

The Geopolitical Theodicy: Reconciling Coercion and Diplomacy in the Architecture of Power

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In theology, *theodicy* seeks to reconcile the existence of evil with the notion of a benevolent and omnipotent God. This paper extends that framework into the realm of international relations, proposing that modern statecraft functions as a geopolitical theodicy—a system wherein states justify covert coercion under the banner of public virtue. By examining the strategic interplay between overt diplomacy and covert operations, particularly within U.S. foreign policy, we reveal how this dual-track approach allows nations to maintain moral authority while engaging in morally ambiguous actions. Through historical and contemporary case studies—ranging from Iran in 1953 to the evolving U.S.–Israel–Iran triangle in 2025—we argue that this choreography of power is not a flaw of democratic governance but a hidden feature of it. As the CIA and State Department embody wrath and mercy in institutional form, the illusion of ethical consistency is preserved. Ultimately, this paper challenges whether states, lacking divine wisdom, can ever fully justify the suffering they orchestrate—and explores whether a post-theodical model of accountability is possible.

Keywords: geopolitical theodicy, coercion and diplomacy, CIA, State Department, U.S. foreign policy, dual-role strategy, moral dualism, international ethics, good cop bad cop, Israel-Iran conflict, covert operations, strategic justification, plausible deniability, statecraft and morality, theological analogy in geopolitics. A collaboration with GPT-4o. CC4.0.

Abstract

This paper explores the moral architecture of modern statecraft through the lens of theodicy, the theological framework traditionally used to reconcile the existence of evil with the sovereignty and benevolence of God. Drawing a parallel between divine problem-solving and strategic governance, we examine how contemporary nation-states—particularly the United States—employ dual-role tactics such as the “good cop, bad cop” doctrine to advance their foreign policy goals. In this model, institutions like the CIA and the State Department represent coercive and conciliatory forces respectively, operating in apparent opposition but toward a shared end. Much like theological justifications for divine wrath and mercy, these institutions frame suffering, manipulation, and even war as unfortunate but necessary consequences in the pursuit of higher goods: security, order, and peace.

Focusing especially on the enduring triangular tension between the U.S., Israel, and Iran, this paper argues that dual-track diplomacy serves as a form of geopolitical theodicy—an implicit moral justification for strategic harm. By engaging this analogy, we offer a novel framework for evaluating the ethical legitimacy of foreign policy, asking whether state-sponsored contradictions are the price of global stewardship—or the mask of moral evasion.

I. Introduction: From Divine Dilemma to Diplomatic Paradox

In theology, the problem of evil—or theodicy—has occupied some of the greatest minds in human history. Rooted in the tension between God’s omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and the manifest presence of evil in the world, theodicy asks: *If God is all-powerful and all-good, why does suffering exist?* The challenge is not merely intellectual but deeply moral. It forces us to ask whether suffering serves a hidden purpose or whether divine authority itself must be morally re-evaluated. Classic formulations by Augustine, Aquinas, and Leibniz sought to resolve this dilemma by reframing evil as a test of faith, a consequence of free will, or a

necessary contrast to appreciate goodness. In every case, the divine rationale for permitting harm was ultimately tethered to the claim of a higher good.

This paper begins with a simple but disruptive hypothesis: What if this theological structure is mirrored in modern diplomacy? What if governments—particularly those that claim moral or democratic legitimacy—invoke a form of secular theodicy in the architecture of statecraft?

The practice of contemporary foreign policy, especially by hegemonic powers like the United States, often reveals a calculated duality. On one side, the State Department engages in dialogue, economic incentives, and international cooperation—emphasizing rule-based order and mutual security. On the other, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) undertakes covert operations, regime destabilizations, and psychological manipulation—operating in secret to preserve strategic advantage. While these two arms of government appear to act independently or even in contradiction, they often serve a shared strategic aim. Much like divine justice and divine mercy in theological theodicy, these two roles—coercive and conciliatory—may not oppose each other, but rather define the contours of a single governing logic.

This duality is not incidental. It is structural. And it raises a profound ethical question: When states cause suffering in the name of peace, do they operate under a secular version of divine justification?

