



Transcending Dualistic Discourse: Advaita Vedanta's Non-Dualism as a Paradigm for Global Harmony and Ethical Sustainability

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Abstract

The ongoing disintegration of political, economic, and social structures in today's world highlights a deeply entrenched and fragmented worldview. From international conflicts to environmental devastation, humanity is caught in a cycle of materialism driven by competition, unchecked consumerism, and self-centred pursuits, leaving little room for a holistic understanding of reality. Though Vedanta carries a timeless message of interconnectedness and harmony, its transformative power to solve today's global crisis has been largely unexplored. This research explores the profound ontological distinction between vyavaharika (empirical reality) and Paramarthika (ultimate reality) as articulated in Advaita Vedānta and applies this framework to address contemporary global challenges. In a world fragmented by political, economic, and social divisions, the dominance of Vyavaharika's thinking perpetuates conflict, materialism, and exploitation. This paper argues that recognizing the Paramarthika truth—an undivided, non-dual reality of interconnected existence—offers a transformative philosophical approach to reimagining global unity, peace, and sustainability. Vedanta ontology provides a pathway toward ethical global governance, ecological harmony, and socio-political equity by transcending the illusory nature of empirical differences. Drawing from classical texts like the Upanishads and Sankara's Brahma Sutra's commentary, alongside contemporary interpretations, this research examines how the realization of Paramarthika can serve as a practical, philosophical solution to modern fragmentation. It critically evaluates whether adopting a non-dual worldview can foster compassionate and sustainable interactions between nations and communities, ultimately paving the way for a more unified world order.



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1. Introduction

Humanity has long struggled to reconcile the pursuit of well-being with the ethical imperative of global harmony and environmental stewardship. Although progress has been made through policy frameworks and scientific advancements, much of the contemporary sustainability discourse remains confined within mechanistic and utilitarian boundaries (Gibbons, 2020). The prevailing models often prioritize measurable thresholds of human welfare while neglecting the deeper ontological questions concerning human purpose, meaning, and our relationship with the cosmos. As the global community confronts ecological collapse, sociopolitical

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fragmentation, and rising material inequality, a paradigm shift toward a more integrative worldview has become both urgent and inevitable.

In this regard, the ancient philosophy of Advaita Vedanta offers profound insights for reimagining this transition. The core principle of Advaita—the non-duality of existence—proposes that all apparent divisions in reality arise from ignorance (avidya) of the ultimate, unified nature of Brahman. This distinction between *Vyavaharika* (empirical or transactional reality) and *Paramarthika* (ultimate or transcendental reality) offers a crucial framework for transcending the deeply ingrained dualistic thinking that underpins modern global crises (Nelson, 1998; Dwivedi, 2006). The Vedantic perspective suggests that sustainable solutions do not merely lie in reforming external systems but require a fundamental shift in human consciousness—an alignment of individual and collective awareness with the non-dual essence of existence.

This philosophical orientation resonates not only with indigenous and non-Western worldviews, such as *Buen Vivir* in Latin America and *Ubuntu* in Africa, which emphasize relational ontology and ethical co-existence (Van Norren, 2017), but also with Gandhian thought. Mahatma Gandhi's vision of *Sarvodaya* or “the welfare of all” underscores a holistic understanding of social justice rooted in self-realization and universal compassion, echoing the Vedantic emphasis on transcending ego and separateness (Van Norren, 2017).

The relevance of this perspective is increasingly supported by contemporary interdisciplinary research. Scholars like Haigh (2010) and Narayanaswamy (2008) emphasize the need for rethinking human development through a lens of interconnectedness rather than fragmentation. Recent work in environmental humanities and global ethics has also highlighted the inadequacy of conventional anthropocentric models in fostering a sustainable world order, reinforcing the need for ontological frameworks that prioritize unity over division.

This study approaches the Vedantic worldview not as an abstract metaphysical speculation but as a living, dynamic philosophy with the potential to reshape modern approaches to global challenges such as political conflict, social inequality, environmental degradation, and cultural fragmentation. The famous Upanishadic verse “एकं सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति” (*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*) — “Truth is one, the wise call it by many names” (Mundaka Upanishad, 3.2.9) — further emphasizes this fundamental insight into the unity underlying apparent diversity.

The ontological distinction between empirical reality and ultimate reality, central to Advaita Vedanta, offers a transformative lens to understand and resolve the conflict between human material pursuits and spiritual fulfillment. At the empirical level, divisions and conflicts emerge as tangible realities in social, political, and economic life. Yet at the transcendental level, these differences dissolve into the undifferentiated existence of *Brahman*, an insight that calls for humility, self-awareness, and ethical responsibility in human affairs (Radhakrishnan, 1929; Deutsch, 1969).

