

The Concept of Self in Advaita Vedanta and Western Idealism: A Comparative Analysis of the Advaitic Idea of Atman-Brahman Identity with Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Idealism or Hegel's Absolute Idealism

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *This study explores the concept of self in Advaita Vedanta and Western Idealism, focusing on the Atman-Brahman identity in Shankara's non-dualism and its parallels with Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Idealism and Hegel's Absolute Idealism. Advaita posits that the individual self (Atman) is identical to the ultimate reality (Brahman), transcending empirical distinctions. Kant, on the other hand, distinguishes between the phenomenal self (subject to experience) and the noumenal self (unknowable in itself), while Hegel's Absolute Idealism envisions reality as an evolving self-conscious unity. This paper analyzes how each system conceptualizes self-awareness, reality, and ultimate knowledge, evaluating their epistemological and metaphysical frameworks.*

Methodology: *In this paper, the exploratory qualitative research method is used. The relevant information is collected using keyword-based search in Google search engine, Google Scholar search engine, and AI-driven GPTs. This information is analysed and interpreted as per the objectives of the paper.*

Results/ Analysis: *While Advaita emphasizes pure consciousness (Chaitanya) as the essence of self, Western Idealism approaches selfhood through dialectical reasoning and synthesis.*

Originality/ Values: *This comparative analysis highlights convergences and divergences in their understanding of self, perception, and ultimate reality.*

Keywords: Advaita Vedanta, Atman-Brahman, Transcendental Idealism, Absolute Idealism, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, Self, Non-Dualism, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Consciousness, Reality

1. INTRODUCTION :

The concept of self has been a central concern in both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions. In Advaita Vedanta, the self (*Atman*) is considered identical to Brahman, the ultimate reality, beyond all distinctions of subject and object. This non-dualistic (Advaita) perspective, primarily formulated by Adi Shankara, argues that the apparent multiplicity of the world is an illusion (*Maya*), and true knowledge (*Jnana*) reveals the unity of existence. On the other hand, Western Idealism, particularly in the works of Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, also grapples with the nature of self and reality but through a different epistemological lens [1-2].

Kant's Transcendental Idealism distinguishes between the phenomenal self, which perceives the world through categories of human cognition, and the noumenal self, which remains unknowable. Hegel, however, develops Absolute Idealism, where reality is seen as an evolving, self-conscious unity, progressively realizing itself through history and dialectical development. While Advaita Vedanta emphasizes self-realization through direct experience, Western Idealism relies on rational dialectics to understand the nature of selfhood [3-5].

This paper explores the convergences and divergences between these traditions, analysing how self-awareness, perception, and ultimate reality are conceptualized. It aims to highlight the philosophical bridges between Indian non-dualism and Western metaphysical thought.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

(1) "The Central Philosophy of Advaita Vedanta" – Chandradhar Sharma (1948) [6]:

This book provides a clear and systematic exposition of Advaita Vedanta, covering its metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology. Sharma presents Shankara's philosophy in relation to Buddhism, Samkhya, and Nyaya, making it an excellent introductory text. For comparative studies, this book helps establish a solid foundation in Advaita before engaging with Western idealist thought.

(2) "Idealism: The History of a Philosophy" – Jeremy Dunham, Iain Hamilton Grant & Sean Watson (2016) [7]:

This book traces the development of idealism from Plato to Hegel, covering Kant's transcendental idealism and Hegel's absolute idealism in detail. It is useful for understanding the Western perspective on self, reality, and metaphysics, making it an essential resource for a comparative approach to Advaita.

(3) "The Bloomsbury research handbook of Vedānta" – Ayon Maharaj (2020) [8]:

This book directly engages Advaita Vedanta with Western philosophy, particularly with idealism and phenomenology. Maharaj compares Shankara's non-dualism with Hegelian dialectics, Husserlian phenomenology, and contemporary consciousness studies, making it a valuable reference for those exploring philosophical crossovers.

(4) "The Self and Its Shadows: A Book of Essays on Individuality as Negation in Philosophy and the Arts" – Stephen Mulhall (2003) [9]:

Mulhall examines the concept of self across different philosophical and literary traditions, including Kant and Hegel. His analysis of self-negation and transcendence provides a Western parallel to Advaita's concept of non-duality, making it relevant for comparative research.

