A Matter of Life and Death: Iatrogenic Violence and the Formal Logic of International Intervention

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The language of international intervention into political, social, and demographic crisis zones draws heavily on medical metaphor. While proponents may, for example, celebrate the scientific precision of “surgical strikes,” critics may attack “band-aid solutions” to profound problems and all may debate the appropriate doses of “shock therapy,” the discourse of intervention commonly constructs the eruptions of violence or failure of state institutions that elicit outside attention and intervention in terms of pathology, drawing on the organicist logic of structural-functionalist social theory. The pathologizing analogy gathers strength empirically, if not logically, from the apparent symptoms of a “sick” society: death, injury, impoverishment, famine, and actual medical epidemics. As descriptively fitting as it may be, the medical metaphor is of course politically hardly innocent. Medicine responds to illness through intervention, an authoritative form of social action enjoying the double legitimacy of scientific rationality and of traditional shamanistic awe. The apparent political neutrality of the Hippocratic commitment to human life and well-being, moreover, exempts (medical) intervention from ethical critique. Thus providing the ideological cover of humanitarianism, the medical metaphor helps to conceal the political stakes of intervention (not only internationally but domestically with attempts to pass off social policies as technical solutions to social pathologies)—but only as long as the metaphor remains superficially and superstitiously reverential.

Truly conservative critics of intervention can turn the medical metaphor into an argument against virtually and kind of international or domestic political action by simply noting that the placebo and the waiting list constitute the two most successful medical treatments of all time, followed by hand washing and a good night’s rest. Those on the left can also point to public health studies showing that socio-economic equality and spending on public goods such as drinking water, schools, and parks improve health statistics more than does spending on drugs, doctors, and hospitals. Applied metaphorically to the sphere of international military-humanitarian interventions, whose number have risen dramatically since the end of the Cold War, these critiques of medicine raise serious questions about the legitimacy and the efficacy of outside intervention into crisis zones such as those of the Balkans in the 1990s. While the principles and premises of intervention do require debate, I do not propose here to explore alternatives to the practice of military-humanitarian intervention as it has developed over the past 15 years and as my colleagues Mariella Pandolfi, Annie Lafontaine, and Marie-Joëlle Zahar have critically analyzed it in the context of the Balkans. Instead, I wish to examine another critical avenue arising from a further medical analogy, namely that of iatrogenic violence.

Iatrogenic (literally: physician-induced) morbidity refers to disease or injury that medical intervention itself produces. With the term iatrogenic violence I designate social disruption and political violence that results from outside intervention (military and/or “humanitarian”) intended to stop or to prevent such violence. The most blatant example of iatrogenic violence is of course the aftermath of the American invasion and on-going occupation of Iraq. Carried out by the United States and its “coalition” partners with dubious to non-existent international legal sanction, the intervention in Iraq allegedly aimed, among other vague and shifting goals, to shut down Iraq as a breeding ground for international terrorism and other forms of internal and external belligerence. As a consequence of the invasion, Iraq has indeed become such a breeding ground. The
treatment has become the cause of the illness it purported to be curing. Now, the example of Iraq calls into question the precise meaning of iatrogenics (which the hysterical quest for medical liability has incidentally elevated, through definitional stretching, to the rank of number one fatal illness in the United States). If we give the Bush administration a huge benefit of the doubt, then we might say that the present violence emanating from and in Iraq is more the result of a misdiagnosis than an inappropriate treatment, though according to the Orwellian logic of the Bush administration, the violence and disruption it has produced in Iraq is proof that the treatment is working, a final peaking of fever before the patient recovers from his previously low-grade illness. By contrast, it requires only the slightest cynicism or glance at the administration and its cronies’ oil interests to suggest that the Iraqi case illustrates not iatrogenics but willful malpractice, along the lines of Dr. Mengele, for example. The treatment is working fine; it just does not happen to be in the interest of the patient or the public health of the planet.