Although Advaita Vedanta presents profound philosophical insights into the nature of existence and unity, the contemporary global system remains entrenched in a worldview defined by fragmentation, materialism, and dualism. This prevailing perspective is largely shaped by Western economic and political ideologies, which prioritize separation over interconnectedness. Such a mindset is deeply rooted in pragmatic consciousness, where human engagement is limited to empirical, experience-based, and materially oriented realities. The ongoing crises confronting the world — including the climate emergency, persistent regional conflicts, and widespread cultural disintegration — further illustrate how modern civilization is ensnared by the illusion of duality, which Advaita Vedanta identifies as *Maya*. This research directly addresses the central challenge of how societies might transcend this fragmented view by recognizing the unity of existence articulated through the ontological insights of Vedantic philosophy (Deutsch, 1969) and adopting a transcendental outlook.

This research seeks to examine how Advaita Vedanta's acknowledgment of the dual nature of reality — distinguished as *Vyavaharika* (empirical) and *Paramarthika* (transcendental) — can offer meaningful insights for confronting the complex global challenges of the present age. By proposing a deeper ontological framework grounded in the principle of unity, this study aims to highlight how Vedantic non-duality can reshape contemporary conversations surrounding conflict resolution, environmental sustainability, and social equity. Beyond offering theoretical insight, the research aspires to position Vedanta's perspective as a transformative ethical guide that can inspire both individual and collective efforts toward global harmony, asserting that the philosophy's emphasis on interconnectedness is as enduring as it is relevant to the urgent crises of human division and ecological instability.

The inquiry is concerned with evaluating the ways in which the ontological foundation presented by Advaita Vedanta can function as a conceptual tool for interpreting global complexities and offering an alternative philosophical basis for restructuring the dominant paradigms of world order. Current global frameworks, often shaped by materialist and separatist assumptions, leave little room for perspectives that emphasize unity and

interdependence. This research also addresses the significant gap arising from the underrepresentation of comprehensive philosophical traditions — especially those rooted in Indian thought — within contemporary governance systems and global policy debates. While Advaita Vedanta has long articulated a profound metaphysical vision centered on the essential oneness of all existence, its relevance and practical contribution to addressing pressing modern concerns in the realms of politics, social justice, and environmental stewardship have yet to be fully explored and applied.

Against this backdrop, the present inquiry investigates whether the ontological structure of Advaita Vedanta, rooted in non-duality, can contribute to modern thought and practice by offering transformative solutions for global peace, social equity, economic justice, and ecological sustainability. Central to this exploration are questions concerning the philosophical distinctions between *Empirical* and *Transcendental* reality as conceived within the Vedantic tradition, and how these distinctions might deepen our understanding of contemporary global conflicts and social divisions. This study also seeks to clarify the ways in which Vedanta's ontological approach offers a critique of the separatist and materialist foundations underlying modern political and economic systems, and whether ethical principles derived from Vedantic thought can be meaningfully applied within contemporary institutional frameworks to shape a more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable world order.

2. Literature Review

The foundation of this study is grounded in the Advaita Vedanta framework, particularly its distinction between Vyavaharika (empirical reality) and Paramarthika (transcendental reality). These categories reflect the dual perception of existence embedded in Vedanta thought, first articulated in the Upanishads and later systematized by Adi Shankara in his renowned commentary on the Brahma Sutras. Vyavaharika refers to the conventional, everyday domain of experience, where dualities such as self and other, subject and object, and world and individual seem tangible and real. This layer of existence is where human life is defined by conflict, competition, and suffering (Sharma, 1962).

In contrast, Paramarthika represents the ultimate, non-dual truth, in which all distinctions dissolve into the absolute unity of Brahman — the infinite consciousness that underlies all forms of life. According to Advaita Vedanta, liberation (moksha) is attainable only through self-knowledge and the realization of this unity (Deutsch, 1969). A central theme in this philosophical discourse is Maya, the illusory power through which the empirical world appears separate and real. Under the influence of Maya, individuals mistakenly perceive themselves and the world as fragmented and permanent, remaining trapped in Vyavaharika reality until true knowledge of Brahman dawns (Radhakrishnan, 1929). Shankara's exposition of this framework in his commentaries on the Brahma Sutras (2.1.13-20) firmly established the view that liberation is achieved when this veil of illusion is transcended, allowing the seeker to perceive the oneness that lies beyond multiplicity. Historically, this understanding has evolved through the intellectual efforts of classical and modern Vedanta scholars. The early Vedic period was primarily centered around ritual and sacrificial practices, which gradually gave way to spiritual inquiry during the Upanishadic age (circa 800–500 BCE), where questions about the self, ultimate reality, and existence emerged as central concerns. It was Adi Shankara, the eighth-century Indian philosopher, who synthesized and systematized these Upanishadic teachings into a coherent ontological model, firmly asserting the non-dual nature of Brahman as the only reality and shaping the philosophical trajectory of Advaita Vedanta.