(5) "Hegel, Kant, and the Structure of the Object" - Robert Stern (2009) [10]:

This book delves into how Kant and Hegel construct the concept of reality and how the self-interacts with it. Stern's discussion of absolute idealism and dialectical reasoning provides a deeper insight into Hegelian thought, helping to contrast it with Advaitic non-dualism.

These books provide foundational knowledge in Advaita Vedanta while also offering insight into Western Idealism, particularly in Kantian and Hegelian metaphysics. For a comparative study, they establish key parallels and differences, helping scholars explore how Eastern and Western traditions conceive of the self and ultimate reality.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY :

(1) To study the Foundations of Advaita Vedanta.

(2) To understand the Concept of Self in Advaita Vedanta and Western Idealism.

(3) To investigate the implications for Ethics and Social Philosophy.

(4) To evaluate the doctrines by the comparative Analysis: Bridging East and West.

4. METHODOLOGY :

In this paper, the exploratory qualitative research method is used. The relevant information is collected using keyword-based search in Google search engine, Google Scholar search engine, and AI-driven GPTs. This information is analysed and interpreted as per the objectives of the paper [16].

5. THE CONCEPT OF SELF IN ADVAITA VEDANTA AND WESTERN IDEALISM: BRIDGING EASTERN AND WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS :

The quest to understand the nature of self and reality has been a central pursuit in both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions. This explores the fascinating parallels and divergences between the Advaita Vedanta school of Indian philosophy and Western Idealist thought, particularly focusing on the concepts of self-identity and ultimate reality. By examining the Advaitic notion of Atman-Brahman unity alongside Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Idealism and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's concept of the Absolute, we can gain deeper insights into how these profound philosophical systems grapple with fundamental questions of existence and consciousness.

As we embark on this comparative journey, it's crucial to approach these rich philosophical traditions with an open mind, recognizing that while they may use different terminologies and frameworks, they often wrestle with similar core inquiries about the nature of being and knowing. By bridging Eastern and Western perspectives, we can cultivate a more holistic understanding of the human quest for self-knowledge and ultimate truth.

The Foundations of Advaita Vedanta:

Advaita Vedanta, one of the most influential schools of Indian philosophy, offers a non-dualistic interpretation of reality that has captivated thinkers for centuries [17-20]. At its core lies the profound concept of the unity between Atman (individual self) and Brahman (ultimate reality).

The Nature of Atman:

In Advaita thought, Atman refers to the innermost essence or true self of an individual. Unlike the ego or empirical self that we typically identify with, Atman is understood as:

- Eternal and unchanging
- Self-luminous consciousness
- Beyond attributes and limitations
- The foundation of all experience

Advaita philosophers argue that our usual sense of self is merely a superimposition on this pure consciousness, clouded by ignorance (avidya) and false identification with the body and mind.

Brahman as Ultimate Reality:

Brahman, in Advaita Vedanta, represents the absolute, infinite, and all-encompassing reality. It is characterized as:

- Non-dual and without attributes (nirguna)
- The source and substrate of all existence
- Pure consciousness and bliss (sat-chit-ananda)
- Beyond conceptual understanding

The central tenet of Advaita is that Atman and Brahman are, in essence, identical. This non-dual reality is obscured by maya (cosmic illusion), leading to the appearance of multiplicity and separation in our everyday experience.

The Path to Self-Realization:

Advaita Vedanta outlines a spiritual journey aimed at directly experiencing the unity of Atman and Brahman. This process involves:

- (1) Cultivating discrimination between the real and unreal
- (2) Practicing detachment from worldly desires
- (3) Developing inner virtues like tranquillity and self-control
- (4) Engaging in contemplation and meditation on one's true nature

Through these practices, the seeker gradually dissolves the illusion of separateness and realizes their fundamental identity with the absolute reality.

6. WESTERN IDEALISM: KANT AND HEGEL :

While Eastern philosophy developed its unique approach to understanding reality and the self, Western thinkers were engaged in their own profound inquiries. Two towering figures in this tradition, Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, formulated influential idealist philosophies that bear intriguing similarities and differences to Advaita Vedanta.

6.1 Kant's Transcendental Idealism:

Immanuel Kant's revolutionary philosophy sought to reconcile empiricism and rationalism while addressing fundamental questions about the nature of knowledge and reality [21]. Key aspects of his transcendental idealism include:

- The distinction between phenomena (things as they appear to us) and noumena (things-in-themselves).