Still, bona fide cases of iatrogenic illness and epidemics do exist, with patients falling ill from the best intended, state-of-the-art medical interventions. For example, recent fatal outbreaks of infection from clostridium difficile can be traced to doctors’ perhaps overzealous prescription of antibiotics, which weakens immune systems and generates resistant strains. Although we might also blame drug company profit incentives and patients’ magical belief in the power of the prescription pad, the use of antibiotics is nonetheless the medically indicated treatment for bacterial infection even if it ultimately favours more severe infection. Similarly, it is at least ideal-typically imaginable that cases of iatrogenic violence exist in a pure form, i.e. cases when outside intervention occurs exclusively in the best interest of the afflicted society and according to the most appropriate and efficient technical means yet nonetheless generates social disruption and violence. For example, the massive intervention in Kosovo since 1999, largely inspired and informed by the relative failures of intervention in Bosnia and other previous ex-Yugoslav crises, might be seen as a best-case scenario in which an effective use of armed force was followed by a centrally coordinated, coherent multilateral and multilevel effort at political, economic, social, and ethnic reconstruction still failed to prevent, or even prompted, large-scale fatal interethnic violence and rioting in March 2004. To be sure, any complex social action such as multilateral intervention will suffer from shortcomings, inconsistencies and paradoxical consequences, as Annie Lafortaine has shown for the unexpected conflicts arising from the repatriation of refugees in Kosovo. I do not intend here, however, to catalog the practical pitfalls of even the most welcome and well-planned interventions. Instead, the theoretical argument that I wish to develop claims that iatrogenic violence is inherent to the formal structure of international intervention, regardless of the substantive means, motives, or context of intervention. Drawing for the last time on the anthropomorphic medical metaphor, I mean to argue that this form of iatrogenic illness arises neither from the qualifications and intentions of the treating physician, nor from the treatment and its potential side effects, nor from the particular morphology and possible pathology of the patient, but from the structure of the doctor-patient relationship itself.

Every instance of international intervention is of course sui generis, yet whatever the particular causes, contents, and contexts of intervention, we can identify common
features of contemporary international interventionism that distinguish it, at least idealtypically, from “good old-fashioned” conquest and colonialism. These features, each of which could be critically elaborated in depth, include: 1) the request for or consent to outside intervention from some significant population group (typically an ethnic minority or other category of “victim”) or its apparent representatives in order to help resolve a social or natural problem surpassing the capacity or will of local authorities (e.g. epidemic, armed insurrection, ethnic conflict, etc.); 2) the quest for normative or legal approbation for the requested or proposed intervention by a supranational body recognized as competent by international law or treaty (United Nations, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or other regional organizations to which the territory of intervention is at least nominally party); and of historical novelty and perhaps of greatest significance 3) the involvement in the intervention, alongside of traditionally state-based actors such as armed forces, of a corps of experts organized within the parallel and cross-cutting hierarchies of multilateral international agencies and formally autonomous non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Taken together, these features have contributed to the emergence of what Mariella Pandolfi has dubbed “mobile sovereignty.” This paradoxical formulation captures well the political complexity of the formal structure of contemporary international intervention. Understood traditionally as an attribute of the modern territorial state, sovereignty refers to the highest possible instance of social authority responsible for the maintenance of internal order and its protection from the interference of competing external orders through the exercise of a monopoly of legitimate violence within a delimited territory, according to Max Weber’s classic definition of the state. Sovereignty is thus spatially bounded yet, at least in theory, absolute. The ideal-typical sovereign state is consequently subject to international legal norms only insofar as it authorizes those norms itself (though only the United States today approaches this ideal-typical status). The expression “mobile sovereignty,” however, not only contradicts the bounded territorial character of the sovereign state but relativizes authority as well: sometimes it’s there, sometimes it’s not. Pandolfi uses the term to describe the authority exercised by the corps of expert interveners who migrate from crisis zone to crisis zone, but its mobility is not only empirically geographical. That is, “mobile sovereignty” also theoretically describes the authoritative relationship between interveners and local populations in any particular site of intervention, regardless of the cosmopolitan, or for that matter parochial, character of the corps of interveners.

