religions

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Charles Taylor and the Invention of Modern Inwardness: A Sufi, Constructive Response

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Abstract: Philosophers such as Charles Taylor have claimed that selfhood is a distinctly modern phenomenon, associated with inwardness, inner depths, and creativity. In this conception, selfhood is defined in terms of "radical reflexivity", which saw its emergence with the likes of Descartes. Thus, according to Taylor, it is only with modern people that we see the appearance of selfhood and subjectivity, whereas premoderns did not have a notion of the self, because they lacked the essential conceptions of inwardness and reflexivity. The purpose of this article is to challenge and overturn the above thesis by presenting how various historical Sufi–Islamic authors placed "inwardness and reflexivity" at the center of their conceptions of the self, while emphasizing its ambivalent nature.

Keywords: Charles Taylor; Sufism; radical reflexivity; inwardness; inner depths; self; bewilderment

Citation: Faruque, Muhammad U. 2022. Charles Taylor and the Invention of Modern Inwardness: A Sufi, Constructive Response. *Religions* 13: 674. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080674

Academic Editor: Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh

Received: 10 June 2022
Accepted: 18 July 2022
Published: 25 July 2022

1. Introduction

Charles Taylor (b. 1931) is a familiar name in contemporary philosophical thought. In a time of hyper-specialization, Taylor's philosophy provides a breath of fresh air because it covers a wide range of topics, including the philosophy of language, moral theory, selfhood, secularism, identity politics, democracy, nationalism, human rights, and cross-cultural understanding (Taylor 1964, 1985a, 1985b, 1989, 1992, 2003, 2007, 2016). For this reason, he is aptly described as an "untimely thinker" (Abbey 2004, p. 1). Although it is hard to pin down Taylor's thought to either analytic or continental philosophy, one cannot fail to observe the influence of such figures as Martin Heidegger (d. 1976), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (d. 1961), Michel Foucault (d. 1984), Hans-Georg Gadamer (d. 2002), Ludwig Wittgenstein (d. 1951), Elizabeth Anscombe (d. 2001), Iris Murdoch (d. 1999), and others, shaping his philosophical formation.[1] His work in social philosophy, and in particular, his communitarian critique of atomistic individualism, also parallels that of Michael Sandel (b. 1953), Michael Walzer (b. 1935), and Alasdair MacIntyre (b. 1929).[2]

Be that as it may, Taylor is arguably most famous for his groundbreaking analysis of the genealogy of the modern self. In his mammoth *Sources of the Self*, Taylor claims that selfhood is a distinctly modern phenomenon associated with inwardness, authenticity, inner depths, and creativity. In Taylor's telling, the modern self is defined at its core by "radical reflexivity", which saw its emergence with the likes of René Descartes (d. 1650). Moreover, the modern self is distinguished by its emphasis on justice, respect for others, dignity, a sense of right, freedom and self-control, autonomy, and individual difference. More importantly, Taylor argues that the very phenomenon of selfhood or subjectivity is coterminous with modernity, because premoderns or nonmoderns did not have a notion of the self as they lacked the resources to express inwardness and reflexivity. In addition, Taylor does two things while providing a genealogy of the modern self. First, he traces the evolution of the modern self from Plato and Augustine to Descartes, John Locke, and a host of early modern thinkers to the Romantics and the twentieth-century modern and postmodern authors. Secondly, Taylor also attempts to put forth his own particular conception of the self. For instance, Taylor's constructive views on the self become apparent when he argues how the question of selfhood is inextricably linked to morality (Taylor

1989, pp. 25–52). Additionally, in both *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* (and elsewhere), Taylor defends a version of the self which is bent on affirming the ordinary life of family, work, and production (as opposed to, say, Platonic/Aristotelian contemplative life) (Taylor 1989, 2007). In contrast, Taylor's interpretation of the modern self is based on the claim that it is unique in terms of its radical reflexivity, inner/outer distinction, inner depths, inwardness, disengagement, punctual and buffered nature, and self-creation. In fact, despite his occasional upbraiding, Taylor mostly privileges the modern self for all of the above characteristics.[3]

The burden of the present article is thus to challenge and overturn Taylor's thesis that selfhood is a modern phenomenon associated with inwardness, inner depths, and radical reflexivity by presenting how various authors from the nonmodern Islamic tradition place "inwardness and reflexivity" at the center of their conceptions of the self, while emphasizing its multidimensional nature. I intend to do so in several steps. First, I will delineate the context of the modern self by drawing attention to theories of disenchantment, subtraction schemes, exclusive humanism, reductionism, disengagement, immanent frame, and the affirmation of ordinary life. Next, I will reconstruct Taylor's modern self and highlight its radical reflexivity, inwardness, and inner depths. After that, I will offer extensive textual evidence of the self from the Islamic tradition, showing how it is characterized by elements of radical reflexivity, inwardness, and inner depths, which Taylor claims are the exclusive possessions of the modern self. The article concludes by reflecting on the implications of embracing proposals such as that of Taylor, which claim that selfhood or subjectivity is a modern phenomenon.[4]

2. Some Theoretical Quibbles

In the previous section, I alluded that in probing the genealogy of the modern self, Taylor also attempts to articulate a particular notion of the self. This should not be surprising because these two queries are intertwined, which Taylor himself explains in the *Sources of the Self* (Taylor 1989, p. 3). Taylor's interpretation of the modern self is influenced by his prior understanding of what constitutes the reality of the self; therefore, it is necessary to shed some light on it, although I must make it clear that my primary intention is to refute Taylor's claim that the self, as characterized by inwardness, is a modern invention. Thus, the following remarks will rather be sporadic.

Taylor's first insight concerning the self consists in suggesting that it is always entangled in a moral space. When we try to ask, "who we are", we are already oriented in a moral space, "a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance for us and what is trivial and secondary" (Taylor 1989, p. 28). Taylor further explains this point by arguing that asking questions about our identity or selfhood requires us to acknowledge pre-existing frameworks that precede our social existence. This is because we cannot answer the question of who we are without delving into the frames that shape us. Taylor mentions the metaphor of "space" to illustrate the point. Thus, it would be impossible to investigate the nature of space from a vantage point where there is no space, because as physical beings, we are already and always immersed in space. In a similar way, frameworks provide us with a background for moral judgements, intuitions, and influence our sense of the good. They form the invisible ground when we grapple with questions of selfhood and identity. The reductionist is thus mistaken when they attempt to reduce frameworks to simply mental constructs or to an accident of neurobiology.[5]

Another way to perceive the relationship between "framework" and the self would be to make sense of the latter in relational terms. Basing himself on a long line of social constructionists, Taylor claims that one is a self only among other selves, and that it is not possible to describe a self without reference to those who surround it (Taylor 1989, p. 35). In other words, the self is dialogical by its very nature. Taylor states emphatically that we cannot attain our personhood except by being initiated into a language (Taylor 1989, p. 35). We become full human beings, capable of self-understanding and self-reflection,

through our acquisition of language that offers rich expressions for art, aesthetics, and intersubjective communication (Taylor 2003, pp. 32–33).

Although Taylor's observation about the inextricable relationship between selfhood and morality is sound, it overstates the role of "language" in one's self-formation. That one's initiation into a linguistic tradition in order to orient oneself rationally or in what is called the "space of reasons" is something rather undeniable. However, the question remains as to how to explain the unique status of the logical space of reasons without reducing it to naturalism (to which Taylor does not subscribe), especially because the appeal to linguistic traditions or their fusion reifies "language" and almost makes it a *self-conscious*, a superstructure underlying everything. Moreover, although the socio-cultural and philosophical theories on which Taylor relies explain how we come to develop an extended idea of the self by continually adjusting our identity in relation to the environment to which we belong, they fall short of accounting for more fundamental questions about the self: What enables the self to attribute social facts to itself? What is the basic structure of consciousness that the self must assume in order to construct a meaningful picture of the world of which it is a part? Notice, however, that to talk about the "socio-cultural self" is to already implicate the self in a self–other relationship, which already presupposes self-consciousness and reflexivity on its part. But the self–other relationship, which is indispensable for the socio-cultural self, does not explain how the self knows itself, because any reflective statements concerning the nature and structure of the self-presuppose the existence of a conscious self that is able to make all such statements. For this reason, a theory of the self is initially determined by the question of self-knowledge, as argued by a contemporary philosopher (see Faruque 2021).