- The idea that the mind actively structures our experience through a priori categories and forms of intuition.
- The limits of human knowledge, confined to the realm of possible experience.
- The transcendental unity of apperception as the foundation of self-consciousness.

Kant argued that while we cannot know the ultimate nature of reality beyond our experience, we can understand the necessary conditions that make experience possible. This approach shares some similarities with Advaita's view of the limitations of conceptual knowledge in grasping ultimate reality.

6.2 Hegel's Concept of the Absolute:

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel developed a comprehensive philosophical system that sought to overcome the dualisms present in Kant's thought. Central to Hegel's philosophy is the concept of the Absolute, which bears some resemblance to the Advaitic notion of Brahman [22-24]. Key features of Hegel's thought include:

- The idea of reality as a dynamic, self-developing totality
- The dialectical process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis
- The unity of subject and object in absolute knowledge
- The progressive unfolding of Spirit (Geist) through history and culture

Hegel's vision of the Absolute as the ultimate ground of being and consciousness shares some parallels with Advaita's non-dual Brahman, though with important differences in how this ultimate reality is conceived and realized.

6.3 Comparative Analysis: Bridging East and West:

Having explored the core concepts of Advaita Vedanta, Kant's transcendental idealism, and Hegel's absolute idealism, we can now delve into a comparative analysis that highlights both the convergences and divergences between these philosophical systems.

Similarities in Approach:

- (1) Transcendence of Empirical Reality: Both Advaita and Western idealism recognize limitations in our everyday perception of reality and seek to uncover a deeper, more fundamental truth.
- (2) Emphasis on Consciousness: All three systems place great importance on the role of consciousness in shaping our understanding of reality, though they conceptualize this in different ways.
- (3) Unity of Subject and Object: Advaita's non-dualism and Hegel's absolute idealism both point towards an ultimate unity that transcends the subject-object divide.
- (4) Critique of Naive Realism: These philosophies challenge the common-sense view that the world exists exactly as we perceive it, independent of our consciousness.

6.4 Key Differences:

- (1) Metaphysical vs. Epistemological Focus: Advaita Vedanta is primarily concerned with the nature of ultimate reality, while Kant's philosophy focuses more on the limits and conditions of human knowledge.
- (2) Static vs. Dynamic Conceptions: The Advaitic Brahman is often described as unchanging and eternal, whereas Hegel's Absolute is conceived as a dynamic, self-developing totality.
- (3) Individual vs. Universal Consciousness: Advaita emphasizes the realization of one's true self as identical with universal consciousness, while Western idealism tends to focus more on the structures of individual human consciousness.
- (4) Methodological Approaches: Advaita Vedanta incorporates spiritual practices and direct experiential realization, whereas Western idealism relies more heavily on logical argumentation and conceptual analysis.

The Nature of Self-Consciousness:

One of the most intriguing areas of comparison between Advaita Vedanta and Western idealism lies in their respective treatments of self-consciousness. This fundamental aspect of human experience is approached from different angles in each tradition, yielding rich insights into the nature of selfhood and awareness.

Advaitic Perspective on Self-Consciousness:

In Advaita Vedanta, true self-consciousness is understood as:

- The pure awareness that underlies all mental states
- Non-dual and without subject-object division
- Identical with universal consciousness (Brahman)
- Distinct from the ego or empirical self

Advaita philosophers argue that our ordinary sense of self-consciousness, characterized by the feeling of "I am this" or "I am that," is actually a form of ignorance (avidya) that obscures our true nature as pure, undifferentiated awareness.

Kant's Transcendental Unity of Apperception:

Kant's approach to self-consciousness centers on what he calls the transcendental unity of apperception. This concept involves:

- The necessary condition for the possibility of coherent experience
- The "I think" that must be able to accompany all our representations
- A formal, contentless unity that grounds our sense of self
- The basis for synthesizing the manifold of intuition into unified experience

While Kant's view shares some similarities with the Advaitic notion of a fundamental consciousness underlying all experience, it differs in its emphasis on the formal conditions of knowledge rather than an ultimate metaphysical reality.

6.5 Hegel's Self-Consciousness and Recognition:

Hegel's treatment of self-consciousness introduces a more dynamic and intersubjective dimension:

- Self-consciousness arises through a dialectical process of recognition
- It involves the tension between independence and dependence on others
- True self-consciousness is achieved through mutual recognition in ethical community
- The development of self-consciousness is part of the larger unfolding of Spirit (Geist)

Hegel's approach diverges from both Advaita and Kant in its emphasis on the historical and social dimensions of self-consciousness, seeing it as a developmental process rather than a static reality or formal condition.