This paper contends that the dual-role approach often embedded in U.S. foreign policy—most clearly exemplified by the “good cop, bad cop” dynamic between the CIA and the State Department—constitutes a form of geopolitical theodicy. It is a moral system in which the harms inflicted by one hand of the state are justified by the ideals professed by the other. Through a combination of theological analogy, historical case studies, and geopolitical analysis, we examine how this system not only rationalizes contradictions, but often cloaks them in the language of necessity and virtue. In doing so, it opens a new lens for evaluating the moral claims of state power—not merely on whether outcomes are justified, but whether the structure of justification itself mirrors the very logic once reserved for the divine.

II. The Structure of Classical Theodicy

At the heart of theodicy lies a moral and metaphysical paradox: how can an all-powerful and all-good God allow evil and suffering to exist? This question, posed most famously by the ancient philosopher Epicurus and taken up by theologians across centuries, forms what is often called the trilemma of classical theodicy:

1. If God is omnipotent, He has the power to prevent evil.
2. If God is omnibenevolent, He has the desire to prevent evil.
3. Yet evil exists.

To reconcile these conflicting premises, theologians developed complex systems of justification that often hinge on two core ideas: free will and the greater good.

Free Will and the Necessity of Suffering

In the Augustinian tradition, evil is not a substance created by God but a privation—a lack of good that arises from the misuse of free will. This framing absolves God of directly causing evil while preserving His sovereignty and benevolence. Human beings, endowed with moral agency, are responsible for introducing sin and suffering into the world. Under this framework, evil becomes a byproduct of freedom—something God allows in order to preserve the integrity of human choice.

Similarly, in the Irenaean tradition, suffering is seen not as a failure of divine oversight but as a necessary component of moral and spiritual development. The soul must be “trained” through adversity. Just as physical strength is built through resistance, moral character is formed through trial. In this view, evil and suffering are permitted not in spite of God’s love, but as a consequence of it.

Both approaches offer justifications for divine inaction or indirect responsibility. They reframe God not as the author of evil, but as its overseer—one who permits it for reasons that may be inscrutable to finite human minds but are nonetheless oriented toward some ultimate good.

Evil as Permitted but Not Desired

A crucial distinction in most traditional theodicies is between what God permits and what God desires. God may not desire war, famine, or injustice, but He may allow them within the structure of a fallen world to serve higher purposes: moral growth, the preservation of freedom, or the unfolding of a redemptive plan. In this view, God functions as a dual-actor: both sovereign (allowing or orchestrating events on a cosmic scale) and compassionate (weeping with those who suffer, sending prophets, offering grace).

This dual nature allows religious believers to maintain faith in the face of catastrophic evil. It preserves God's character as good, even when the outcomes permitted by divine governance appear anything but. It also introduces a subtle asymmetry: God may appear divided in role, but is unified in purpose. The apparent contradiction of wrath and mercy, punishment and grace, is resolved in the belief that divine logic transcends human understanding.

It is precisely this structural feature—asymmetric roles justified by a unified purpose—that reappears, often unconsciously, in modern statecraft. When governments authorize coercive operations while publicly promoting peace and human rights, they enact a version of this theological logic. One hand inflicts pressure; the other offers deliverance. The strategy, like classical theodicy, depends not on consistency of action, but on the moral story used to justify contradiction.

In the sections that follow, we explore how this ancient structure has migrated from the divine to the geopolitical—from the Book of Job to the battlefield of diplomacy.

III. Statecraft as Secular Theodicy

In the absence of divine authority, the modern nation-state has assumed a kind of secular sovereignty. It claims the exclusive right to use force, define justice, protect its people, and shape the moral and material conditions of the world within and often beyond its borders. In this sense, national sovereignty functions

as an analog to divine will: it is invoked to justify war, coercion, secrecy, and sacrifice—acts that may otherwise be morally impermissible. Just as theodicy seeks to reconcile the apparent contradiction between divine goodness and the existence of evil, modern statecraft must reconcile its stated values—liberty, peace, order—with its use of violence, deception, and manipulation. This reconciliation gives rise to a secular theodicy: a narrative that redeems contradiction through the promise of a higher, often hidden good.