Additionally, it is notable that Taylor refers to other cultures in his quest to explore and understand the self. When he claims that the modern self is constituted by a sense of inwardness, which is best captured through the distinction of "inner/outer" or inside/outside, he wonders if other cultures, including Islam, have similar resources to talk about the self. Relying on Clifford Geertz's problematic study of local cultures in Java, Taylor mentions the "*batin/lair*" distinction (i.e., the *batin/zahir* distinction in Sufism) that the Javanese locals make use of in order to refer to both the flow of subjective feeling and the more outward behavioral manifestations.[6] Thus, even though the *batin/lair* distinction, ultimately emanating from Sufism, goes some way toward explaining some form of inwardness, it is still "quite strange and unfamiliar" to our modern sense of inwardness (Taylor 1989, p. 113). Similarly, Taylor grants that other cultures might have had some resources to express a rudimentary notion of the self, but they all fall short of expressing the modern sense of agency, inwardness, and self-determination (Taylor 1989, p. 113).[7] Additionally, Taylor does not hesitate to relegate the Indian theories of "*anatta*" and "*atman*" to this category by describing them as "ethnocentric and baffling" (Taylor 1989, pp. 535–36), while also arguing that even the theories of Plato and Augustine could not reach the height of the modern sense of inwardness, although they had some traces of it.[8]

Nonetheless, Taylor, to his credit, does wonder if we can conceive of a "universal framework" that would enable us to study selfhood objectively in various contexts and cultures, and he seems to be pessimistic about finding such a general formula.

The above theoretical considerations provide some clues as to why Taylor fails to see the rich phenomenon of selfhood in different cultures, including Islam, and why he comes to ascribe "inwardness" to the modern self only. It is worth mentioning here that my recent book on selfhood proposes a multidimensional model of the self that addresses the desideratum of a universal framework that Taylor thinks is missing when it comes to a global study of the self. In my view, the self is a multidimensional entity, which is best captured through the notion of a "spectrum". By drawing a distinction between descriptive and normative dimensions within this spectrum, I provide a global framework for analyzing the self in terms of its bio-physiological, socio-cultural, cognito-experiential, ethical, and spiritual aspects (Faruque 2021). Thus, in light of my spectrum model, Taylor's theoretical framing of the self would be something that is mostly confined to its "socio-

cultural" dimension. More importantly, in the absence of a multidimensional model, Taylor's ruminations on selfhood fail to capture the variety of ways Islamic thinkers reflect on the self, in which talk of inwardness, reflexivity, agency, creativity, etc. (in its own way) is very much present. At any rate, let us proceed to reconstruct Taylor's notion of the modern self at this stage.

3. The Context of the Modern Self

Although Taylor's story of "modern inwardness" begins with Plato, its more immediate context is shaped by the transformative events of the last five hundred years. In his more recent work, *A Secular Age*, Taylor narrates how our ancestors inhabited a world in the year, say, 1500 AD, which can be called the "enchanted world", in contrast to Max Weber's (d. 1920) famous expression "*Entzauberung*" (generally translated as "disenchantment") as a description of the modern world.[9] The enchanted world is the world of demons, spirits, and moral forces in which people lived. More explicitly, people in the enchanted world believed in all kinds of spirits, including Satan. They thought their everyday life is affected by the machinations of the spirits that resided in forests and wilderness (Taylor 2007, p. 32). It was also a world in which people believed in the "magic power" of certain objects. Thus, sacred objects, such as relics of saints, the Host, and candles, were full of magic power, which can bring about beneficial things such as healing diseases and fighting off disasters. Correspondingly, those objects that emitted evil power can wreak malevolent ends, make us sick, weaken our cattle, blight our crops, and the like (Taylor 2007, p. 35). People would visit holy shrines and pray to the saints in addition to God in hopes of a cure, or to express gratitude for a cure already prayed for and granted, or for rescue from extreme danger, e.g., at sea (Taylor 2007, p. 32). Above all, in the enchanted world, humans were not the only beings endowed with minds. The myriad extra-human agencies described above also contained "minds", hence "meaning", in contrast to the modern outlook that only grants meaning to the human mind (i.e., based on the assumption that only human beings are minded creatures with feelings, desires, aversions, etc.) (Taylor 2007, p. 31).

Now, in contrast to what Taylor calls "subtraction" stories, modernity is not a straightforward outcome of a process of disenchantment. For Taylor, such subtraction stories generally attribute disenchantment to the rise of mechanistic science, with its naturalistic explanation of the world. However, according to him, the new scientific paradigm rather threatened the enchanted world, but it did not necessarily destroy the source of ethics and morality in sacred sources (Taylor 2007, p. 26). In other words, disenchantment was only part of the story in the gradual fading of sacred presence in the natural world, as well as in society. In Taylor's view, this gradual fading of sacred presence made people look for possible alternative reference points for fullness and meaning in human life; and eventually, "exclusive or secular humanism" came to fulfil this role (Taylor 2007, p. 27). Thus, it would be more appropriate to argue that science paved the way to secular humanism as an alternative to the existing God-centric view by helping to disenchant the universe. In this process, Taylor also notes the importance of the development of a new sense of the self and its place in the cosmos, which he calls the "buffered self". The buffered self is a self-contained entity which is capable of disengaging itself from everything outside the mind. Its ultimate purposes are those that arise within itself, and the crucial meanings of things are those defined in its responses to them. Taylor contrasts the modern, buffered self with the "porous" self of the enchanted world, which grounds the source of its most powerful and important emotions outside the "mind". The buffered self is invulnerable and master of its meaning–making activities, whereas the porous self is vulnerable to various "outside" forces such as spirits and demons (Taylor 2007, pp. 27, 38).

Taylor sees the development of the buffered self as a condition for the rise of secular humanism. A full understanding of the modern sense of inwardness would be incomplete without some account of secular humanism and how it gave birth to what Taylor calls the "immanent frame". With the rise of mechanistic science and deism, the need to formulate one's highest moral and spiritual goals in reference to God became less and less obvious, as

people came to define their moral order in terms of humanistic motives such as an ethic of freedom, impartial benevolence, and purely human sympathy (Taylor 2007, pp. 260–1). The good life was increasingly defined in light of ordinary human enjoyments and productivity, and anything that seemed to evoke an otherworldly flavor was condemned under the names of "fanaticism" or "enthusiasm".[10] For instance, David Hume (d. 1776) castigates what he calls "monkish virtues" such as celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, etc., while glorifying "genuine" virtues that are useful to oneself and others (Taylor 2007, p. 263). For Hume, the monkish virtues neither advance one's fortune nor render one more valuable to society, neither entertain others nor bring self-enjoyment. In a word, they serve no useful purpose in life, as he famously says: "The gloomy, hare-brained enthusiast, after his death, may have a place in a calendar; but will scarcely ever be admitted, when alive, into intimacy and society, except by those who are as delirious and dismal as himself" (Hume 1902, pp. 269–70). One can thus see the secularization of the moral order that leaves little room to incorporate and contemplate the divine in human life. Secular humanism is also characterized by the dominance of instrumental rationality (i.e., calculating the most economical application of means to a given end) and secular time in a constructed social space, which together comprise the "immanent frame".[11] Moreover, the immanent frame is constituted by a natural order, which is purely "immanent", because it leaves no room to incorporate the transcendent realm (Taylor 2007, p. 542). In such a transformed world, monastic rules disappear, and the ascetic withdrawal reflects only spiritual pride, and the pretension that one can save oneself through one's own effort. In place of monasticism, all valid Christian vocations affirm "ordinary life" (Taylor 2007, p. 266). This is the life that celebrates the satisfactions of love, of work, the enjoyment of the natural world, the riches of music, literature, and art. According to Taylor, one of the constitutive elements of modern culture is the sense of how valuable ordinary living can be (Taylor 2007, p. 711). The affirmation of ordinary life goes hand in hand with a generalized culture of "authenticity", or expressive individualism, in which people are encouraged to find their own way, discover their own fulfillment, and "do their own thing" (Taylor 2007, p. 299). Interestingly, Taylor also claims that the foundation for this new radical revaluation of ordinary life comes from the fountainhead of the Jewish–Christian–Islamic religious tradition, where God as Creator affirms the good found in life and being (Taylor 1989, p. 218).