The Role of Experience and Knowledge:

Another crucial area of comparison between Advaita Vedanta and Western idealism lies in their respective views on the nature and limits of human knowledge and experience. These philosophical systems offer distinct perspectives on how we come to know reality and the relationship between empirical experience and ultimate truth.

Advaita Vedanta's Epistemology:

In Advaita thought, knowledge and experience are understood through several key concepts:

(1) Pramanas (Valid Means of Knowledge):

- Perception (pratyaksha)
- Inference (anumana)
- Testimony (shabda), especially from scripture

(2) Levels of Reality and Knowledge:

- Vyavaharika (empirical reality)
- Pratibhasika (illusory appearances)
- Paramarthika (absolute reality)

(3) Direct Realization (Aparokshanubhuti):

- The ultimate goal is direct, non-dual experience of Brahman
- Conceptual knowledge is seen as a stepping stone to this realization

Advaita emphasizes that while empirical knowledge has practical value, it is ultimately limited and cannot grasp the true nature of reality. Only through transcending ordinary modes of knowing can one realize the non-dual truth.

6.6 Kant's Critique of Knowledge:

Kant's epistemology centers on his famous "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy:

(1) A Priori and A Posteriori Knowledge:

- A priori knowledge is independent of experience
- A posteriori knowledge is derived from experience

(2) Analytic and Synthetic Judgments:

- Analytic judgments are true by definition
- Synthetic judgments add new information

(3) Phenomena and Noumena:

- We can only know things as they appear to us (phenomena)
- The thing-in-itself (noumena) remains unknowable

(4) Categories of Understanding:

- The mind structures experience through a priori categories
- These categories make objective knowledge possible

Kant argues that while we can have objective knowledge of the phenomenal world, our knowledge is limited to the realm of possible experience. The ultimate nature of reality remains beyond our cognitive grasp.

6.7 Hegel's Dialectical Approach to Knowledge:

Hegel's epistemology is characterized by its dynamic, historical approach:

(1) Dialectical Method:

- Knowledge progresses through thesis, antithesis, and synthesis
- Each stage of knowledge contains and transcends previous stages

(2) Phenomenology of Spirit:

- Traces the development of consciousness from sense-certainty to absolute knowing
- Knowledge evolves through increasingly comprehensive forms of awareness

(3) Unity of Thought and Being:

- In absolute knowledge, the distinction between subject and object is overcome
- True knowledge is the self-knowledge of Spirit (Geist)

(4) Historical and Cultural Dimensions:

- Knowledge is not just individual but develops through collective human experience
- The unfolding of knowledge is part of the larger process of Spirit's self-realization

Hegel's approach differs from both Advaita and Kant in its emphasis on the historical and dialectical nature of knowledge, seeing it as a progressive unfolding rather than a static realization or a fixed set of conditions.

6.8 The Concept of Maya and Appearance:

The relationship between ultimate reality and the world of appearances is a central concern in both Advaita Vedanta and Western idealism. While these traditions approach the issue from different angles, they share a common recognition that our ordinary perception of reality is in some sense limited or illusory.

Maya in Advaita Vedanta:

In Advaita philosophy, the concept of maya plays a crucial role in explaining the apparent multiplicity of the world:

(1) Nature of Maya:

- Neither real nor unreal, but indescribable (anirvacaniya)
- The power that creates the illusion of duality and separation

(2) Functions of Maya:

- Veiling (avarana): obscures the true nature of Brahman
- Projection (vikshepa): creates the appearance of multiplicity

(3) Levels of Reality:

- Paramarthika: absolute reality (Brahman)
- Vyavaharika: empirical reality (the world as we experience it)
- Pratibhasika: illusory appearances (like dreams or mirages)

(4) Overcoming Maya:

- Through knowledge (jnana) and realization of non-dual truth
- Maya is dispelled like darkness by light

Advaita emphasizes that while the world appears real from our limited perspective, it is ultimately non-different from Brahman, the one reality without a second.