National Sovereignty as an Analog to Divine Will

The state, like God in classical theology, is often described as all-powerful within its domain. It enforces laws, decides life and death in war, and exerts control over its citizens and, in some cases, over the policies of other nations. It also appeals to legitimacy not only through force, but through moral language—promoting democracy, human rights, national security, or global stability. This combination of power and purpose enables the state to justify actions that might otherwise be indefensible. A drone strike, a coup, a disinformation campaign—each may be framed as regrettable but necessary, or even virtuous when viewed in light of the state's larger vision.

This echoes the theological move in theodicy: the goodness of the sovereign is not disproved by the presence of suffering, because suffering serves a purpose the subject cannot fully grasp. It is endured or inflicted in the name of a larger moral architecture.

Just War Theory and Realpolitik as Mechanisms for Explaining "Necessary" Evil

Within political philosophy and international law, Just War Theory offers a codified form of secular theodicy. Originating in the works of Augustine and Aquinas but formalized in modern legal frameworks, just war theory articulates the conditions under which violence is morally permissible: just cause, right intention, proportionality, last resort. It recognizes that harm may be necessary to prevent greater harm and that force, under the right conditions, may serve peace.

In parallel, the tradition of realpolitik—developed most famously by Machiavelli and later by figures like Bismarck and Kissinger—dispenses with moral language in

favor of pragmatic survival. Here, the good is not defined by virtue or law, but by effectiveness and state interest. Yet even *realpolitik* requires a moral rationale to maintain legitimacy in democratic societies. It often adopts a submerged moral frame, claiming that actions are taken not simply to win, but to secure order, protect lives, or preserve civilization itself.

Both of these traditions allow policymakers to perform a kind of ethical inversion: violence becomes peacekeeping, secrecy becomes responsibility, manipulation becomes leadership. Like theodicy, they assert that evil is not evil in itself, but evil used with restraint in the service of a greater good.

The Dual Face of Governance: Overt Diplomacy and Covert Operations

This structure of justification is most visibly enacted through the institutional duality of modern governance—especially in the United States. The State Department, as the face of diplomacy, public values, and multilateral cooperation, represents the benevolent, transparent arm of state power. It speaks in the language of peace, partnership, and legitimacy. Meanwhile, the CIA, operating in the shadows, often pursues destabilization, covert influence, and targeted violence. It speaks, when it speaks at all, through silence and outcomes.

Together, these two arms form a paradoxical unity. They mirror the divine roles of wrath and mercy, judgment and grace. And yet, as with theological theodicy, they are often interpreted as separate forces, rather than two expressions of the same sovereign will. This separation allows the state to preserve a moral image while executing amoral strategies. It enables the public to believe in the goodness of diplomacy, while tolerating the results of coercion.

In this way, statecraft functions as a secular theodicy: it permits contradiction while demanding trust, it causes suffering while promising redemption, and it invokes sovereignty not to excuse evil, but to explain it away. The next section will explore how this logic becomes operational through one of its most familiar tactics: the “good cop, bad cop” doctrine in foreign affairs.

IV. The Good Cop, Bad Cop Doctrine Revisited

The "good cop, bad cop" tactic is widely recognized in criminal psychology as a manipulation technique, where two interrogators assume opposing roles to break down a suspect's resistance. Transposed into international relations, this dynamic becomes far more sophisticated—embedded within state institutions and long-term strategic doctrines. Nowhere is this more evident than in the relationship between the CIA and the U.S. State Department, whose seemingly divergent missions often operate as two faces of a single strategic will.

CIA and State Department as Wrath and Mercy

Revisited through the lens of theodicy, the CIA and the State Department perform roles analogous to divine wrath and mercy. The CIA acts as the executor of judgment: unseen, unilateral, and often unaccountable. It inflicts suffering in the form of covert operations, disinformation, assassinations, and regime destabilization. Its logic is consequentialist, focused on outcomes rather than appearances. It reflects what theological traditions call the *permissive will*—the part of divine governance that allows or unleashes calamity for a hidden purpose.

By contrast, the State Department embodies mercy and overt moral order. It engages in treaties, diplomacy, foreign aid, and public statements about human rights and international norms. It is the face of law, negotiation, and peace. It offers the world a narrative of benevolent leadership while distancing itself from the darker mechanisms of power exercised behind the curtain.

When these two institutions operate in tandem, they offer an asymmetric but unified approach to foreign policy. One imposes pain; the other offers relief. One threatens chaos; the other restores order. The target of this dynamic is caught between apparent opposites that, in reality, are performing a shared function.