Over time, other schools of Vedantic philosophy emerged, offering both critiques and expansions of Shankara's non-dualist position. Vishishtadvaita Vedanta, championed by Ramanuja in the 11th century, offered a qualified non-dualism that maintained the distinctiveness of the individual soul while affirming its dependence on Brahman. Dvaita Vedanta, proposed by Madhava in the 13th century, firmly rejected Advaita's interpretation by insisting on the eternal distinction between the individual self (jiva) and the divine reality (Brahman), emphasizing a fundamentally dualistic cosmology (Sharma, 1962). Modern thinkers have also contributed significantly to the reinterpretation and global dissemination of Advaita Vedanta. Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) was instrumental in introducing Vedantic thought to the Western intellectual sphere, emphasizing its practical relevance for fostering compassion, social justice, and global peace (Vivekananda, 1989). Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) deepened the modern understanding of Advaita in his work *Indian Philosophy*, where he described its capacity to transcend the dualisms embedded in Western materialist worldviews (Radhakrishnan, 1929). Eliot Deutsch, in his landmark text *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, offers a rigorous philosophical interpretation of Shankara's metaphysics, situating Advaita as a viable response to both Indian and Western dilemmas about the nature of identity, transformation, and the structure of reality (Deutsch, 1969). A recurring debate within Vedantic scholarship concerns the ontological status of the world. Critics from Dvaita

Vedanta and other dualistic traditions have consistently questioned Advaita's assertion that the world is ultimately illusory. They argue instead for the eternal and distinct reality of both the individual self and God, offering a relational rather than non-dual understanding of existence (Sharma, 1962).

The dialogue between metaphysical insight and social practice has been an important concern for modern Vedantic scholars. Both Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan emphasized the relevance of spiritual realization for addressing concrete social and political challenges. Despite occasional criticisms that Advaita's transcendental focus might encourage detachment from worldly affairs, advocates argue that genuine non-dual realization can lead to greater ethical engagement, motivating commitments to social justice, global solidarity, and environmental sustainability (Vivekananda, 1989). In the context of this study, the Vyavaharika and Paramarthika framework will function as the central philosophical lens, helping to distinguish the surface-level divisions that characterize modern geopolitical, social, and economic systems from the deeper, underlying unity Advaita posits as the true nature of reality. The principles of Maya and Brahman offer an ontological foundation for challenging the illusion of separation, a theme that has been explored in varying degrees by classical thinkers like Shankara and modern interpreters including Radhakrishnan and Vivekananda.

The Upanishadic tradition, with its distinction between Vyavaharika and Paramarthika, underscores that while the empirical world is shaped by diversity, multiplicity, and apparent separation, the transcendental reality is rooted in an indivisible, non-dual Brahman (Deutsch, 1969). This distinction is more than a theoretical concept — it shapes ethical perspectives by framing human interaction, social responsibility, and ecological consciousness. The persistent experience of Maya, or illusion, manifests in social hierarchies, political conflicts, and environmental exploitation. Through the realization of the self's unity with Brahman, individuals are encouraged to overcome separation and act with compassion, empathy, and harmony toward all beings (Radhakrishnan, 1929). Advaita's ethical vision, which emphasizes interconnectedness, offers a counter-narrative to the dominant global values of competition, materialism, and consumerism that fuel modern crises (Kaplan, 2013). As Vivekananda (1953) and Deutsch (1969) suggest, understanding the oneness of all life can cultivate environmental stewardship and socio-political solidarity. When societies internalize this realization, the outcome is not passive withdrawal but active participation in compassionate, nonviolent, and justice-oriented practices that transcend national, racial, and religious divisions. Advaita Vedanta, therefore, holds the potential to serve as both a spiritual and philosophical foundation for sustainable global governance.

Despite the challenges posed by political systems rooted in self-interest and economic profit, Advaita's principles offer an alternative model for global harmony, grounded in ethical consciousness, educational reform, diplomatic practice, and ecological responsibility (Radhakrishnan, 1929). Through its emphasis on Ahimsa (nonviolence) and the recognition of the Self in all beings, Advaita Vedanta can inspire new pathways toward peace, reconciliation, and coexistence in an increasingly fragmented world.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a philosophical analysis methodology, grounded in textual interpretation, conceptual synthesis, and comparative critique. The study engages both primary and secondary sources to explore the relevance of Advaita Vedanta's ontological framework in addressing modern global issues. Primary texts, including foundational Vedantic scriptures such as the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and classical commentaries like *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, serve as the core material for examining the practical and metaphysical distinctions embedded within Advaita's non-dual ontology. These ancient texts are analyzed with a focus on their articulation of the relationship between *Vyavaharika* (empirical reality) and *Paramarthika* (transcendental reality), alongside their ethical and social implications.