In an ideal-typical site of intervention, we encounter a local population “in need” and a corps of interveners. Although the latter may be a complex amalgam of soldiers, administrators, doctors, and other technical experts subject to the more or less coherent, competing logics and command structures of states, multilateral agencies, and NGOs, the relationship between “locals” and “internationals” always has the same slippery, or “mobile,” authority structure, a peculiar form of “legitimate domination,” which, as we shall see, escapes Max Weber’s well-known tripartite typology. The “internationals” obviously occupy the position of dominancy, ultimately by virtue of their superior firepower if nothing else. The existence of social domination is not a problem, but a universal. The locals, in their subordinate position, necessarily engage in some form of resistance, again a universal within the sociology of domination and therefore not the source per se of iatrogenic violence. Substantively, the sociological categories of
domination, subordination and resistance vary almost endlessly in their contents according to the innumerable social inequalities that enter into the play of social interaction (cf. Bourdieu), but formally, as Weber’s sociology of domination posits, relations of domination vacillate between the types of claims to legitimate domination.

Because the maintenance of a social order cannot depend on only coercion and common interest (forms of interaction based on instrumental rationality alone), Herrschaft almost always seeks to reinforce itself with belief in its normative legitimacy, i.e. with an appeal to value rationality. The values which the dominant can evoke to legitimate their rule, however, are innumerable and often incommensurable. Hence, a typology of legitimate modes of domination according to underlying values makes no sense. Regardless of the innumerable principles that can justify a claim to rule, be they sex appeal or divine right, they can take one of three forms according to Weber. Under traditional authority, the dominating social agent claims to represent a generally agreed-upon longstanding principle, whereas under charismatic authority a new principle in rupture with existing values emanates from the ruler. Finally, in the modern age, under legal-rational authority the principle of command is unrelated to the person exercising it, drawing its “legitimacy” from a formal procedure accepted by all because it takes no one in particular into consideration.

None of these ideal-typical modes of legitimation can actually exist in pure form precisely because legitimate domination cannot be a static coincidence of value-orientations between rulers and ruled. The notion that a claim to authority can encounter a perfect willingness to obey is utopian. Indeed, Weber defines legitimate domination not as a coincidence of value beliefs between dominants and subordinates, which can occur, to be sure, but as a situation in which obedience happens as if the subordinate had made the dominant’s value claim the maxim of his or her behaviour. Ambiguity, misunderstanding, mimicry, hypocrisy, and disagreement inevitably mean that legitimation is an interactive process in which claims to command and obedience constantly adjust to one another. What is more, the inherent logic of the ideal-typical modes of legitimation is unstable. Thus, even under an order approaching the “traditional” ideal-type, e.g. in an age-old dynastic divine-right monarchy, rule by the inertia of tradition would give way to habit, the arbitrary, and the absurd in the absence of a minimum of innovative charisma and formal proceduralism. Similarly, a revolutionary regime under the sway of a charismatic leader cannot endure, for while the leader’s administrative personnel might live for his or her politics, they must also, beyond the very short run, live from politics. The basic physical reproduction of charismatic rule hence requires some predictability (pro-vision) and hence routinization into “traditional” or “legal-rational” forms. Finally, the empty formalism of “legal-rational” bureaucratic rule not only acquires the inertia of “tradition” but especially therefore requires charismatic political direction.