Kant's Phenomena and Noumena:

Kant's distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves bears some similarity to the Advaitic concept of maya:

(1) Phenomena:

- The world as it appears to us, structured by our forms of intuition and categories of understanding
- The realm of possible experience and scientific knowledge

(2) Noumena:

- Things-in-themselves, beyond our perception and cognition
- Unknowable but necessarily posited as the ground of appearances

(3) Transcendental Idealism:

- Space and time are not features of reality itself but forms of our intuition
- The categories of understanding shape our experience but do not apply to things-in-themselves

(4) Limits of Knowledge:

- We can have objective knowledge of phenomena but not of noumena
- Metaphysical speculation about ultimate reality is prone to error and contradiction

While Kant's approach differs from Advaita in many respects, both systems recognize a fundamental distinction between appearance and ultimate reality.

Hegel's Dialectic of Appearance and Essence:

Hegel's philosophy offers a more dynamic view of the relationship between appearance and reality:

(1) Dialectical Process:

- Appearance and essence are moments in the self-development of the Absolute
- Their opposition is overcome in a higher synthesis

(2) Phenomenology of Spirit:

- Traces the development of consciousness from immediate sense-certainty to absolute knowing
- Each stage reveals a more comprehensive grasp of reality

(3) Concrete Universal:

- The Absolute is not an abstract unity but a concrete totality that includes all determinations
- Appearance is not simply illusion but a necessary moment in the self-manifestation of the Absolute

(4) Identity of Thought and Being:

- In absolute knowledge, the distinction between subject and object is overcome
- The Absolute comes to know itself through the process of human thought and history

Hegel's approach differs from both Advaita and Kant in its emphasis on the developmental and dialectical nature of reality, seeing appearance and essence as interconnected moments in a larger process.

6.9 The Path to Realization: Knowledge and Practice:

While Advaita Vedanta and Western idealism share some common ground in their understanding of ultimate reality and the limitations of ordinary experience, they differ significantly in their approaches to realizing or accessing this higher truth. This section explores the various paths and practices advocated by these philosophical traditions.

Advaita Vedanta's Path to Self-Realization

Advaita Vedanta outlines a comprehensive spiritual path aimed at directly experiencing the unity of Atman and Brahman:

(1) Preparatory Practices (Sadhana Chatushtaya):

- Viveka: discrimination between the real and unreal
- Vairagya: detachment from worldly desires
- Shatsampatti: six virtues including tranquility and self-control
- Mumukshutva: intense longing for liberation

(2) Threefold Path (Triguna):

- Sravana: listening to scriptural teachings
- Manana: reflection and contemplation on these teachings
- Nididhyasana: deep meditation leading to direct realization

(3) Knowledge (Jnana) as the Ultimate Means:

- Self-knowledge is seen as the direct cause of liberation
- Ignorance (avidya) is removed through right understanding

(4) Role of Guru and Scripture:

- A qualified teacher (guru) is considered essential for guidance
- Vedantic scriptures, especially the Upanishads, are key sources of knowledge

Advaita emphasizes that while practices and study are important, ultimate realization is a direct, non-dual experience that transcends all conceptual understanding.

Kant's Critical Philosophy and Moral Practice:

Kant's approach to realizing the highest truths is more focused on ethical conduct and the proper use of reason:

(1) Critique of Pure Reason:

- Establishing the limits of theoretical knowledge
- Recognizing the boundaries between science, metaphysics, and faith

(2) Moral Philosophy:

- The categorical imperative as a guide for ethical action
- Duty and good will as the basis of moral worth

(3) Postulates of Practical Reason:

- Freedom, immortality, and God as necessary assumptions for moral life
- These ideas, while not theoretically provable, have practical validity

(4) Cultivation of Reason:

- Developing critical thinking and self-reflection
- Striving for autonomy and maturity in one's use of reason

For Kant, the highest realization comes through moral action and the proper use of reason within its limits, rather than through mystical experience or metaphysical speculation.

Hegel's Dialectical Development of Spirit:

Hegel's philosophy sees the path to absolute knowledge as a historical and cultural process:

(1) Phenomenology of Spirit:

- Tracing the development of consciousness through various stages
- From sense-certainty to absolute knowing

(2) Dialectical Method:

- Progress through thesis, antithesis, and synthesis
- Each stage contains and transcends previous stages

(3) Historical Development:

- The unfolding of Spirit (Geist) through human history and culture
- Art, religion, and philosophy as progressive manifestations of absolute truth

(4) Philosophical Comprehension:

- Understanding the rational structure of reality
- Grasping the unity of thought and being in absolute knowledge

Hegel's approach differs from both Advaita and Kant in its emphasis on the historical and collective nature of realization, seeing it as a process that unfolds through human culture and thought rather than an individual spiritual experience or ethical practice.