4. Inwardness: A Modern Invention

In his work, Taylor is emphatic in his claim that the modern self is characterized by a particular sense of "inwardness", which is unique to it. He grants that earlier thinkers such as Plato (d. 347 BC) and Augustine (d. 430) had some rudimentary notion of inwardness, but it was not enough to account for modern inwardness, which is intertwined with "radical reflexivity" and first-person subjectivity. Plato provides us with the initial trace of inwardness with his characteristic distinctions of spirit and matter (bodily and non-bodily), higher and lower, eternal and temporal, and immutable and changing. Plato speaks of an intellectual vision in which the vision of the cosmic order is the vision of reason, and human flourishing involves seeing, loving, and imitating this order. The vision of reason is identified with the concept of the inner human (*ho eisō anthrōpos*), whose proper functioning is key to human happiness. However, what often prevents the self from identifying itself with the inner human is the human propensity to be lost in the sensible, which is merely an appearance of the higher reality. Thus, the self must turn around and change the direction of its desires so that it would be able to see the truth (Taylor 1989, chp. 6).[12]

As for Augustine, who was decidedly an anti-Platonist, his philosophical and spiritual outlook was nevertheless deeply influenced by Platonism via Plotinus (d. 270 CE). More importantly, although René Descartes was the ultimate starting point of modern inwardness for Taylor, it is Augustine who was the originator of what he calls "radical reflexivity" (see below). In Taylor's view, Augustine initiated the language of inwardness by calling us to look within. Augustine distinguished between the inner and outer human even

more pronouncedly than Plato, and explicitly suggested that by going inward we can hope to find God Who dwells therein. In other words, one can think of the self as a private inner space where one can enter and find God. More philosophically, our self-knowledge through self-presence ultimately proves God, even though Augustine granted that we can fail to know ourselves and be mistaken about our own nature (Taylor 1989, pp. 129–34). Regardless, Augustine made use of the first-person pronoun in many of his arguments concerning the self and God; thus, Taylor credits him with providing us with the first-person understanding of the self, even if it falls short, in the end, of the criterion of radical reflexivity that appears in the writings of Descartes (see Figure 1).

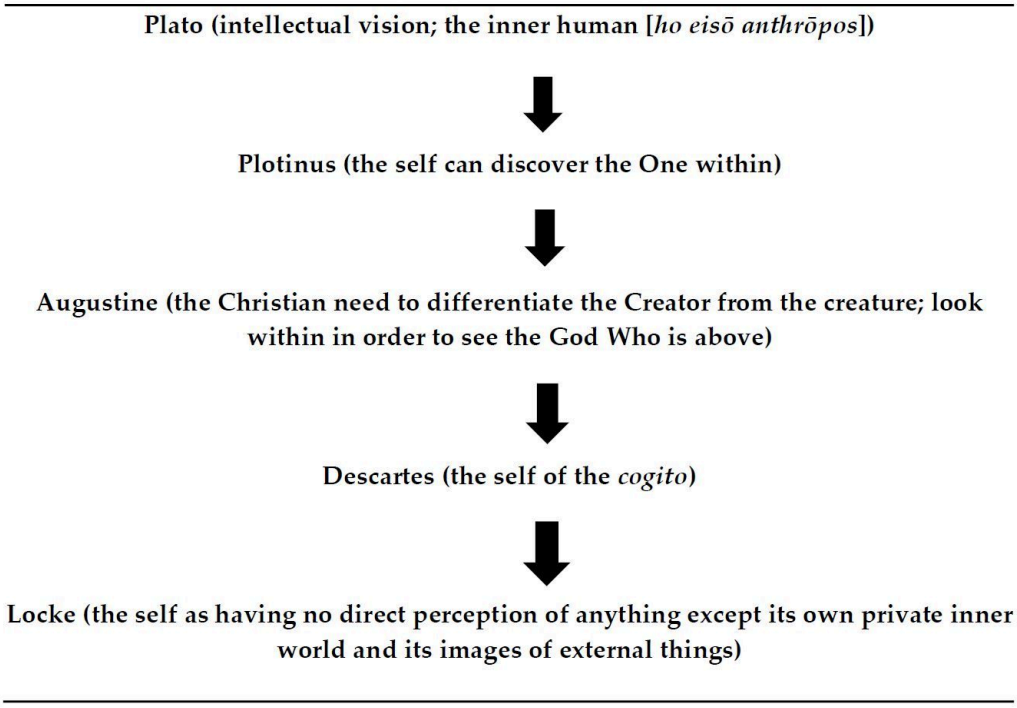

Figure 1. Tracing the notion of inwardness in Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (Taylor 1989).

Thus, the decisive criterion of modern inwardness for Taylor consists in "radical reflexivity", which is a form of introspective awareness that one is able to adopt toward one's own consciousness. As Taylor puts it:

> The world as I know it is there for me, is experienced by me, or thought about by me, or has meaning for me. Knowledge, awareness is always that of an agent. What would be left out of an inventory of the world in one of our most 'objective' languages, e.g., that of our advanced natural sciences, which try to offer a 'view from nowhere', would be just this fact of the world's being experienced, of its being for agents, or alternatively, of there being something that it is like to be an experiencing agent of a certain kind. In our normal dealings with things, we disregard this dimension of experience and focus on the things experienced. But we can turn and make this our object of attention, become aware of our awareness, try to experience our experiencing, focus on the way the world is for us. This is what I call taking a stance of radical reflexivity or adopting the first-person standpoint . . . . The turn . . . to oneself in the first-person perspective—a turn to the self as a self. (Taylor 1989, pp. 130, 176)[13]

Here, we come to the focal point of Taylor's argument, which is crucial for our purpose as well. Taylor claims that although Augustine takes a step in the direction of radical reflexivity, it is really Descartes who gives Augustinian inwardness a radical twist and provides resources for "inner depths"—the power of inexhaustible, expressive self-articulation—which is a further development of modern inwardness. The notion of radical

reflexivity, as described by Taylor in the above passage, can be best analyzed in terms of the first-person and third-person standpoints. For instance, when we pinch our skin, we feel pain. Now, from the third-person standpoint (i.e., in terms of the objective language science), we can analyze a given phenomenon of pain and observe its corresponding brain-states, e.g., a neuron firing at the time and its causal effect on other parts of the brain and the behavior to which it gives rise. Subsequently, scientists provided the world with all the scientific details and results. But scientific observation, which inevitably takes place from the third-person view and which may exhaust all the physical descriptions of the phenomenon under scrutiny, still leaves out the question, "what-it-is-like-to-experience" or "what-it-is-like-to-feel" such a mental state, i.e., pain. In other words, the subjective feeling of pain, or any mental states for that matter, can only be "experienced" from the first-person stance, or what we might call the "domain of the 'I'" (Faruque 2021, pp. 29–30). Notice, however, that a physical system (e.g., the brain, no matter how complex it is) is, after all, a physical system, which, like all other such systems, is constituted primarily of atomic and subatomic particles which obey the laws of physics. Even though its behavior could be analyzable and predictable, it cannot encompass the first-person stance by the very definition of subjectivity that restricts the "I" to its "experiencing agent". Taylor then points out that although in everyday life we disregard the first-person stance and focus on the things experienced instead, we can, nevertheless, turn our experience to an object of introspection and become aware of our awareness. In a nutshell, radical reflexivity or adopting the first-person standpoint consists in turning to the self as a self.