The analytic purpose of Weber’s formal typology of legitimate domination is not to make concrete historical cases of social order correspond to one or another hypothetical model but to reveal, through comparative historical sociology, the competing logics at work in the shifting, hybrid modes of legitimation in different contexts, as Weber does in his encyclopaedic scientific oeuvre as well as in his polemical critiques of the pseudo-caesarist, hypertrophic bureaucratic Wilhelmine Reich. Abstractly applicable to all forms of social order, the Weberian sociology of domination also offers
a key to understanding the socio-political dynamics of intervention. At first brush, then, we can ask which ideal-typical forms of legitimate domination come into play in the relationship between “locals” and “internationals.” What becomes immediately evident, however, is a fundamental formal contradiction in the dominant internationals’ claim to authority. The context for intervention is crisis, a breakdown in social order requiring extra-ordinary—external and heroic—leadership in clear rupture with the previous routine internal order. In other words, the predominant mode of authority would have to be charismatic. The interveners’ claim to authority, though, is also one of technical competence, rational expertise, and procedural validity doubled with an appeal to the normative validity of international law. That is, they rule in the name of legal-rational authority (bolstered by traditionalist appeals to the longstanding, unquestioned but ultimately formalistic values of democracy and the rule of law). Inasmuch as the locals’ heroic expectations and the internationals’ mundane talents do not jibe, we might expect sites of interventions to be more conflictual and disorderly than they actually are, but again the problem lies elsewhere.

As we have already suggested, legitimate domination does not require a coincidence or convergence of normative beliefs between dominants and subordinates. For Weber, domination is “legitimate” in form (but not content, about which there can never be agreement) from the moment a ruler makes any normative claim to authority. Contrary to culturalist readings, in fact, Weber has no interest in what social actors actually believe. Instead, he shows how certain forms of belief shape social structures and different types of social actors. In structures of domination, the ideal-typical forms that normative claims to legitimacy take—charismatic, traditional, legal-rational—imply different kinds of social relations (and even human personalities) regardless of how anyone feels about them (e.g. a legal-rational claim to leadership, whatever its substantive value content, favours, and is favoured by, impersonal, rationally calculable, highly institutionalized, bureaucratic structures). To understand the socio-political structural consequences of intervention’s mobile sovereignty, we must then further explore the form of its claim to legitimacy, especially because it seems to correspond to a form logically missing from Weber’s typology.

In purely schematic terms, Weber defines his three ideal-types of legitimate domination along two dimensions. Relations of domination, as we have already suggested, can be either personal or impersonal, ordinary or extraordinary, with traditional authority being personal and ordinary (alltäglich, or quotidian), charismatic being personal but extraordinary, and legal-rational being impersonal and ordinary. The logically missing fourth pure form would be an impersonal yet extraordinary one. We can only speculate on why Weber did not name, let alone elaborate upon, such a form of legitimate authority. Self-avowedly anti-theoretical in personal character if not practice, Weber claimed to have fit his theoretical apparatus to the empirical objectives of his Wirklichkeitswissenschaft (science of reality), and he may therefore not have elaborated a type that no historical example with which he was familiar began to approach. Alternatively he may have found it empirically implausible that anyone might accept an extraordinary norm that did not have an exemplary personal embodiment, or on a more philosophical plane he may have wished to avoid the contradictions of the Western metaphysical tradition which he knew all-too-well that Nietzsche had exposed.
Weber’s apparent difficulty in imagining, or at least in articulating, an impersonal but extraordinary mode of legitimation makes even more sense if we associate with each kind of relation of legitimate (i.e. rationalized) domination his four ideal-typical modes of rationality, namely: habit, affectivity, value rationality (Wertrationalität), and instrumental rationality (Zweckrationalität). We can map these types of rational motives for social action along the two dimensions of their relative motivational strength and of their degree of conscious (intellectual) articulation, with habit (e.g. custom) being a relatively weak and unconscious “reason” for action; affect (e.g. eros) being a potentially powerful but not necessarily self-conscious motive; the rationality of ultimate value ends (e.g. salvation) being also very powerful and usually subject to conscious articulation; and finally instrumental rationality (e.g. utility maximization) being absolutely self-conscious in its calculations but relatively weak in its motivational strength precisely because of the fungibility of its ends. In purely abstract terms, then, the quotidian and personalized claims of traditional authority appeal to habit and affect whereas charisma by virtue of its personal and extraordinary quality appeals to affect and value rationality and legalist proceduralism in its impersonal routine to instrumental rationality and habit. Logically, a simultaneously extraordinary and impersonal claim to authority would have to appeal to both value rationality and instrumental rationality at the same time, i.e. to the substantive rationality of ends and the formal rationality of means, two conscious but contradictory motives for action.

