints a unifying picture of ruling power structures aligned against impoverished constituents. His conclusions are well articulated, thoughtful, and damning. . . . Through his engaging and passionate style, Farmer gives voice to the unheard poor around the world and challenges medical professionals to broaden the vision of medicine to include human rights. In reinvigorating the role of human rights in the health and well being of the poor, Farmer's book is a valuable addition to the growing literature on health and human rights."--"The Lancet

Paul Farmer is well known in the anthropological world as well as within the Christian world. He works to make social issues known to the greater public for the greater good. Through his own work in Haiti, South America, and Russia, he illustrates the turmoil prevalent in our world. He writes in an easy style that makes what he is trying to convey, easy to digest. He shares with the reader situations and circumstances where he has tried to make a difference. His books, and this one in particular, are excellent teaching resources for any of the social sciences

Needed as a school text and it was informative and easy to read.

Interesting read

A phenomenal read, I was required to complete this ethnology for a 200-level Cultural Anthropology

course that emphasized the concepts of ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, and structural violence. This text is a life-changer if you let it be. Read it for school. Read it in your spare time. Just read it- you will be glad you did.

I love you Farmer, but have gotten used to your form of writing. I'd like to see a different approach, maybe more aggression in your writing.

Interesting book for this who enjoy global health topics. Some very sad moments and points but overall a great read.

A little difficult to read but it creates a great sympathy and call to arms for quality healthcare

Paul Farmer is awesome. Read his book. Support his work. One of my favorite references in medical anthropology.

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