6.10 Implications for Ethics and Social Philosophy:

The divergent views on self, reality, and knowledge in Advaita Vedanta and Western idealism naturally lead to different implications for ethics and social philosophy. This section explores how these philosophical systems approach moral and social questions.

Advaita Vedanta's Ethical Perspective:

Advaita's non-dual philosophy has profound implications for ethics:

(1) Unity of All Beings:

- Recognition of the fundamental oneness of all existence
- Compassion and non-violence (ahimsa) as natural expressions of this understanding

(2) Karma and Dharma:

- Actions (karma) are seen as binding only from the perspective of ignorance
- Fulfilling one's duty (dharma) while maintaining inner detachment

(3) Liberation as the Highest Good:

- Self-realization (moksha) as the ultimate goal of human life
- Ethical behavior as a means to purify the mind for higher realization

(4) Relative and Absolute Ethics:

- Recognition of conventional morality for practical life
- Transcendence of dualistic ethics in the state of non-dual realization

Advaita's ethics emphasize inner transformation and the realization of unity, rather than focusing primarily on external rules or social reform.

Kant's Ethical Framework:

Kant's moral philosophy is grounded in reason and universal principles:

(1) Categorical Imperative:

- Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law
- Treat humanity always as an end, never merely as a means

(2) Autonomy and Duty:

- Moral worth lies in acting from duty, not inclination
- Rational beings as self-legislating moral agents

(3) Kingdom of Ends:

- Ideal moral community where all are treated as ends in themselves
- Striving for a just and ethical social order

(4) Perpetual Peace:

- Vision of international cooperation and world citizenship
- Moral progress as a historical process

Kant's ethics emphasize universal principles, rational autonomy, and the progressive realization of moral ideals in society.

Hegel's Social and Historical Ethics:

Hegel's philosophy sees ethics and social life as part of the larger unfolding of Spirit:

(1) Ethical Life:

- Integration of individual freedom with social institutions
- Family, civil society, and state as moments in ethical development

(2) Historical Development of Freedom:

- Progress from abstract to concrete freedom through history
- Dialectical overcoming of contradictions in social and political life

(3) Reconciliation of Individual and Universal:

- True freedom as recognition of oneself in social institutions
- Overcoming alienation through participation in ethical community

(4) Philosophy of Right:

- Rational structure of social and political institutions
- State as the highest expression of ethical life

Hegel's approach emphasizes the historical and social dimensions of ethics, seeing moral development as part of the larger process of Spirit's self-realization.

6.11 Contemporary Relevance and Future Directions:

During our exploration of the concept of self in Advaita Vedanta and Western idealism, it's important to consider the contemporary relevance of these philosophical traditions and potential directions for future inquiry and integration.

Bridging Eastern and Western Thought:

(1) Cross-Cultural Dialogue:

- Increasing interest in comparative philosophy and East-West synthesis
- Potential for mutual enrichment and deeper understanding of fundamental questions

(2) Interdisciplinary Approaches:

- Integrating insights from philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and contemplative traditions
- Exploring the relationship between consciousness studies and ancient wisdom traditions

(3) Addressing Global Challenges:

- Applying non-dual perspectives to environmental ethics and sustainability
- Exploring the implications of interconnectedness for social and political theory

Relevance to Modern Psychology and Cognitive Science:

(1) Consciousness Studies:

- Advaitic insights into the nature of consciousness and self-awareness
- Exploring non-dual states of consciousness through scientific methods

(2) Cognitive Therapy and Well-being:

- Mindfulness practices inspired by Eastern philosophies
- Integrating non-dual perspectives into psychological approaches to self and identity

(3) Neuro-philosophical Investigations:

- Exploring the neural correlates of self-awareness and altered states of consciousness
- Investigating the relationship between brain, mind, and ultimate reality

Ethical and Social Applications:

(1) Global Ethics:

- Developing inclusive ethical frameworks based on the recognition of fundamental unity
- Addressing issues of cultural diversity and universal values

(2) Environmental Philosophy:

- Applying non-dual perspectives to ecological ethics and sustainability
- Exploring the implications of interconnectedness for our relationship with nature