By failing to elaborate an impersonal, extraordinary form of legitimate authority within his sociology of domination, Weber skirted a fundamental dilemma of Western legal and political thought of which he was nonetheless keenly aware. Indeed, the tension between substantive justice and formal justice pervades his sociology of law, and at the end of his well-known lecture “Politics as a Vocation” he evokes the competing ethics of conviction and of responsibility that guide political action. Modernist partisan of formal rationality, Weber seems to plump in favour of the instrumental rationality underlying a politics of responsibility, yet ultimately he concludes that the politician of true vocation must somehow also follow the passionate conviction of value rationality even if it entails violence and disorder. Because he called for charismatic renewal of bureaucratised modern politics, Weber has been accused of laying the ground not only for the Stalinist dogmatism of his student Georg Lukacs and for the Führer-worship of his other most infamous follower Carl Schmitt, but even of preparing German liberal thought and Germany as a whole for the ascension of Hitler. While one can thus criticize the substance of Weber’s political thought, its form concerns us here, for in situating socio-political dynamics between the ideal-typical poles of legal-rationality, charisma, and tradition, he neglects the pole that not only characterizes contemporary international interventions’ form of legitimate domination but defines perhaps the fate of the western political tradition.

The centrality of an unnamed impersonal but extraordinary mode of legitimation both to intervention and to Western politics as a whole is the thesis—translated into Weberian terms—that the contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben advances in his book Homo Sacer. Starting from Carl Schmitt’s premise that the power to declare a state of exception defines the sovereign, Agamben tracks the “structure of exception” as the formal paradox at the core of, and permeating, the Western political and metaphysical tradition at least ever since Aristotle excluded “mere (or naked) life” (zoe) from the ends
of the polis in its self-legislating pursuit of the “good life” (bios). Whether it exist between the “good life” and “naked life,” civil society and the state of nature, constitutional order and the state of emergency, law and force, or language and being, the structure of exception entails a relationship of “inclusive exclusion” where the existence of the first term both depends on and negates the second. The (state of) exception proves the rule (of law)—in both senses of the verb: to confirm and to contest. The most vivid contemporary illustration of the state of exception’s political fecundity is no doubt the American “detention centre” in Guantanamo Bay: extra-territorial, extra-constitutional, outside of international law, and yet heralded by the Bush administration as a vital instrument in the “war on terror.” The example is not an aberration, or an exception itself (or, inasmuch as it is, it is a revelation of the fundamental structure of American politics), for as Agamben argues (well before September 11), the concentration camp is the “biopolitical paradigm of modernity,” a delocalised space where totalitarian state power reduces politics to control and to extermination of naked life. Less brutal but at least equally biopolitical, modern democratic politics have, more even than Foucault anticipated, concentrated on the control of bodies and populations (from the birth-right of citizenship to sexuality, stem-cells, “security” and euthanasia).