The methodology employed is not only analytical but also comparative, allowing for an examination of Advaita Vedanta alongside other relational worldviews such as *Buen Vivir*, *Ubuntu*, and Gandhian *Sarvodaya* (Van Norren, 2017). This comparative lens sharpens the study's capacity to test whether Vedanta's ontological distinctions can effectively be applied to the real-world complexities of international relations, social fragmentation, and ecological degradation. The approach also draws insights from sociopolitical theory, particularly critiques of materialist worldviews, to position Vedantic thought as a viable alternative ethical and philosophical model for global cooperation and peacebuilding.

Furthermore, the research acknowledges the need to bridge ancient Indian philosophy with contemporary global discourse, an approach that not only illuminates the enduring value of Advaita Vedanta but also responds to the underexplored question of how philosophical worldviews can actively inform sustainable governance, social justice, and ecological ethics today. By combining textual interpretation, interdisciplinary dialogue, and

philosophical reasoning, this study aims to establish whether the ontology of non-duality can move beyond its metaphysical origins to offer applicable insights for fostering global harmony and sustainable human development.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is deeply rooted in the Advaita Vedanta tradition, specifically its dual conception of reality — *Vyavaharika* (empirical reality) and *Paramarthika* (transcendental reality). These two concepts form the central axis of Vedantic thought, shaping both its metaphysical and ethical dimensions. They do not merely represent abstract philosophical categories but offer an ontological roadmap for understanding human perception, global divisions, and the potential for transcending them through knowledge and self-realization.

Vyavaharika, or empirical reality, refers to the everyday world of human experience — a reality characterized by multiplicity, fragmentation, and relational difference. Within this realm, individuals perceive themselves as distinct from others and from the world, and as such, navigate life through the lenses of competition, conflict, desire, and suffering (Sharma, 1962). This is the space in which socio-political systems, economic models, cultural boundaries, and institutional hierarchies operate. Here, the human experience is deeply entangled with the illusion of separateness, a phenomenon Advaita Vedanta defines as *Maya*.

Paramarthika, by contrast, represents the ultimate, unchanging truth — the pure, undivided reality known as *Brahman*. In this transcendental state, distinctions between self and other, subject and object, or world and individual dissolve entirely. The realization of this non-dual reality is the highest spiritual goal in Advaita Vedanta, a state known as *moksha* (liberation), which can be attained through self-inquiry, inner discipline, and the removal of *avidya* (ignorance) (Deutsch, 1969). This ontological clarity forms not only the foundation for individual self-realization but also provides a profound ethical perspective, offering a framework for universal compassion, justice, and peace.

Maya, or illusion, is central to this framework. According to Vedantic thought, *Maya* is the cognitive and experiential filter that renders the empirical world falsely as absolute. This illusion gives rise to the human fixation on identity, property, power, and difference, all of which perpetuate systemic injustice and ecological imbalance (Radhakrishnan, 1929). Advaita Vedanta proposes that transcending *Maya* through self-knowledge reveals the underlying unity of all existence, fundamentally altering the individual's relationship to others and to the world.

Shankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* (2.1.13-20) articulates this framework as a dynamic tension between practical engagement with the world and transcendental realization. His interpretation positions *Vyavaharika* as provisional truth — necessary for navigating human existence but ultimately subordinate to the higher realization of *Paramarthika*. It is this dual awareness, rather than mere withdrawal from worldly life, that serves as a foundation for ethical action, social harmony, and compassionate engagement with the world. This theoretical framework challenges modern political, economic, and social paradigms that are predominantly built on separation, material accumulation, and competition. Contemporary global crises — including political instability, social inequality, environmental destruction, and cultural conflict — can be seen as direct manifestations of a *Vyavaharika*-bound consciousness that has yet to recognize the underlying unity of *Paramarthika* reality (Kaplan, 2013). The Vedantic vision suggests that solutions to these crises lie not merely in institutional reform but in the radical transformation of human consciousness. Additionally, this non-dual perspective resonates with global ethical systems that prioritize interconnectedness over separation, such as Ubuntu, Buen Vivir, and Gandhian Sarvodaya (Van Norren, 2017). These worldviews echo Advaita Vedanta's assertion that human flourishing is inseparable from the welfare of the entire living world. Within this study, *Vyavaharika* and *Paramarthika* will serve as interpretive tools for analyzing modern global structures, offering an alternative framework that transcends the limitations of materialist and dualist thinking.