(3) Social Transformation:

- Integrating individual spiritual growth with social engagement and activism
- Exploring new models of community and social organization inspired by non-dual philosophies

Future Research Directions:

(1) Phenomenology of Non-Dual Experience:

- In-depth studies of the lived experience of non-dual states
- Comparative analysis of mystical experiences across cultures and traditions

(2) Quantum Physics and Non-Duality:

- Exploring potential connections between quantum theory and non-dual philosophies
- Investigating the nature of reality at the intersection of physics and consciousness

(3) Artificial Intelligence and Consciousness:

- Examining the implications of non-dual philosophies for AI ethics and development
- Exploring the possibility of machine consciousness from various philosophical perspectives

(4) Evolutionary Approaches:

- Investigating the evolutionary origins and adaptive value of self-awareness
- Exploring the relationship between biological and spiritual evolution

As we continue to grapple with fundamental questions about the nature of self, consciousness, and reality, the rich traditions of Advaita Vedanta and Western idealism offer valuable insights and frameworks for inquiry. By fostering dialogue between these diverse philosophical approaches and integrating them with contemporary scientific understanding, we can deepen our comprehension of the human condition and our place in the cosmos.

The comparative analysis of Advaita Vedanta and Western idealism reveals both striking similarities and significant differences in their approaches to understanding the self and ultimate reality. While Advaita emphasizes direct realization of non-dual truth, Western idealism tends to focus more on the

structures of human cognition and the historical development of consciousness. By engaging with these diverse perspectives, we can cultivate a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the perennial questions that have captivated philosophers and seekers throughout history.

As we move forward, the integration of Eastern and Western philosophical insights, coupled with advances in scientific understanding, holds great promise for addressing the complex challenges of our globalized world. The enduring relevance of these profound philosophical traditions lies in their ability to inspire us to look beyond surface appearances, question our fundamental assumptions, and seek a deeper understanding of ourselves and the nature of reality.

7. ADVAITA VEDANTA AND WESTERN IDEALISM: EXPERIENTIAL REALIZATION VS. CONCEPTUAL REASONING :

Self and reality have been in question among Western and Eastern traditions of philosophy. Vedanta, a school of Indian philosophy associated with Adi Shankara, claims that reality cannot be divided. The ultimate reality, Brahman, is change; true self (Atman) is identical to it. This is recognized through direct knowledge (Jnana), which is an experience rather than mere concepts, words, or intellect. On the other hand, Western Idealism, illustrated in the works of Immanuel Kant and his Transcendental Idealism, as well as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his Absolute Idealism, assume self within reality is formulated with language, logic, dialectics, and rationality.

(1) The Advaita Vedanta Approach: Direct Experiential Realization (Jnana):

1.1 The Core Principle of Advaita: Non-Duality (Advaita):

Advaita Vedanta asserts that Brahman is the sole reality and that the perceived world of plurality is an illusion (Maya). The self (Atman) is not different from Brahman, but due to ignorance (Avidya), individuals perceive duality.

1.2 Jnana Yoga: The Path of Knowledge:

According to Advaita Vedanta, liberation (Moksha) is attained through direct experiential realization of one's true self, not through mere intellectual speculation. The process of Jnana Yoga involves:

- (i) Shravana (Hearing the Truth): Listening to the Upanishads and Advaita teachings under a guru.
- (ii) Manana (Contemplation): Reflecting deeply on the teachings to remove doubts.
- (iii) Nididhyasana (Meditative Absorption): Direct realization of Brahman through deep, meditative insight.

1.3 The Role of Intuition and Experience:

In Advaita, conceptual reasoning is secondary to direct experience. Philosophical arguments (such as those in Brahma Sutras and Upanishads) help guide the seeker, but ultimate realization transcends logic. This is akin to "knowing fire by touching it," rather than merely theorizing about it.

1.4 The Importance of Avidya (Ignorance) and Its Removal:

Shankara argues that the world appears real due to Avidya (ignorance), which is removed through Jnana (knowledge). This knowledge is not mere intellectual understanding but a transformative realization, where the seeker directly perceives the oneness of Atman and Brahman.