Totalitarian and democratic biopolitics converged in the exceptional political context of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. As Agamben writes, the Yugoslav civil wars, with their systematic rape and gratuitous slaughter surpassed totalitarian genocide as well as traditionally modern redrawing of ethnic and state boundaries. Subsequent “democratic” intervention, understood and justified as temporary and a restoration of political and social order, has become an indefinite state of exception, a permanent transition to…. Under these circumstances, Agamben writes (even before the scale and permanency of intervention became evident):

...il ne faut pas considérer ce qui est en train de se produire dans l’ex-Yugoslavie et, plus généralement, les processus de dissolution des organismes étatiques traditionnels en Europe orientale comme la réapparition d’un état naturel de lutte de tous contre tous, annonçant la constitution de nouveaux pactes sociaux et de nouvelles localisations nationales et étatiques, mais plutôt comme l’émergence de l’état d’exception en tant que structure permanente de dé-localisation et dis-location juridico-politique. Il ne s’agit pas d’une régression de l’organisation politique vers des formes surannées, mais d’événements prémonitoires annonçant, comme autant de messagers sanglants, le nouveau nomos de la terre qui, si le principe sur lequel il se fonde n’est pas remis en cause, est destiné à s’étendre sur toute la planète. [p. 47, find English translation]

Regardless of whether Agamben’s dystopian biopolitical premonitions come to pass, his analysis of the structure of exception can help us to explicate the more immediate problem of iatrogenic violence within sites of intervention. Following Weber, we saw that the abstract form of legitimate domination on a site of intervention is neither legal-rational, nor charismatic, nor a hybrid of them (as in party democracy when a leader alternately claims authority by virtue of personal merit or formal electoral approbation1),

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1 Election would appear to be a process that appeals simultaneously to charismatic and legal rational forms of authority, the formal procedure of election serving as a “proof” of the candidate’s gift or grace, yet the
but rather an unnamed extraordinary yet impersonal one simultaneously appealing to the apparently contradictory rationalities of efficient means vs. ultimate ends. The relation between these two rationalities, however, corresponds to Agamben’s structure of exception, where one term depends on and negates the other. Specifically, instrumental reason, which is impersonal in that its validity is internal and autonomous of any particular subject engaged in ratiocination, depends on value rationality since its “objective” validity exists only relative to a given end, but it must also negate value rationality, which is extraordinary, or unpredictable, and varies from person to person. In other words (which may appear banal), ordinary, impersonal bureaucracy reposes on extraordinary, personal charisma, just as the rule of law obscures the arbitrary force from which it derives.

Such a “dialectical unity of opposites” derives from the formal logic of their definition, but this binary structure of western thought is not without political consequences especially since it goes through its own historical moments. Thus, different periods have experienced the ideal-typical predominance of one or another form of legitimate domination with its incumbent rationality. Modernity was the age of the instrumental legal rationality of bureaucracy, indispensable to the emergence of industrial capitalism and the democratic state. It would be idealist nonsense, however, to pretend that the march of (instrumental) reason alone gave rise to these (or other) historical structures. As Weber’s historical sociology establishes, the translation of different forms of (ir)rationality into social structures depends on social carriers with material and ideal interests as well as on the technical means at their disposal; it also gives rise to distinctive institutions and modes of violence. To caricature: modern bureaucratic society was carried largely by an intellectual proletariat/petty bourgeoisie of technicians and managers organized in distinctive organizations such as political parties, public sector unions, and public or private national economic enterprises. Whereas traditional societies practiced externalised, ritual forms of violence, modern societies, as Elias and Foucault have shown, depended on the internalised violence of self-discipline. By contrast, the more ephemeral charismatic social orders and movements have typically flourished with exuberant, externalised violence (looting, pillage, warfare, purges, genocide) and relied on loose institutional structures such as warrior commensality and communism.

If, as Agamben suggests, the indefinite extension of states of exception and the exacerbation of bio-power characterize the emergent postmodern socio-political order, then we must ask not only who the social carriers of its arbitrary but efficient rationality and legitimation are but what kinds of institutions, of technical means and of social violence they animate. Concretely, the sites of intervention in the Balkans and in other instances of “permanent transition” around the planet offer an answer. The participation of a migratory corps of experts represents a novel, defining feature of the new international interventionism. Indeed, in the absence of a growing cosmopolitan body of professionals with expert training and experience as well as material and ideal interests in the perpetuation and proliferation of intervention sites, the phenomenon would not be technically feasible. The social origins and resources of these interveners require closer empirical scrutiny, but clearly most belong to highly educated, mobile, privileged social strata and all derive social prestige, if not always their material livelihood, from an...
activity distinct from government and business. Thus, the innovative social institution within which they typically function is fittingly the non-profit non-governmental organization devoted to a particular normative cause.