The Illusion of Choice and Constrained Freedom in Diplomacy

The effectiveness of the good cop, bad cop doctrine lies in the illusion of choice. It gives the impression that a sovereign decision can be made—peace or war, cooperation or resistance—while subtly constructing conditions in which only one

path is truly viable. This illusion is central to both psychological coercion and theological theodicy.

Just as theodicy frames obedience to divine law as freely chosen, even when disobedience leads to damnation, dual-track diplomacy frames submission to U.S. terms as voluntary, even when the alternatives are economic ruin or military intervention. Sanctions, drone strikes, regime change threats, and covert destabilization serve as the “wrath” that prepares the stage for “mercy” to enter, often under conditions that heavily favor the initiator.

This constriction of agency echoes theological debates about free will under divine testing. Are we truly free if the consequences of one choice are unbearable? Is a nation exercising sovereignty if the only peaceful path is acquiescence to an imposed framework? These questions do not negate the existence of choice, but they expose how freedom is shaped—and often constrained—by design.

Nations and Populations as Moral Agents Under Duress

In this structure, target nations and their populations take on a role not unlike the biblical figure of Job: tested, punished, lured, and observed. Their endurance or compliance becomes part of a larger drama in which the stakes are often invisible to them. They are subjected to stress tests of loyalty, alignment, and resistance, with both suffering and salvation held just beyond reach.

Consider Iran in the 21st century. Decades of covert operations, cyber warfare, assassinations of nuclear scientists, and crippling sanctions have been framed as necessary to prevent nuclear proliferation. At the same time, diplomatic openings like the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) are offered as pathways to global reacceptance. Yet even the act of compliance often brings no guarantee of relief—agreements are torn up, promises are reversed, and the pressure resumes. This mirrors the structure of a theological test: the reward is never immediate, and sometimes not guaranteed at all.

This moral staging positions the hegemonic state not just as an actor, but as a kind of secular deity—dispensing suffering and redemption, exercising judgment, and

controlling the terms of peace. The nation under pressure becomes a moral agent not in a free exchange, but in a drama where its agency is conditioned by fear and desire.

The good cop, bad cop doctrine, when viewed through this theological framework, is no longer a tactic of psychological manipulation alone. It is a ritual of moral theater, a geopolitical sacrament wherein states reenact the logic of divine judgment and mercy—subtly constructing the illusion of justice within the machinery of control.

In the next section, we will explore how this moral drama has played out in real-world case studies, illustrating the enduring structure of geopolitical theodicy in American statecraft.

V. Case Studies in Secular Theodicy

The concept of secular theodicy becomes sharply visible when we examine key episodes in American foreign policy where coercion and diplomacy work in tandem. In each case, one arm of power—the covert or coercive—engages in acts that are later justified by another arm invoking high ideals such as democracy, peace, or regional stability. These “case studies in secular theodicy” reveal a recurring structure: the justification of morally dubious actions as necessary components of a higher good.

Iran 1953 (Mossadegh): Containment as Divine Mandate

In 1953, the CIA orchestrated the overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh, Iran’s democratically elected Prime Minister, under Operation Ajax. His nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company threatened British interests and, by extension, Western access to Middle Eastern oil. More critically, U.S. officials feared that his independent stance might tilt Iran toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Publicly, the intervention was eventually justified as a preemptive strike against communism—a morally urgent containment of global evil. Yet the overthrow led

to decades of autocratic rule under the Shah and planted the seeds of resentment that exploded in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The “bad cop” (CIA) inflicted harm under secrecy, while the “good cop” (later diplomatic narratives) reframed the act as defense of freedom and global order. This pattern reflects classical theodicy: evil is allowed for a greater purpose, even if the consequences are delayed and deeply painful.

Chile 1973 (Allende): Democracy Undone in the Name of Stability

Twenty years later, a similar structure played out in Chile. Salvador Allende, a Marxist elected through democratic means, became the target of U.S. covert operations aiming to prevent a perceived slide toward socialism. The CIA provided material support to opposition forces and facilitated conditions that ultimately led to Allende’s overthrow and Augusto Pinochet’s military dictatorship.