Taylor acknowledges that we cannot objectify or bring into the open every object of experience, because some things "in the mind" can be deeply hidden and repressed such that introspective awareness cannot reach them. But these hidden or repressed thoughts belong to the inner space and help shape the things we can grasp introspectively. Thus, the inner or inward in this sense, in Taylor's view, is constituted by "radical reflexivity" (Taylor 2007, p. 30).

Being aware of Foucault's study of the concept of "care of the self" (*epimeleia heautou*) in Hellenistic thought, Taylor charges that "care of oneself", either originating from an ancient sage, or as addressed to a modern executive, is other than radical reflexivity. In Taylor's interpretation, "care of the self" is an important concept, because it is a call to concern ourselves with the health of our soul (for the ancient Greeks) or body (for the moderns) as against being completely absorbed in the quest for power or wealth. However, in either case, this concept does not bear any special relation to the first-person standpoint, because "care of the self" leads us to concentrate on the causes and constituents of health (Taylor 1989, pp. 131–32). In short, premodern concepts such as "care of the self" lack the ingredient of inwardness in the sense of radical reflexivity and first-person subjectivity.

In the next two sections, I will show why Charles Taylor is deeply mistaken about these ideas of inwardness, which he invents for and attributes to the modern self. However, to flesh out the yet fuller extent of modern inwardness, let me offer a few brief comments about the Cartesian–Lockean practices of disengaged self-making and the "inner depths" associated with modern notions of nature and their roots in the affirmation of ordinary life.

By the time we come to Locke via Descartes's *cogito*-related self-talks, we find a self, which is defined in neutral terms, outside of any essential framework of questions. Thus, the Cartesian–Lockean "thinking self" ignores our desires, instincts, and beliefs because of its conviction that the essence of the self is defined by our capacity to turn on ourselves by careful examination. Taylor describes such a self as the "punctual self", which disengages itself from everything else while trying to relate to objects, situations, and ideals based on its self-awareness only (Taylor 1989, pp. 49–51). Although such conceptions of the self, associated with radical reflexivity, form the basis of a certain conception of inwardness, they still do not explain the full stretch of the modern idea of "inner depths" (Taylor 1989, p. 211). With the rise of the buffered self, as noted earlier, there has been a corresponding rise in the self's interiorization, which goes deeper than the inner/outer or the mind/world distinction. In the inner/outer, distinction thoughts, etc., occur only in minds which are

bounded or buffered as opposed to porous (as in the enchanted world), although thanks now to the Cartesian–Lockean disengaged self, one is able to experience the growth of a rich vocabulary of interiority and create an inner realm of inexhaustible thought and feeling. We are thus able to conceive of ourselves as having inner depths (Taylor 2007, pp. 539–40). The idea of "inner depths" is also associated with an ethics of authenticity, which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late eighteenth century. The ethics of authenticity ask of us to find our own way of realizing our humanity, and not succumb to a framework imposed on us from outside, by society, the previous generation, or religious or political authority (Taylor 2007, p. 475).[14]

5. Selfhood in Sufi–Islamic Thought: Interiority and Reflexivity

With what transpired in the preceding sections, we are now in a position to look for evidence of "inwardness" in Sufi–Islamic thought. Of course, one may simply question Taylor's idiosyncratic criterion of inwardness, i.e., radical reflexivity, when it comes to selfhood in other, nonmodern cultures.[15] But let us play by Taylor's rules for now. The "radical reflexivity criterion" that Taylor suggests can be explained at the simplest level in the form of reflexive statements such as "I am aware that I am aware of myself". Alternatively, it can be explained in terms of "turning one's gaze upon oneself", or using introspective awareness to talk about the experiences of the self and its inner states, or objectifying one's mental and spiritual states or simply the content of one's consciousness. However, it must be noted that all of these different forms of radical reflexivity are different from simply using the first-person pronoun to make narrative statements about the world. In other words, the reflexive statements must explicitly be about the self and its inner states. This does not, however, mean that the primary authors of these statements themselves must use expressions such as "radical reflexivity" or "what-it-is-likeness" when they talk about inwardness, because these are terminologies used in second-order explanations. One would not find Descartes or Locke using terms such as radical reflexivity, although by Taylor's light, the writings of these authors initiate this very concept.

In any event, we will use Taylor's criterion of radical reflexivity to investigate whether or not historical Muslim authors had a concept of inwardness. But first, some general comments about the word "self" are in order. In contemporary scholarly discourse, the term "self" evokes all sorts of connotations; therefore, the questions of "how one should use the word in the context of Islam" and "what are the ambiguities one must void while discussing self" must be addressed first.[16] In Islamic thought, there is no single term that renders the self, but a few have overlap, such as *nafs*, *dhat*, *huwiyya*, *ana'iyya*, and *ananiyya*. In general, these terms refer to the relationship between human consciousness (or, the human self), God, and the cosmos. The lexical meanings of *nafs* in Arabic include soul, self, spirit, mind, desire, and appetite, among others. But it also denotes reflexivity, as in *nafsi* (myself) and *bi-nafsihi* (by himself). What is important to note, however, is that in mystical and philosophical texts (unless it is used as a compound word), the word normally connotes either self or soul. Additionally, when it comes to Sufism, selfhood is seen as a phenomenon which is ultimately indefinable and unknowable (i.e., ultimately it involves an apophatic discourse).[17] Nevertheless, the basic of sense of the self involves an ethical "split" within itself in terms of its higher and lower nature—the higher nature being the state of perfect peace, with the lower nature being the site of negative thoughts and emotions. It is also helpful to view selfhood as both received and achieved, i.e., a self is not something that we automatically are; rather, a self (i.e., an aspirational self) is something we must become. Thus, it is possible to describe the self (the received aspect of the self) in terms of scientific and social facts, but at the same time, it is equally possible to articulate it in terms of aspirational ideals that are yet to be realized (i.e., the achieved aspect).[18]

In what follows, I will produce sporadic (I say "sporadic" because it is simply impossible to cite all the texts from such a vast tradition spanning several centuries and across an immense geographic expanse) evidence of radical reflexivity cum inwardness from the Sufi–Islamic tradition. I will also try to refrain from explaining these texts much due to

limitation of space, but the discerning reader can easily decide for themselves if these texts indeed speak of reflexivity and inwardness.

Let me begin with Avicenna (d. 1037). Although Avicenna is read in some circles as being a forerunner of Cartesianism and a proponent of "substance-dualism" because of his sharp distinction between the body and the soul as being two different substances, in reality, Avicenna's philosophy of self is much more nuanced in that it begins with a concept of the self that must be reflexively discerned by turning to the self as a self. Below is a representative passage from the *Isharat wa al-Tanbihat* ("Remarks and Admonitions") that fleshes out this idea:

> Return to your self (*nafsika*) and reflect (*ta'ammal*). If you are healthy, or rather in some states of yours other than health such that you discern a thing accurately, do you ignore the existence of yourself and not affirm it? To me this [ignoring and not affirming] does not befit one who has intellectual vision. One's self does not escape even the one asleep in his sleep and the intoxicated in his intoxication, even though its representation to oneself is not fixed in memory. (Avicenna 1957, vol. 2, p. 343, trans. in Inati 2014, p. 94, modified)

The injunctions "return to your self" (*irji' ila nafsika*) and "reflect" make plain Avicenna's affirmation of radical reflexivity cum inwardness. He further argues that one never ceases to be aware of oneself, even during sleep or in a state of drunkenness, a theme which Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (d. 1191) elaborates further, as we shall see shortly, because any human action, conscious or subconscious, presupposes the existence of a background self or subject that must be there to experience it (e.g., to experience the state of intoxication).