The NGO’s negative form of definition clearly signals the shift in rationality away from the legal-rational instrumentalism of the modern state. Just as the explosive economic growth of modern capitalism depended on a shift from a rationality of ends (i.e. wealth) to a rationality of means (productivity), the unprecedented development of the bureaucratic, sovereign state resulted from the western European political dynamic of the pursuit of power as an end in itself, i.e. from the subjection of politics to a purely instrumental rationality. The internal, circular logic of the preservation and aggrandizement of state capacities obscured, as Agamben shows, the inclusive exclusion of political value rationality, which manifested itself in the growing bio-politicisation of modern state power. The emergence, since the 1970s, of the NGO has simply completed the backdoor-return of political value rationality. Performing social functions previously associated with the state and doing so largely with funding of state origin, NGOs short-circuit the self-sustaining circular logic of the bureaucratic state’s formal, impersonal rationality. More than a neo-liberal privatisation of an allegedly bloated, inefficient and self-serving (but procedurally legitimate) state bureaucracy, NGOs confer the means of legitimate violence to particular, personal, and passing substantive value rationalities. Feigning a non-political, humanitarian vocation, NGOs, whose missions and methods can change with the prevailing wind, in fact embody a politics of arbitrary life force imposing its values and visions.

Again, the normative violence of NGOs as central actors of the new interventionism does not simply signal an incursion of charismatic authority into contemporary politics, for the particular mode of violence they exercise in sites of intervention differs significantly. Charismatic violence seeks a revolutionary transformation of social order in the image of the value emanating from the leader. By contrast, the extraordinary but impersonal legitimacy of intervention shapes its characteristic mode of violence, which forces conformity not with a substantive value but a formal method. In an inversion of the structure of exception, intervention occurs in the name of an overarching normative principle (health, security, “freedom”) that denies the formal instrumental rationality of state sovereignty only the better to apply its own technical rationality. We can thus characterize its typical mode of violence as “therapeutic” because ostensibly it pursues a value emanating from the object of intervention (a population “in need”) but its actual end is the proficient application of a treatment protocol (captured by the quip “surgery successful, patient dead”). The therapeutic structure of domination also determines the mode of resistance principally as “patient non-compliance”: usually passive aggressive, often self-destructive, and occasionally prone to apparently irrational outbursts directed at “care-givers.”

In sum, the therapeutic social relation of domination defines iatrogenic violence, attaining its highest form in the military-humanitarian interventions of the past 15 years. Although they still rely on the typically modern legal-rational authority and bureaucratic capacities of sovereign states and international law and institutions, these operations have introduced a new extraordinary, impersonal form of legitimate domination that escapes the bureaucratic rationality of the modern state. As we saw with Agamben, this
apparently paradoxical form has more or less latently permeated the western political and metaphysical tradition, expressing itself today in rampant bio-politicisation. Convinced perhaps of the inescapability of the iron cages of the instrumentally rational modern state and capitalism, Weber skirted the naming and theoretical elaboration of this extraordinary, impersonal form logically implied by his typology of legitimate dominations. His typology thus reproduced the “structure of exception” underlying western political and metaphysical thought, suggesting the hidden pervasiveness of a kind of authority that characterizes the purely logical structure of both politics and science. Both of these are promethean efforts to lend meaning to a godless, meaningless world, where the creative genius must deny and negate his or her arbitrary power. Intervention reproduces this godless, god-like structure of authority, whence its banal claim to be a matter of life and death.