The justification, once again, was that democracy itself was in peril—not from Allende’s election, but from what his policies represented: a possible domino in the Cold War chessboard. The moral framing was that short-term repression would secure long-term freedom for the region. In practice, it meant trading democracy for authoritarianism, a bitter contradiction wrapped in redemptive rhetoric. Wrath was wielded in secret, while mercy was promised in public.

Israel–Iran (2025): Strategic Tension as Moral Theater

In the present day, the U.S.–Israel–Iran triangle represents a live enactment of the same theodicean pattern. Public tensions between U.S. and Israeli leadership on how to handle Iran’s nuclear program—diplomacy versus preemptive strike—may appear to be disunity. Yet the divergence often serves as a coordinated dialectic, where Israel plays the threatener (“bad cop”) and the U.S. plays the mediator (“good cop”).

This dualism allows both parties to apply pressure on Iran without assuming full accountability. The threat of war coerces movement, while the offer of talks sustains legitimacy. The entire dynamic unfolds like a test of moral resolve for Iran: accept the deal and avoid destruction, or resist and risk annihilation. Within this

performance, each actor fulfills a familiar role: the enforcer of pain, the dispenser of hope, and the subject under trial.

The Pattern Across Cases

In all three cases, we observe the same moral geometry:

- An “evil” act—overthrow, support for dictatorship, or covert threat—is performed by one institutional arm.
- A higher good—freedom, order, peace—is invoked by another.
- The target nation is cast as a moral agent whose fate depends on submission to the terms of the dominant power.
- The public is asked to believe in the integrity of the system, not the purity of each act.

This secular theodicy does not erase contradictions; it redeems them through narrative. Like its theological counterpart, it insists that behind every torment lies a telos—a final cause—waiting to be unveiled.

In the next section, we will evaluate the moral implications of this framework and ask whether the state can ever be justified in claiming divine logic for worldly coercion.

VI. The Problem of Moral Displacement

While the doctrine of “good cop, bad cop” diplomacy may serve strategic interests and even achieve geopolitical objectives, it comes at a profound ethical cost. At the heart of this cost lies a fundamental question: Who bears the suffering incurred by dual-track statecraft? The answer, historically and consistently, is not the architects of strategy but the people caught in its crossfire—civilians, dissidents, and peripheral nations who become the object lessons in a drama of coercion and control. The problem of moral displacement arises when the burden of moral consequence is shifted away from those who wield power and onto those who cannot resist it.

Citizens and Civilians as Modern-Day Jobs

In theological terms, Job is the innocent sufferer—a man tested by unseen forces to prove a moral point beyond his comprehension. In modern geopolitics, this role is often played by ordinary people: Iraqi families under sanctions, Chilean students under dictatorship, Iranian citizens under surveillance and economic strain. These individuals endure trials orchestrated not by divine will but by state logic, and they do so without recourse or reprieve.

They are told, if not directly then by implication, that their pain is meaningful—that it is for the greater good of democracy, regional stability, or global peace. Yet the benefits of such outcomes are rarely theirs to enjoy. This strategic suffering is morally abstracted, justified not by justice but by necessity, and frequently disconnected from the will of those who suffer. They become, like Job, case studies in endurance—except their story is rarely redeemed or remembered.

Bureaucratic Diffusion of Responsibility

A central feature of this displacement is the bureaucratic structure of modern governance, which enables moral ambiguity to flourish. In a complex state apparatus, no single actor claims full responsibility for the consequences of covert or coercive acts. The CIA may execute a coup, but the State Department handles the public justification. Military operations may be outsourced, sanctioned regimes enforced by economic departments, while ethical debates are buried in classified memos or outsourced to think tanks.

This diffusion creates what Hannah Arendt called the “banality of evil”: the ease with which profoundly harmful actions can be carried out when no one feels personally accountable. The result is a system that perpetuates harm without moral anchoring, operating on procedural logic rather than ethical reflection.

This is not merely a failure of individual morality but a systemic condition: moral agency is rendered functionally absent. Those in power act according to roles, policies, and national interests, not according to conscience. Meanwhile, those harmed by these policies are rarely given voice, compensation, or even acknowledgment.

The Absence of a Moral Center

In classical theodicy, God is at least imagined as morally coherent, even if inscrutable. But in secular statecraft, the center does not hold—there is no unified moral subject to whom one can appeal. The state is fragmented, its intentions contradictory, its methods opaque. It can punish and redeem in the same breath, without internal contradiction, because its legitimacy is political, not moral.