By employing this Advaitic distinction, the research investigates how global systems can evolve beyond exploitative competition and ego-centered governance, toward a model of cooperation, ecological balance, and ethical solidarity. The recognition of *Brahmanic* unity offers more than a metaphysical insight; it presents a compelling ethical imperative for reshaping the human relationship with the world, fostering peace, social justice, and environmental sustainability in an age defined by fragmentation.

5. Interpretation of Contemporary Perspectives

The discourse on non-dualism, though deeply rooted in ancient Advaita Vedanta, finds renewed relevance when recontextualised through contemporary frameworks concerned with ethical sustainability, democratic governance,

and environmental integrity. This philosophical paradigm, which fundamentally posits the unity of all existence (Brahman), challenges us to transcend the illusion of separateness (Maya) and recognise the interdependence of all beings. In modern contexts, such a worldview aligns with and enriches current discourses on justice, governance, and ecological stewardship.

Amartya Sen's concept of public reasoning and democratic engagement provides a potent analytical lens through which the principles of non-duality can be practically applied. Sen (2009) emphasizes that democracy extends beyond institutional mechanisms to encompass the cultivation of inclusive and dialogic public spaces where diverse voices can engage in meaningful deliberation. This perspective resonates with the Vedantic imperative to look beyond superficial social, religious, and political divisions to realise the essential oneness of humanity. The Vedantic aphorism, *Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti* ("Truth is one, the wise call it by many names") (Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.9), affirms this call for pluralism and mutual respect, and provides a metaphysical foundation for a truly inclusive democracy.

Sen's critique of global economic models that privilege material accumulation over equitable social development echoes Advaita's repudiation of materialism as an illusory goal (Maya). Instead, he argues for developmental paradigms that foreground human capabilities and freedom (Sen, 1999), aligning with the Advaitic ethos that liberation (*moksha*) lies in transcending ego and possessiveness to realise the Self in all beings. Incorporating non-dualistic thinking into governance structures could therefore pave the way for policies that prioritise collective wellbeing, equity, and dignity over divisive political or economic interests (Nussbaum, 2011). The holistic ethical orientation of Advaita finds kinship with Sen's call for a compassionate, dialogic, and justice-oriented polity.

Likewise, Vandana Shiva's environmental philosophy exemplifies a living enactment of non-dualistic ethics. Her concept of "Earth Democracy" champions the intrinsic interconnectedness between humans and the natural world, opposing the mechanistic and exploitative worldview perpetuated by industrial capitalism (Shiva, 2016). Shiva (2010) argues that such dominant paradigms of knowledge are grounded in Cartesian dualisms that alienate humans from nature, thereby justifying environmental degradation and social inequality. In contrast, her ecological vision is rooted in the recognition of *Brahman*—the indivisible source of all life—as articulated in Advaita Vedanta.

Shiva's emphasis on biodiversity and sustainability dovetails with the Advaitic understanding that all life forms are manifestations of the same ultimate reality. As articulated in the *Isha Upanishad*, "*Isha vasyam idam sarvam*" ("All this—whatever exists in this changing universe—should be covered by the Lord") (Isha Upanishad, 1), the world is not to be exploited but revered and sustained. Therefore, environmental ethics informed by non-dualism reject anthropocentric hierarchies and instead endorse an egalitarian ontological vision where all beings are interrelated and sacred.

Importantly, the integration of Advaita with contemporary political and ecological theory dispels critiques that non-dualism is a passive or world-negating philosophy. Rather, as exemplified by Shiva and Sen, non-dualism can inspire a robust ethical activism grounded in spiritual insight. It becomes a dynamic force that not only critiques existing structures of oppression but also proposes alternative frameworks based on unity, mutual respect, and sustainable coexistence.

Thus, the convergence of Advaita Vedanta with contemporary thinkers like Sen and Shiva enables a transformation of non-dualism from abstract metaphysics into a living ethical and political praxis. It highlights the relevance of ancient spiritual insights in addressing modern challenges—such as inequality, climate change, and democratic erosion—by offering a unifying, non-exploitative vision of reality. In this way, the discourse on non-dualism evolves beyond philosophical contemplation into a comprehensive framework for ethical governance, global solidarity, and ecological responsibility.