Suhrawardi, the founder of Illuminationist philosophy, like Avicenna, emphasizes the significance of a reflexive, phenomenological approach when it comes to investigating the basic nature of the human self:

> Know that when you know yourself, you do not do so because of a form of thou-in-thou, because knowing your thou-ness by a representation can be in only of two ways: either you know that the representation of your thou-ness is equal to thou or you do not. If you do not know that the representation is the same as your thou-ness, then you would not know your self, while we are here assuming that you do know it. If you do know that representation of your thou-ness is equal to thou, then you would have known yourself with the representation of your thou-ness so as to know that it is equal to your thou. Therefore, your knowledge of yourself is not by the representation. It can only be that your self is a self-subsistent entity, free from corporeality and always self-conscious. (Suhrawardi, *Partow Nama*, modified trans. Ziai in Suhrawardi 1998, p. 39)

This highly dense and dialectical (also reflexive) argument concerning the self states that knowledge of the self cannot be through a mental representation, because one either *knows* that the representation is identical to one's self, or one does not. However, if one says that one does not know oneself, it implies a contradiction because it is still a form of cognition, and hence, implies knowledge. Thus, this is ruled out. If, on the other hand, one knows that one's representation is "identical" to oneself, then one knows that it is "identical" to oneself. But the twist in the argument, according to Suhrawardi, lies in the second-order awareness, because "I come to know that my 'I' is identical with its representation", i.e., I know that the "'I' is equal to its representation", which is enough to show that the "I" is other than "its representation". This argument shows again how "by turning our self upon itself", we can come to a measure of self-knowledge.

Suhrawardi also argues that we know ourselves directly through our consciousness that is the very nature of the self. This means I cannot be absent from my self because my reality is ever-present to myself through the uninterrupted self-awareness that is indistinguishable from my "mineness". Suhrawardi writes:

> Know that you are never absent from your self and never unaware of it. Even though you may be in a state of wild intoxication, and forget yourself and become

> unaware of your limbs, yet you know that you exist and your self too exists .... [E]very now and then your flesh and skin changes but your 'thou-ness' does not. In like manner, the knowledge of your parts, limbs, heart, brain and whatever is inside can only be obtained through dissection, without which you are hardly aware of their states. However, you become aware of yourself through self-perception. This shows that your reality lies beyond your bodily organs and your thou-ness cannot be found in your body. Your self cannot be found in something of which you are sometimes aware and sometimes forgetful. Know that what is indicated by your 'self' is called 'I', and whatever lies in the material world belongs to the realm of 'it'. (Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-Qulub*, in Suhrawardi 1976–1977, vol. 3, pp. 363–64)[19]

Although much more can be said about the above passage, for our purposes, it is sufficient to point out that Suhrawardi's insights about self-knowledge and consciousness directly emanate from attending to the self's inner and mental states through introspective awareness. The Safavid philosopher Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) expands on the nature of the self and consciousness, based on the earlier thinking of Avicenna, Suhrawardi, and others:

> When a human comes back to his self and feels his inner reality, he sometimes become unaware of all universal concepts, including even the notion of being a substance, or a person, or the one governing the body. When I attend to my self (*dhati*), I only perceive the being which perceives itself in a particular way (*yudriku nafsiha 'ala wajh al-juz'iyya*). Whatever is other than that particular identity to which I refer by 'I' is outside of myself, including even the very concept of 'I' (*mafhum ana*), the concept of existence, the concept of the perceiver itself, the concept of the one governing the body or the self, and so forth. All of these consist of types of universal knowledge, and each one of them is indicated by an 'it', whereas I refer to myself as an 'I'. (Mulla Sadra, *Asfar*, in Mulla Sadra 2001–2005, vol. 8, pp. 50–51, vol. 3, p. 315. Cf. Avicenna 1957, vol. 2, pp. 343–45; and Suhrawardi 1999, pp. 85–86)

One cannot find a clearer statement on radical reflexivity and first-person subjectivity than this. In this crucial passage, Sadra puts forward the first-personal character of the self's subjectivity, which can only be experienced by a particular "I" by turning inward and attending to itself. Thus, when the self turns its gaze inward and attends to itself, it has a subjective experience of what-it-is-like-to-be-me, which is non-representational and non-universal, and which excludes all other Is. It would be possible to fill out pages with such reflexive statements, but these passages should be sufficient to show that Islamic philosophers' conceptions of the self incorporate a very rich notion of the inward. In fact, the following passage from Baba Afdal al-Din al-Kashani (d. 1213–14) summarizes Islamic philosophy's emphasis on the self's interiority and reflexivity:

> Philosophy is valuable because people who meditate upon its truths will look within themselves and come to understand that they already possess everything they seek: a human has no need of anything but himself. (Baba Afdal, *Musannafat*, trans. in Chittick 2011)

Let us turn our attention now to Sufi authors, who have plenty of things of to say about the self and how it confounds us about the nature of reality. The following passages from Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Jabbar b. al-Hasan al-Niffari (d. 965) and Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi (d. 1289) graphically depict how the self veils the nature of Ultimate Reality, conceived subjectively. In one of his dialogues with God, al-Niffari narrates:

> He said to me: Your veil is yourself, and it is the veil of veils.
> If you come out from it, you will come out from the veils, and
> if you remain veiled by it, the veils will veil you.
> He said to me: You will not come out from your veil except
> through My light. So, My light will pierce the veil, and you

> will see how it veils and by what it veils. (cited in Chittick 2001, p. 189; cf. Al-Ghazali 1998, p. 18)

In his *Diwan*, 'Iraqi writes:

> Deliver me from the selfness of my self
> for from my self is the wound, and there is no balm;
> Since my being is a veil for my self,
> if it were not to exist, all the better: there is no grief. ('Iraqi, *Diwan*, p. 105, cited in Zargar 2011, p. 55)

As mentioned earlier, I will not attempt an interpretation of these dense, metaphysical texts, which, in any case, is secondary to my purpose here. However, let me point out that the dialectical and reflexive stance toward the self in these texts is unmissable. To wit, whatever uncertainty one might have regarding the nature of the self or self–God relationship, one cannot fail to miss how these Sufi authors are using introspective awareness to talk about their inner experiences of the self. The reflexive nature of the self, which can only be gleaned by turning inward and objectifying one's inner experiences, is brought into the open even more clearly in the following couplet from the *Diwan* of the great Sufi poet Shams al-Din Hafez Shirazi (d. ca. 1390):

> I do not know who is there within my exhausted soul.
> For while I am silent, it makes all sorts of commotion. (Hafez, *Divan*, no. 26, trans. Saberi in Hafez 2002, modified)

One possible reading of the verse suggests a dual identity about the referent "I". It expresses a reflexive stance through which the "I" ponders over its true identity. Thus, the "I" itself is split into two different Is, one of which is silent, while the other is making noise outside. The silent "I" symbolizes the inner self, while the noisy "I" signifies the outer self. In any event, what is important to note for our purposes is that the referent of the "I" in this verse could not have been something other than the self, even though we do not know what the nature of this self is. Nonetheless, such a verse does not fail to ask the question "who or what is the 'I'", the answer to which determines the nature of the self. Sufi poems by 'Attar, Rumi, Sa'di, 'Iraqi, Hafez, and countless others are replete with such verses that express a reflexive and inward stance toward the self. For instance, one can further cite the following verses from 'Iraqi and Hafez: "Inebriate me in such a way that I do not know that I am who I am" (*nadanam ka man manam*),[20] and "Inebriate me in such a way that I cannot distinguish my selflessness" (*nadanam zi bikhudi*) (Hafez, *Divan*, no. 84, trans. Saberi in Hafez 2002). Perhaps the supreme example of the dialectical nature of the self (i.e., two selves within a single "I") can be gleaned from the following poem by Hafez:

> For years I sought the goblet of Jamshid (*jam-i jam*) from myself
> That which it already possessed (*ancha khud dasht*) it sought from others.
> [This self is] the pearl that is outside of the shell of time and space
> It searched its true reality from those who were lost on the seashore.
> Last night, I took my problem to the Magian Pir (*pir-i mughan*)[21]
> Who could solve problems by his powerful [spiritual] insight.
> I saw him joyful and happy with a goblet of wine in his hand
> And while he looked at the mirror in hundred different ways,
> I asked, 'O sage, When was this cup world-viewing goblet (*jam-i jahanbin*) given to you?'
> He said, 'On that day, when He created the azure dome [of heaven]'.
> He said, 'That friend [i.e., Hallaj] who honored the top of the gallows',
> His fault was that he laid bare the secrets [of the self] . . . .
> I said to him, 'What is the tress of idols for?'
> He replied, 'Hafez complains of his frenzied heart (*dil-i shayda*)'. (Hafez, *Divan*, no. 136, trans. Saberi in Hafez 2002, modified)

It is hard not to see a "radical inward turn" in such a poem, which consists in a self-dialogue (i.e., the poet is conversing with himself by reflecting on his inner states). I will quote one last poem about reflexivity and interiority that also brings out the self's unique existential situation:

> Who am I? Tell me what my selfhood means?
> What is the meaning of 'travel inside yourself' (*andar khud safar kun*)?
> Again you question me, saying, 'What am I?' (*man chist*)
> Inform me about 'I' as to what 'I' means. (Shabistari 2002, pp. 50–51)

6. Selfhood in Sufi–Islamic Thought: Love, Bewilderment, and the Inward Journey

The evidence presented in the previous section shows the variety of ways Muslim authors discuss radical reflexivity cum inwardness. The call to take an "inward turn" begins with several verses in the Qur'an that later inspired Sufi authors to elaborate on the inner world of the self. For instance, Q 41:53 states that God's manifestations can be found both in the cosmos and the inner realm of the self: "We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves (*fi anfusihim*) until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth". Similarly, Q 30:8 asks pointedly: "Do they not reflect upon their own selves?"[22] Drawing on these verses, Sufi authors such as 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani (d. 1131) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) ask us to take an inward turn and to look within:

> The very path of the seeker is inside of him. He must take the path in his self: and within your selves—do you not see? (Q 51:21). All existing things are the heart-traveling seeker: there is no path to God better than the path of the heart. ('Ayn al-Qudat, *Tamhidat*, trans. in Rustom 2023)

> O you who're going on pilgrimage—
> where are you, where, oh where?
> Here, here is the Beloved!
> Oh come now, come, oh come!
> Your beloved, he is your wall-to-wall neighbor,
> You, erring in the desert—
> what are you seeking? (Rumi 2000, vol. 2, p. 648)

However, Sufi ruminations on the inner self are not simply about "finding God within", *à la* Augustine, although God as an object of love and beauty is often part of the equation. One can perhaps reach a similar conclusion about much of Romantic expressivism and American transcendentalism, where the divine is not negated in musings on the self.[23] But there is something about Sufi inwardness or inner depths that is hard to find elsewhere, with its depictions of love, bewilderment, and paradoxes of self-identity. Such expressions of inner depths far outstrip the "bleached", punctual self of Descartes, Locke, and others, which from this Sufi perspective is but a fiction. Indeed, one tends to find indeterminate musings on the self more meaningful than simple, conclusive facts about it, such as the claim that it is a "thinking thing". Let me then proceed to produce a plethora of textual evidence from Sufism that situates the inner world of the self in terms of love, bewilderment, and the paradoxes of self-identity.

Speaking of the difficulty of self-understanding, the eighteenth-century Indian Sufi writer Mir Dard (d. 1785) says the following: "I wish that the truth should be discovered by me so that my heart may find consolation, for I do absolutely not understand the depth of my own reality—who I am and why have I been born and why do I live and whence, and where . . . " (Mir Dard, *'Ilm al-Kitab*, cited in Schimmel 1976, p. 40). In other places, Mir Dard appears even more frustrated and bewildered as he seeks to resolve the dilemmas of personal identity (i.e., "who am I"):

> [I could never find] the answer to the question 'Who am I? and how and where shall I die and how and why did I live till now?' And I see the gnosis and interior knowledge of all the human beings beneath this greatest amazement of mine—for

> they have woven the warp and woof of imagination for themselves; and I find the peace and quietude of the individualities of my race beneath this highest bewilderment of mine . . . . (Mir Dard, *Nala-yi Dard*, cited in Schimmel 1976, p. 97)

> Though a world sings the fame of me, the lost one, and people and look at me according to their thoughts, but . . . the door of self-knowledge does absolutely not yet open, and it was not yet found who I am and for what all this longing of mine is. And still stranger is, that in spite of not knowing myself I always remain in the torture of my self. Then it was understood that the figure of my existence sits like a bezel with the name of somebody else, and the dream of my selfhood sees, like velvet, the thought of others, and I am just like a seal with my mind dug up from my side, and like velvet, my whole body is standing hair, top to bottom wounded by existence. (Mir Dard, *Sham'-i Mahfil*, cited in Schimmel 1976, p. 98)

These remarkable expressions of "inner depths" are encapsulated by Dard's following couplet:

> The states of the two worlds are clear to my heart—
> Except that I have not understood what I am . . . . (Mir Dard, *Urdu Diwan*, cited in Schimmel 1976, p. 98, modified)

As with Mir Dard, one can mention numerous other Sufi writers whose writings showcase the centrality of inwardness and inner depths in their reflections on the self. Space will not allow me to draw on all of this literature from across the Islamic world; however, let me at least mention a few notable names. The nineteenth-century Bengali Sufi-Baul Lalan Faqir (d. 1890) has composed some of the most penetrating poems on the inner self and the paradoxes of self-identity.[24] Lalan says:

> I'm out of touch with myself.
> If only I could know myself,
> I would know the one who is unknown.
> Sai is near, yet seems far away.
> Don't you see, he's hidden from us
> like a mountain by the strands of hair
> in front of our eyes.
>
> I grope my way around Dhaka and Delhi.
> The darkness before me never lifts.
> Lord Hari has the form of the self.
> If you have faith, you'll find out his address.
> But the more Veda and Vedanta you read,
> the more false impressions you'll get.[25]
>
> The mind asks, 'Who am I?'
> Take refuge at the feet
> of someone who knows.
> Lalan is under the spell of scriptures.
> He's blind despite his eyes. (Lalan, *Songs of Lalan*, trans. in Salomon 2017, p. 93)

Lalan's Baul-inflected Sufi philosophy is well-known for its theory of the self (*amittatva*). Much like Hafez, Rumi, and others, Lalan talks about the difficulty of knowing who he really is. The more he tries to catch his "self" inside of him, the more elusive it appears:

> Will I ever be able to recognize her?[26]
> Night and day, blinders of delusion
> cover my eyes.
> Someone keeps stirring
> in the northeast corner of my room.
> Am I moving or is he?

Groping, I search myself.
I just can't see.
The two of us,
this stranger and I,
live in the same place.
But when I try to catch him,
he's a hundred thousand miles away.
I got tired of searching.
Now I just sit and shoo flies.
Lalan says, What's the trick
of being dead while alive? (Lalan, *Songs of Lalan*, trans. in Salomon 2017, p. 569)

Lalan often talks about a state of bewilderment, as he ponders the identity of the inner self (*maner manush*; lit. "mind's human"), which is also referred to as the unknown bird (*achin pakhi*):

What a pity!
I spent my whole life
raising an unknown bird (*achin pakhi*).
Yet I never learned the secret
of his identity.
The anguish of it
brings tears to my eyes.
I can hear the bird's chatter, brother,
but I can't see how he looks.
I see only this thick darkness.
If I could find someone
to reveal his identity,
I'd get to know him.
Then my heart would stop throbbing.
But I don't know my pet bird.
There's no end to the shame I feel.
What am I to do now? Any day
that bird's going to throw dust in my eyes
and fly away. (Lalan, *Songs of Lalan*, trans. in Salomon 2017, p. 583, modified)

According to Lalan, finding the true nature of the self is like constantly walking in circles—a never-ending quest:

That self is in this self.
Yet for four ages,
countless seers and sages
have roamed in search of it.
The unseen self
always sits in an unseen place
beyond their grasp.
How deluded I am!
I search outside
for the treasure
that's in my house.
Siraj Sai says, Lalan,
you'll keep walking in circles
until you understand
the truth of the self (*atma*). (Lalan, *Songs of Lalan*, trans. in Salomon 2017, p. 149)

Other Sufis talk about the nature of the self in relation to the inward journey, love, and bewilderment. 'Attar (d. 1221), for instance, states in his famous *The Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-Tayr*):

After this the Valley of Bewilderment (*hayrat*) appears,
Your continuous occupation becomes suffering and regret . . . .
There are sighs, combined with pain, accompanied by burning,
Though night and day come, neither have their place here . . . .
If they should inquire of him, 'Are you sober or drunk?
Do you say you are nothing, do you exist or not . . . ?'
He will say, 'I know not, not even a thing',
And this 'I know not, I don't know it at all'.
I am in love, but I know not with whom I'm in love.
I'm neither Muslim nor infidel, so what am I? ('Attar, *Mantiq al-Tayr*, trans. in Boylston 2017, p. 365)

One finds similar themes in Rumi, although in a slightly different manner:

No joy have I found in the two worlds apart from thee, Beloved.
Many wonders I have seen: I have not seen a wonder like thee.
They say that blazing fire is the infidel's portion:
I have seen none, save Abu Lahab, excluded from thy fire.
Often have I laid the spiritual ear at the window of the heart:
I heard much discourse, but the lips I did not see . . . .
Pour out wine till I become a wanderer from myself;
For in selfhood and existence I have felt only fatigue. (Rumi, *Diwan-i Shams*, ed. Badi' al-Zaman Furuzanfar, no. 1690, trans. in Nicholson 1952, p. 129)

Concerning the trials of being trapped in the snares of existence, Rumi says:

Hundreds of thousands of years
I was flying involuntarily,
Like the motes in the air.
If I have forgotten that time and state,
The migration in sleep recalls it to my memory.
Every night I escape from this four-branched cross and
Flee from this halting-place into the pasture of the spirit.
From the nurse, Sleep, I suck the milk of
those bygone days of mine, O Lord.
All the people in the world are fleeing
From their power of choice and
Their self-existence to their drunken side.
In order that for a while they may be delivered from sobriety,
they lay upon themselves the drinking of wine and listening to music.
All know that this existence is a snare,
that volitional thought and memory are a hell.
They are fleeing from selfhood into selflessness
Either by means of intoxication or
By means of engrossing work. (Rumi, *Masnavi*, Book VI, lines 220–27, trans. Nicholson in Rumi 1934, p. 270, modified)

What is perhaps intriguing when it comes to Sufi ruminations on the self is that not only are they rigorous in making a distinction between the outer and the inner self, but also how they connect the quest for selfhood to the grand themes of existence, namely, love, beauty, and meaning. Similar to 'Attar and Rumi, one can mention Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235), whose *Ta'iyya* provides an extraordinarily detailed commentary on the self's inner depths in terms of first-person subjectivity. The poem begins by alluding to the "eye of the heart" (the organ of spiritual perception), which becomes a conduit through which the self experiences the wine-fever of ecstatic love. The wine-fever of such love, however, is caused by a human beloved whose beauty intoxicates the poet's soul. The intelligibility of the above verses becomes clear once it is understood that for Ibn al-Farid, the lover and the beloved are one in the mystery of mystical union, i.e., it is the Divine Self—self-loving

and self-beloved—which is the underlying subject of every form of love hidden behind the veils of manifestation.[27] Seen from this angle, all tales of love are simultaneously both divine and human, contained and being manifested within an undivided consciousness denoted by the first-person pronoun "I":

> I sought her from myself (*wa atlubuha minni*),
> Though she was all the while beside me; I
> Marveled how she was hid from me by me.
> And I ceased not from a state of turmoil
> With her within me; for my senses were
> Intoxicated, and the wine they drank
> Her beauties; still I travelled on and on. (Ibn al-Farid, *Ta'iyyat al-Kubra*, lines 511–13, modified trans. in Arberry 1952, p. 54)

> I sought myself from myself, that I might guide myself (*li-arshadani*) . . .
> By lifting up the veil (*al-hijab*), for I myself
> Found in myself my only means to come
> Unto myself (*wa bi kanat ilayya wasilati*). (Ibn al-Farid, *Ta'iyyat al-Kubra*, lines 514–15, modified trans. in Arberry 1952, p. 54)

Likewise, Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) says in his *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*:

> O moringa of the flood-bed
> at the Tigris's banks
> The cry of a dove on a swaying bough
> saddens my heart
> Her song's like the song
> of the assembly's queen
> At the sound of her oud, you'll
> forget the music of al-Rashīd
> And when she sings, the chants
> of Ánjash fade
> In Khadimāt, Sálma's direction,
> and in Sindād, I swear,
> I'm love-stricken
> in Ajyâdī
> No, she dwells within
> my liver's black bile
> In a rush of saffron and musk
> beauty falls bewildered. (Ibn 'Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, modified trans. Sells in Ibn 'Arabi 2021, p. 243)

Describing the immanence of love in the depth of the self, Ibn 'Arabi further says:

> How strange that I yearn for them and longing
> ask about them while they're with me
> My eyes weep for them but they're there
> in their blackness. I sigh and they line my ribs. (Ibn 'Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, trans. Sells in Ibn 'Arabi 2021, p. 279)

Here, the lover looks without, but the beloved lies hidden the depth of his consciousness. Moreover, as Ibn 'Arabi explains, if he or other Sufi poets make use of various imageries, metaphors, and symbols to talk about love, it is to draw the soul from the outward appearance to the inward reality of love, while acknowledging that the Beloved can never be fully possessed due to Her infinitude (Ibn 'Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, trans. Sells in Ibn 'Arabi 2021, p. 286).

Another Sufi poet whose poems express the inscrutable dilemma of being a self is 'Abd al-Qadir Bedil (d. 1720). In his metaphysical poems, Bedil often expresses the bewilderment of being a self:

> How different, how far apart the road paved by heavy human footsteps
> and the Sufi path to death of self.
> Bedil: you must clear this path: cut it with the knife of breath.
> Passion is a light, swift rider—but I am stone, paralyzed, earthbound;
> I vacate my place of self, I leave it empty—in a spark of color.
> In the chaos of tracelessness, Bedil left a mark, became a traceless trace—
> As getting lost from getting lost produced a phoenix.
> The volume of the phoenix is not composed from any early draft of 'we-and-I:'
> How long will imagined non-existents collect you, bookbind you, mad with existence?
> May no one be like me, held captive—trapped in the illusion of this-and-that;
> So long as breath has wings and flies, it must fall in with shame.
> The phoenix's wingless flight of madness is an ambitious aim;
> Generous Lord, please forgive this nothing's nothing's nothing. (Bedil, *Kulliyat, passim*, trans. in Mikkelson 2020, pp. 58, 59, 63, 64)

Let me end this round of analysis by citing a poem that captures the apophatic, indefinable nature of the self at the pinnacle its spiritual realization:

> When I had drained that pure drink to the last drop
> I fell on the ground lost in intoxication.
> Now I neither exist in myself, nor not exist (*kunun na nistam dar khud na hastam*),
> Nor am I sober, nor intoxicated, nor drunken. (Shabistari 2002, p. 95)

7. Concluding Thoughts

At the very least, the sheer amount of evidence in the preceding sections proves that contra Taylor, the modern self is not as radical or unique as it might appear.[28] This is because Muslim thinkers also put radical reflexivity cum inwardness at the center of their conceptions of the self. Thus, "inwardness" is far from being a modern phenomenon, because it is found in a variety of forms in Islamic literature on the self. However, I am not claiming that modern inwardness is exactly the same thing as that found in Sufi literature. Nor am I claiming that the modern self is the same as the Sufi–Islamic self.[29] Rather, I argue that by applying Taylor's own criterion for inwardness, we can affirm its presence in Sufi–Islamic literature. In fact, one has reason to argue that theories of selfhood in Islam are more robust in a certain sense, because in contrast to the Cartesian self, they do not eliminate inner depths or expressivism. Rather, they put things in their proper perspective by highlighting the role of the imagination in one's self-conception. Moreover, Sufi authors such as Hafez, Ibn 'Arabi, Mir Dard, Bedil, Lalan, etc., do not seem to moralize about religion or God as they reflect on the nature of the self. Rather, they seek to describe the complex phenomenology of human experience as it relates to love, beauty, and meaning. It is possible that in their poems and writings, there may be an underlying, *higher* telos, but then one must have a telos—higher, lower, or something in between—in any discussions on the self. For instance, postmodernists such as Derrida aim for liberation, whereas existentialists such as Camus accept meaninglessness in their respective conceptions of the self.