This absence of a moral center allows governments to behave in ways that resemble theological judgment without bearing theological accountability. Pain becomes a means, not a problem. Suffering becomes strategically useful, not morally urgent. And diplomacy becomes less about dialogue and more about staged salvation, where the terms of peace are dictated, not discovered.

The result is a world in which morality is not denied but reassigned—from the actor to the victim, from the planner to the population. The moral structure remains intact, but its location is shifted, often invisibly. It is this displacement that makes the good cop, bad cop doctrine not just effective—but ethically perilous.

VII. Can There Be a Post-Theodical Statecraft?

If modern diplomacy and covert strategy mimic the theological dilemma of theodicy—justifying harm through the pursuit of higher order—then the urgent question becomes whether such a structure can be transcended. Can international relations evolve beyond the logic of *strategic suffering*, dual-role morality, and systemic moral displacement? Can there be a model of statecraft not predicated on divine-style justification of violence, but on actual accountability, transparency, and ethical asymmetry?

This section explores the possibility of a post-theodical statecraft, one that abandons the narrative need to justify harm as necessary and instead prioritizes the prevention of harm as foundational.

Alternatives to Coercive Balance

The current model of “good cop, bad cop” diplomacy operates on coercive symmetry: threats and offers work together to compel action. But several mechanisms—some tested, others merely envisioned—suggest alternative architectures for international conduct:

- Transparency diplomacy aims to reduce strategic ambiguity, replacing back-channel manipulation with open communication and verifiable intent. This was attempted in part with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), where multinational oversight replaced hidden red lines.
- Restorative diplomacy builds on principles of restorative justice, seeking not only the cessation of conflict but the rehabilitation of broken relationships and historical trauma. South Africa’s post-apartheid diplomacy and Rwanda’s reconciliation efforts offer blueprints for integrating ethical repair into state behavior.
- Truth commissions have emerged in transitional justice contexts to acknowledge past wrongs publicly, even when perpetrators are not punished. Their function is moral rather than judicial: to restore collective memory and affirm victims’ reality. If scaled to global diplomacy, such mechanisms could allow states to confront their covert history without being locked into cycles of denial or justification.

These models challenge the need for a theodicy of state action. Instead of asking “Why was this necessary?”, they ask, “How can this be repaired?”

The Potential of AI, Ethics Boards, and Quantum Transparency

Emerging technologies and institutional structures may help mechanize conscience within policy systems:

- AI-assisted policy simulations could illuminate the long-term consequences of covert operations, war games, and sanction regimes, surfacing ethical harms before decisions are finalized. If linked with moral scoring systems or

human rights databases, such tools could constrain action not through law, but through predictive accountability.

- Ethics boards for foreign policy—analogous to IRBs in biomedical research—could introduce mandatory ethical review before operations are authorized. Such boards, especially if composed of transnational representatives, would shift statecraft from a game of interest to a process of moral consultation.
- Quantum transparency, while still speculative, hints at a future where secure information architectures enable absolute verification without compromise. The implications for diplomacy are enormous: real-time verification of disarmament, negotiation integrity, and treaty compliance would reduce the incentive for deceit and coercion, reshaping diplomacy as collaboration rather than deception.

Toward Ethical Asymmetry, Not Moral Dualism

Rather than continuing the game of good cop/bad cop within a single state apparatus, post-theodical statecraft demands an asymmetry of moral purpose. Not every action must be balanced by a corresponding threat. Not every principle needs a tactical contradiction. The state must stop pretending it is both God and Devil, justice and force.

This means embracing moral asymmetry: diplomacy that does not conceal its moral commitments behind plausible deniability, governance that elevates responsibility above utility. It may be less “effective” in narrow strategic terms, but it promises greater coherence, legitimacy, and sustainability in a global order increasingly shaped by the ethics of interdependence.

To move beyond secular theodicy, states must abandon the illusion of necessity and embrace the possibility of moral reinvention. The next page in global politics will not be written by those who best mimic divine paradox, but by those willing to step outside of it.