6. Limitations

This While Advaita Vedanta offers a profound ontological and ethical framework, its application to contemporary governance, environmental policy, and socio-political reform presents certain challenges. A major limitation, as highlighted by Kaplan (2013), is the difficulty of translating Advaita's metaphysical insights—particularly the concepts of *Brahman* (the ultimate reality) and *Maya* (illusion)—into actionable strategies for political and institutional decision-making. In societies driven by material interests, power negotiations, and economic competition, the abstract non-dualism of Advaita often appears distant from the immediate imperatives of public policy. Radhakrishnan (1929) acknowledges this philosophical tension, noting that Vedanta's emphasis on transcendence can risk overshadowing the importance of worldly action. This concern is echoed by critics who

argue that the pursuit of *moksha* (liberation) may lead to detachment from social responsibility, fostering a passive acceptance of systemic injustice. Amartya Sen (2009), although deeply respectful of Indian philosophical traditions, critiques approaches that focus excessively on ideal moral reasoning at the expense of confronting actual injustices. He argues for a framework grounded in public reasoning and democratic engagement, which can often be at odds with inward-looking spiritual doctrines.

In this context, the concept of *Maya* is particularly contentious. While it is intended to denote the impermanence and deceptive nature of the material world, it has been misinterpreted historically as a justification for political inaction and withdrawal from collective responsibility.

Additionally, scholars such as Kaplan (2013) question whether Advaita's critique of materialism has evolved into a coherent framework suitable for international governance or global policy. While it offers ethical insights into unity and non-violence, it lacks the structural specificity needed to guide complex economic or geopolitical decisions. Though Vedanta has been linked to emerging discussions on environmental ethics and sustainable development, its direct influence on global policy remains limited without institutional anchoring.

This line of critique has led to meaningful reexaminations of Advaita Vedanta, highlighting its potential to inspire rather than hinder social engagement. Some contemporary thinkers interpret non-dualism as a foundation for deep ecological awareness and a call to moral action. From this perspective, the realization of interconnectedness among all forms of life can become a catalyst for political and environmental advocacy. The view that the self is intrinsically linked with the wider ecosystem shifts the focus from individual salvation to the shared responsibility for planetary well-being, suggesting that true freedom is achieved through collective care and sustainable action.

Mukherjee (2020) further develops this perspective, suggesting that modern readings of Advaita can reconcile philosophical contemplation with civic participation. Rather than treating spiritual insight and political action as opposing spheres, he proposes a dynamic interaction in which self-realization becomes the foundation for ethical and social responsibility. This approach reframes transcendence not as escape, but as the moral clarity required to act justly within the world.

Contemporary scholars are also exploring how Vedanta's understanding of consciousness might contribute to debates in cognitive science and artificial intelligence (AI). In contrast to reductive physicalist views of mind and intelligence, Advaita posits a universal consciousness that underlies all cognitive activity. Kaplan (2013) notes that this non-dual perspective can offer novel ethical paradigms for the development of AI, challenging current models that prioritize functionality over awareness. By framing consciousness as fundamental rather than emergent, Vedanta introduces alternative ways of conceptualizing personhood, sentience, and moral agency—issues that are central to the future of ethical AI.

Parallel inquiries are underway regarding Vedanta's potential contributions to economic theory. The philosophy's emphasis on *dana* (charity), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and the rejection of ego-driven accumulation aligns with critiques of capitalist exploitation. Deutsch (1969) argues that these principles, when applied at a systemic level, could guide the creation of equitable economic models centered on sustainability and community well-being rather than profit maximization. Such a Vedantic economy would challenge dominant paradigms by promoting a shared moral purpose over competitive materialism.

Ultimately, while legitimate concerns persist regarding the practical application of Advaita Vedanta to contemporary governance, these limitations are not insurmountable. Rather, they highlight the need for critical engagement and reinterpretation. By reframing Advaitic non-dualism as a call for integrated responsibility—where personal, social, and ecological realms are inseparably linked—modern thinkers are revealing its potential as a transformative ethical framework. Far from being a philosophy of detachment, Advaita may yet serve as a visionary model for just, sustainable, and compassionate global systems.

7. Philosophical Significance of Advaita Vedanta for Global Order

A central principle of Advaita Vedanta is the oneness of all existence, encapsulated in the concept of Brahman, the ultimate, non-dual reality. This realization of non-duality or Advaita has significant philosophical and moral implications for how humans interact with each other and the environment. By asserting that the individual self (Atman) is identical to the universal consciousness (Brahman), Advaita undermines rigid distinctions between self and other, human and non-human. This spiritual insight provides a compelling ethical foundation for advocating global solidarity, social equity, and environmental sustainability (Deutsch, 1969).

Advaita's ethical implications stand in stark contrast to dominant Western paradigms, particularly individualism, which often prioritize autonomy, competition, and material success. In contrast, Advaita promotes

a sense of unity and mutual interdependence that supports cooperation over competition and communal welfare over individual gain. This shift in values aligns with contemporary needs to address global inequality, environmental degradation, and violent conflict. By emphasizing harmony, compassion, and non-harming (ahimsa), Advaita offers a radically different lens for ethical decision-making and conflict resolution (Vivekananda, 1953; Kaplan, 2013).