(2) The Western Idealist Approach: Conceptual and Dialectical Reasoning:

2.1 Kant's Transcendental Idealism: The Limits of Human Knowledge:

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in his Critique of Pure Reason distinguishes between:

- (i) Phenomena: The world as it appears to us.
- (ii) Noumena: The ultimate reality (which is unknowable in itself).
- (iii) Kant argues that human cognition is shaped by a priori categories, meaning that we cannot directly experience ultimate reality as Advaita Vedanta claims. Instead, we can only construct conceptual frameworks that help us navigate reality.

2.2 Hegel's Absolute Idealism: The Dialectical Development of Self:

Unlike Kant, Hegel (1770–1831) believes that absolute reality is knowable, but through a process of dialectical reasoning. His concept of Absolute Spirit develops through three stages:

- (i) Thesis (Self as Subject)
- (ii) Antithesis (Self as Object)
- (iii) Synthesis (Self as Absolute Spirit)

Through dialectical reasoning, the self comes to recognize its unity with the Absolute. This differs from Advaita, which emphasizes instant realization rather than gradual synthesis.

2.3 The Primacy of Conceptual Thought in Western Idealism:

Unlike Advaita Vedanta's focus on meditative experience, Western Idealists see philosophy as a rational, conceptual, and linguistic exercise. For Hegel, the Absolute is reached through logical progression, while for Kant, the ultimate reality is beyond direct cognition.

(3) Key Differences Between Advaita and Western Idealism:

Table 1: Key Differences Between Advaita and Western Idealism

S. No.	Feature	Advaita Vedanta	Western Idealism (Kant & Hegel)
1	Nature of Reality	Brahman (non-dual, absolute reality)	Transcendental (Kant) / Absolute Spirit (Hegel)
2	Path to Truth	Direct experience (Jnana)	Conceptual and dialectical reasoning
3	Epistemology	Knowledge beyond logic	Knowledge within rational structures
4	Role of Self	Atman = Brahman	Self evolves through dialectics (Hegel) or remains unknowable (Kant)
5	Methodology	Meditation, Self-inquiry	Rational analysis, Dialectics
6	Final Realization	Sudden, direct awareness	Gradual synthesis of knowledge

(4) Convergences: Are They Really Opposed?

While Advaita Vedanta and Western Idealism appear to differ in their methodologies, they share common goals:

- (i) Both affirm that perceived reality is not ultimate reality.
- (ii) Both strive for the realization of a higher, unified self.
- (iii) Both acknowledge that ordinary perception is clouded by ignorance.

Hegel's dialectical process of self-realization resembles Advaita's notion of gradual removal of ignorance, even though their approaches differ. Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena also parallels Advaita's Maya vs. Brahman distinction.

To sum up, Advaita Vedanta asserts that reality is directly knowable through intuitive experience (Jnana), while Western Idealism argues that it must be conceptually understood through reason and dialectics. Advaita's path of self-inquiry (Atma Vichara) offers an immediate realization of non-duality, whereas Western Idealism presents a gradual intellectual ascent toward the Absolute.

Despite these methodological differences, both traditions share a fundamental drive toward overcoming duality and understanding the true nature of self and reality. By integrating experiential knowledge with philosophical reasoning, a more holistic approach to truth can emerge, bridging the gap between Eastern and Western philosophical thought.

8. CONCLUSION :

The comparative study of Advaita Vedanta and Western Idealism reveals profound insights into the nature of self and reality. While Shankara's Advaita Vedanta asserts that Atman (individual self) and Brahman (ultimate reality) are identical, Western Idealism, particularly in Kant's Transcendental Idealism and Hegel's Absolute Idealism, approaches the self through epistemological and dialectical frameworks. Kant differentiates between the phenomenal self, bound by human perception, and the noumenal self, which remains unknowable. Hegel, however, sees the self as part of an evolving Absolute Spirit, which attains full self-consciousness through a dialectical process.

Despite methodological differences, both traditions share a common goal: understanding the true nature of self beyond empirical reality. Advaita Vedanta emphasizes direct experiential realization (*Jnana*), whereas Western Idealism prioritizes conceptual and dialectical reasoning. However, both acknowledge that perceived duality is ultimately transcended—whether through pure consciousness (Advaita) or through absolute synthesis (Hegelian Idealism).

This study underscores the intersections between Eastern and Western philosophical thought, demonstrating that both traditions strive toward a non-dualistic understanding of existence. By bridging these perspectives, we gain a deeper appreciation of how human thought, across cultures, has sought to uncover the ultimate unity of self and reality.

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