VIII. Conclusion: State Power, Sacred Logic

Throughout this paper, we have explored the strategic logic of dual-role diplomacy—commonly called the “good cop, bad cop” doctrine—not merely as a political tactic but as a secular reenactment of one of theology’s most enduring dilemmas: theodicy. At its heart, theodicy is the intellectual and moral effort to reconcile the existence of evil with the presence of an all-powerful, all-good God. In the domain of international relations, the same structure appears when democratic nations, claiming to stand for freedom, peace, and human dignity, carry out or permit actions that violate those very ideals. The appeal of this dual structure is profound and enduring, because it allows power to maintain both its force and its righteousness—to harm while claiming to heal, to coerce while invoking consent.

The Enduring Appeal of Theodicy

Theodicy, whether sacred or secular, answers the discomfort of contradiction with the comfort of purpose. It allows power to remain unbroken, even in moments of failure or injustice. In the context of statecraft, it gives democratic nations a way to justify covert operations, coercive diplomacy, and regime manipulation as components of a grander, often unseen narrative—usually one of long-term peace, stability, or security. It is not simply about justifying action; it is about sustaining legitimacy.

By deploying dual-role diplomacy, states split the moral ledger: one arm applies pressure, another offers reprieve. One invokes fear, the other, hope. Yet behind this division lies a single will, cloaked in plausible deniability and rhetorical finesse. This is not always a betrayal of democratic ideals; in some cases, it may be their operational skeleton—the hidden structure that holds up the public face of freedom.

The Illusion of Moral Unity

The danger lies not in complexity, but in concealment. Citizens believe in a government of values, while its actions in the shadows may contradict them. Allies and enemies alike respond not to principle but to the calibrated mix of threat and

offer. The illusion of moral unity is preserved, but only by displacing ethical judgment—onto the victim, the enemy, or the future.

In this way, statecraft mirrors divine logic, without divine accountability. The sovereign does not answer to the governed in matters of secrecy. The suffering of others is noted, regretted, perhaps managed—but rarely owned. In doing so, democracies risk becoming morally bifurcated: transparent in speech, opaque in consequence.

The Call for Moral Reckoning

Until nations are willing to answer for their covert evils as clearly as they proclaim their overt ideals, the moral questions will remain open. And they will not remain theoretical. In an age of increasing transparency, artificial intelligence, and real-time global communication, the curtain that once shielded dual-role diplomacy may soon fall. The people, both domestic and international, may demand more than narrative—they may demand truth.

Post-theodical statecraft, as envisioned here, would not abandon strategy but refuse to sanctify harm. It would treat accountability not as a political liability, but as a moral foundation. It would recognize that power exercised without confession, however effective, is incomplete—and ultimately unsustainable.

Whether we speak in the language of theology or geopolitics, the final question remains the same: Can those who wield power justify not only what they achieve, but how they achieve it?

Until then, the logic of theodicy—sacred or secular—will continue to shape the invisible grammar of world affairs.

Epilogue: The State Does Not Have God's Wisdom

In theology, theodicy rests on the assumption—however contested—that God possesses perfect wisdom, infinite knowledge, and a morally coherent plan beyond human comprehension. The suffering permitted or inflicted by God, therefore, is enveloped in an eternal context. But when secular governments

adopt a theodical logic to justify their own strategic suffering—when they emulate divine duality through diplomacy and covert coercion—they assume a mantle far beyond their capacity. The state, unlike God, does not see all ends. It does not possess omniscience. It cannot claim moral infallibility.

Yet, this assumption is precisely what modern statecraft often performs: it demands obedience to a greater good while shielding its rationale in secrecy and ambiguity. It disciplines dissent through the rhetoric of national interest and forgives its own transgressions by citing necessity. But without the divine wisdom theodicy presumes, such a structure becomes not a system of justice—but a theater of control.

The state may deploy the instruments of wrath and mercy, of threat and conciliation, but it cannot resolve the contradictions it creates. The covert operation may achieve a tactical win; the diplomatic overture may secure a temporary peace. But these moves are fragments, not providence. There is no sovereign arc of moral coherence if the arc is never revealed, confessed, or constrained.

To mistake the instruments of power for divine purpose is a category error of catastrophic proportions. Human governance—no matter how sophisticated—is not divine governance. It must remain answerable not only to its own people but to the limits of its own knowledge and the ethics of its means.

A future worth living in will not be built by those who pretend to be gods, but by those who have the humility to stop pretending.

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