The concept of ahimsa, deeply rooted in Advaita's spiritual insights, extends beyond interpersonal relations to include all life forms and the natural world. This broad application is particularly relevant in the context of climate ethics and ecological sustainability. The non-dual recognition that all beings are interconnected necessitates an ethical responsibility toward the Earth. In contrast to exploitative anthropocentrism, the Vedantic worldview fosters a biocentric ethic that values biodiversity and environmental integrity. Kaplan (2013) suggests that this non-dual approach lays the groundwork for a robust environmental ethics, promoting sustainable living as a spiritual imperative.

Despite these theoretical strengths, Advaita Vedanta's abstract metaphysical focus has been critiqued for its limited applicability in addressing real-world policy and governance challenges. One key issue is the tradition's historical emphasis on individual liberation (moksha), which can sometimes overshadow its potential for sociopolitical engagement. Radhakrishnan (1929) acknowledges this tension between transcendence and worldly action, pointing out that a narrow interpretation of Advaita may inadvertently encourage political quietism or social apathy. The difficulty in translating Advaita's insights into actionable governance strategies stems from its foundational metaphysical orientation. For instance, the doctrine of Maya, which portrays the empirical world as illusory, might be misinterpreted to devalue material engagement or social reform. Critics like Kaplan (2013) argue that while Advaita offers a penetrating critique of materialism and dualistic worldviews, it has yet to develop a fully articulated framework that can address institutional and geopolitical realities effectively.

Nonetheless, when reinterpreted in a modern context, Advaita can provide a transformative paradigm for ethical governance and global policy. The Vedantic notion of interconnectedness, expressed in the Chandogya Upanishad as *sarvam khalvidam brahma* ("everything in the universe is Brahman," 3.14.1), challenges the binary oppositions that dominate political discourse—such as state versus citizen, or human versus nature. This spiritual worldview has potential applications in diplomacy and international relations, advocating cooperation and mutual respect over hegemonic dominance. For example, Mahatma Gandhi's strategy of nonviolent resistance, grounded in Advaita, exemplifies how spiritual principles can guide effective moral diplomacy (Parekh, 2019).

In economic policy, Advaita critiques the consumerist and exploitative tendencies of capitalist systems. Its emphasis on non-attachment and ethical restraint encourages alternative economic models rooted in equity and sustainability. Vandana Shiva (2016) draws on Advaita to argue against hyper-consumption and economic systems that prioritize profit over ecological and human well-being. She suggests that the Vedantic ethos of simplicity and interconnectedness can inform a just and regenerative economy that honours both human rights and ecological balance.

The implications of Advaita Vedanta also extend to climate policy and ecological ethics. The Anthropocene, marked by climate crises, species extinction, and environmental degradation, is a result of the ontological separation between humanity and nature. Advaita, with its assertion that *tat tvam asi* ("Thou art That" – Chandogya Upanishad, 6.8.7), dissolves this false dichotomy. This philosophical unity supports the development of deep ecology frameworks that treat environmental preservation as an expression of spiritual duty. Movements like Chipko, led by rural women protecting forests, embody this Vedantic understanding in direct action (Guha, 2006). A Vedantic-informed model of climate governance would prioritize long-term ecological stability over short-term economic interests. It would emphasize moral self-discipline (Yamas), respect for life, and the cultivation of ecological wisdom within policy-making. By grounding environmental legislation in spiritual principles of unity and compassion, such a model could help reorient governance structures away from exploitation and toward sustainability.

Another frontier where Advaita Vedanta's relevance is increasingly recognized is in the ethical debates surrounding artificial intelligence (AI), cognitive science, and psychology. Advaita's theory of consciousness, which sees awareness as non-physical, non-local, and fundamental, contrasts sharply with dominant mechanistic models that treat consciousness as an emergent property of matter. Deutsch (1969) argues that Advaita offers a radically different ontology of mind that can inform AI ethics by emphasizing subjective experience, moral agency, and the sanctity of life. As AI systems become more integrated into society, incorporating Advaitic perspectives could guide the development of technologies that respect human dignity and ethical responsibility. The contrast between Advaita Vedanta and Western ethical theories also sheds light on their differing moral

priorities. While Western traditions such as Kantian deontology or utilitarianism focus on duty, rights, and consequences, Advaita's ethical framework is grounded in ontological unity. This broader, more holistic understanding of morality transcends the individual to consider the interconnectedness of all beings. Vivekananda (1953) emphasizes that true morality arises not from external compulsion but from inner realization of unity, fostering empathy and selfless action.

However, critics contend that Advaita's abstract nature poses challenges for practical implementation. Kaplan (2013) points out that unlike Western theories, which provide concrete rules and evaluative criteria for decision-making, Advaita relies on personal insight and spiritual maturity—qualities that may be difficult to institutionalize in policy frameworks. Despite this, the emphasis on selflessness, non-attachment, and compassion remains a vital corrective to the self-interest and materialism often driving global politics. Advaita Vedanta's philosophical reach is now extending into emerging disciplines such as global law and international human rights. As the world grapples with questions of justice, equality, and global cooperation, scholars are exploring how non-dualism can inform legal norms and frameworks. The spiritual unity of all beings provides a metaphysical justification for universal human rights and a moral imperative for global justice systems (Deutsch, 1969).

Future research can expand on these connections, examining how Advaita's ethical principles can influence policy-making across sectors. From rethinking the foundations of ecological jurisprudence to developing consciousness-centered models of mental health, Advaita offers a rich reservoir of insights. Its integration into education, legal theory, economic reform, and environmental governance could foster a more just, inclusive, and sustainable global order.

8. Conclusion

The philosophical and practical implications of Advaita Vedanta for global governance and ethics are profound and multifaceted. Its core doctrine of non-dualism—asserting the unity of all existence—offers a compelling moral and ontological foundation to address pressing global issues such as economic disparity, conflict, injustice, and environmental degradation. However, its abstract metaphysical orientation and focus on individual spiritual liberation have historically posed challenges for direct application in policy and institutional frameworks. In a world increasingly fractured by materialism, nationalism, and ecological exploitation, Advaita Vedanta provides a much-needed philosophical corrective. Its assertion that all beings are manifestations of the same ultimate reality (Brahman) invites a reassessment of prevailing paradigms that shape global systems. Rather than upholding dualities such as self/other, human/nature, and citizen/state, Advaita promotes the dissolution of such distinctions, advancing a more compassionate, equitable, and ecologically sound approach to leadership.

As Radhakrishnan (1929) noted, Vedantic ontology offers not only spiritual insight but also an ethical mandate—one that can inform institutional design and international cooperation. The realization of a shared divine essence among all beings grounds policies in non-violence (ahimsa), altruism, and universal responsibility. These are not merely abstract ideals but practical tools for cultivating justice, peace, and sustainability. The Bhagavad Gita (13.30) reinforces this vision:

"यदा भूतपृथग्भावम् एकस्थमनुपश्यति।

तत एव च विस्तारम् ब्रह्म सम्पद्यते तदा॥"

"Yadā bhūtaprthagbhāvam ekasthamanupaśyati. Tata eva ca vistāram brahma sampadyate tadā."

"When one sees the multiplicity of beings as abiding in the One, and their origin and dissolution in the One, then one truly attains Brahman."

This verse encapsulates Advaita's insight that diversity is grounded in unity. Recognizing this truth fosters social cohesion, empathy, and environmental responsibility. Internalizing this understanding allows both individuals and institutions to shift from ego-centric priorities to collective well-being. Rather than being an esoteric pursuit, the application of Advaita to governance offers a transformative framework for reimagining global systems around long-term ecological stability, socio-economic equity, and cross-border cooperation. In a political climate driven by short-term gains, Advaita's values of selflessness (tyaga), unity (ekatva), and universal compassion offer a crucial ethical compass. The ecological crisis of the Anthropocene illustrates the relevance of Advaita Vedanta. Its vision—where the self and nature are not separate—lays a strong foundation for environmental ethics and sustainable policy. Thinkers such as Vandana Shiva (2016) have demonstrated how this philosophy can fuel activism and re-establish harmony between society and the earth. Moreover, Advaita's resonance with fields like artificial intelligence, cognitive science, and human rights further signals its relevance. Its non-material, universal view of consciousness challenges reductionist worldviews and opens the door to inclusive, cross-disciplinary ethical models.

Thus, the shift from a fragmented, materialist outlook to a Vedantic worldview is not merely metaphysical—it is an urgent and practical necessity. Vedanta's recognition that separateness is an illusion (Maya) and that all beings are manifestations of a shared ultimate reality critiques prevailing paradigms while offering a constructive ethical and spiritual alternative. By embracing Advaita Vedanta's principles, humanity can begin to heal deep-rooted disconnection and cultivate unity as a fundamental truth, prompting a profound re-evaluation of what constitutes true progress and prosperity. As Radhakrishnan (1929) emphasized, the realization of Brahman is not a retreat from the world but a moral imperative to engage with it more wisely and compassionately. Advaita Vedanta envisions a holistic global transformation—toward a world order grounded in peace, justice, ecological balance, and spiritual unity. By transcending superficial divisions and embracing the truth of oneness, humanity can lay the foundation for a more conscious, equitable, and sustainable civilization, guided by the enduring wisdom of Vedantic thought.

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The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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