Be that as it may, by inventing the so-called modern self which is inward-looking, Taylor creates an image of the modern self vis à vis the nonmodern self that does not hold historically. Taylor also argues for an authentic self based on the celebration of ordinary life, which can circumvent the "slide to subjectivism", which he rightly criticizes (Taylor 2003, pp. 55–70). However, in the process, he closes off doors to self-transformation and realizations of the higher attributes of the self that are crucial to human flourishing. I personally have no qualms about the worth of ordinary life for a large swath of people, but what makes Taylor so confident that this is going to work for every single person on the planet? We thus need different frameworks for different people. Taylor seems to think that "contemplative life" has totally lost its appeal today. But he fails to see that there are aspects

of contemplative life that need not be otherworldly, and that can, in fact, lead to much peace and flourishing in this world, e.g., realizing that on a higher plane all selves are one. One can come to such a conclusion by taking an inward turn accompanied by deep meditative practices. However, because Taylor unwittingly essentializes and generalizes the modern self—as if it is one thing across the board—he ends up portraying it as a one-dimensional behemoth, albeit with horizontal variations. Taylor seems not to pay attention to thinkers such as Max Scheler, Foucault, and Wael Hallaq, who emphasize self-transformation, and argue that the subject needs to change who they are and must question their place in the world. For Scheler, the problem with modern humans is that they have lost touch with their inner self, and its sentiments of love and sympathy. This is because we have turned ourselves into *homo capitalisticus* (Hallaq 2018).

In contrast to Taylor's modern self, Muslim thinkers recognize the multidimensionality of the self, and the fact that it is ultimately apophatic and indefinable. What this means is that the self or human nature is created on the form of the divine self. But the "form" of the divine self ultimately implies formlessness of the infinite reality of God, which is to say that human nature is anything but deterministic (contra Taylor's assumption), i.e., the possibilities of being a self are indefinite because it is the form of the formless. Although one should acknowledge certain religious views within Islam that seek to pigeonhole the self into a fixed definition, this is hardly the case with the bulk of Sufi writers. Moreover, in Sufi metaphysics, the form of the divine self is the perfect human (*al-insan al-kamil*), which implies indefinite forms of self-creation and modes of perfection that can lead to such desiderata as peace, love, beauty, and compassion (Faruque 2021). This is because the form of the "formless" means that there are limitless possibilities of normative self-conceptions, although all geared toward axiological ends. However, this also means that things such as "imagination" and "creativity" are highly regarded in Muslim culture, as attested by the incredible richness of Islamic art and architecture, music, and Sufi poetry.

Also, it is often asked whether nonmodern conceptions of the self still have any modern-day relevance. But this is an ill-conceived question. For example, recent studies show how Muslims in Morocco make sense of their selfhood which incorporates elements of the classical Muslim self (Pandolfo 2018). As argued above, selfhood in Sufi thought can be understood in terms of the infinite possibilities of divine manifestation. Thus, our possibilities are indefinite when it comes to our becoming, which also allows for the possibility that new cultural norms can bring about a previously non-existent feature of the self. All this is to say that selfhood in Islam is far from being a mere given, as it is made in the form of the formless.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 This can be seen even in Taylor's first book *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964), in which he attacks behaviorism using insights from the phenomenological tradition of Merleau-Ponty and others.

2 For works on Taylor's philosophy, see Tully (1994), Smith (2002), Abbey (2004), and Hämäläinen (2016).

3 It should, however, be noted that Taylor does at times chastise the modern self for its individualism, lack of a higher purpose in life (or, loss of meaning), focus on "*petits et vulgaires plaisirs*" (vulgar and low-quality pleasures), self-centeredness, and narcissism (see Taylor 2003, pp. 1–12).

4 Additionally, I thought it would be more appropriate to use the word "Sufi" in the title, because the bulk of my evidence comes from various Sufi or Sufi-inspired sources. However, the reader will notice that I also draw on other strands of Islamic thought.

[5] One can also argue that the self is entangled in a "metaphysical space", despite the naturalist assumption of a causal closure of the physical world, because it is hard to investigate the nature of the self without assuming some prior ontology or a notion of "being".

[6] If one is looking for an anthropological investigation of the self in Islam, a much better study is Pandolfo (2018). On the *zahir/batin* distinction in early Islamic law, see Johansen (1990).

[7] On "agency" in nonmodern Islamic thought, see Faruque (2021).

[8] It is baffling how Taylor can reach such a straightforward conclusion about the Indian self (or, for that matter, self in other cultures)! The Indian self is defined in many stages, phases, layers, or *tattvas*—pure transcendent being, consciousness, ego, intellect, and mind—all represented by important technical terms and arranged in complex hierarchies. However, despite their varieties, Indian theories all share in the highly introspective focus on the analysis of the self (*atman*). One can cite a wealth of literature on this, but I will just mention a few: Ganeri (2007, 2012, 2017, 2021) and Kuznetsova et al. (2012), for example.

[9] For a critique of the "disenchantment" theory, see Storm (2017). For an illuminating account on the relationship between disenchantment, modernity, and the category of "mysticism", see Zarrabi-Zadeh (2020).

[10] As Taylor notes, this sentiment is widespread in our own time as well: "Running through modern culture is the sense of the wrong we do, in pursuing our highest ideals, when we sacrifice the body, or ordinary desire, or the fulfillments of everyday life" (Taylor 2007, p. 640). Hume would perhaps be surprised to see how the modern West values "Eastern Spirituality", along with its emphasis on meditation, solitude, and silence.

[11] Taylor criticizes the malaise of immanence because it leads to a situation where all our answers in relation to "meaning" become fragile. We may encounter a moment where we no longer feel that our chosen path is compelling, or where we cannot justify it to ourselves or others (Taylor 2007, p. 308).

[12] Although Taylor's reading of Plato is sound, it is incomplete in many ways. A better study of the self in Plato is that of Gerson (2003).

[13] In formulating this criterion, Taylor draws on Thomas Nagel's famous article "What Is It Like to be a Bat?". For some contrasting views on "what-it-is-like-ness", see Nagel (1974) and Hacker (2002).

[14] This was expressed well in the words of a speaker at a New Age festival: "Only accept what rings true to your own inner Self" (Taylor 2007, p. 489).

[15] One may argue that "self-knowledge" is a better criterion (see Faruque 2021).

[16] For an in-depth analysis of all these theoretical issues, see Faruque (2021), which is the first book-length treatment of selfhood in nonmodern and modern Islam.

[17] This is because, for the Sufis, selfhood is an on-going and ever-changing manifestation of the divine names (*al-asma' al-ilahi*), which are infinite.

[18] There are also philological difficulties when it comes to discussing selfhood in Sufism, although it is beyond the scope of the present endeavor to deal with them here. However, at the very least, one has to realize that there is a cluster of terms such as *nafs*, *dhat*, *khud*, *ruh*, *sirr*, *khafi*, *akhfa*, etc., which various Sufi authors employ to talk about the self, and without discerning whether the connotations of these terms point to a common reference, one would not be able to discuss the self in Sufism. For a detailed discussion, see Faruque (2021, pp. 24–26, 49–58).

[19] When not indicated, all translations are mine.

[20] 'Iraqi, *Diwan*, no. 2, available on https://ganjoor.net/eraghi/divane/tarkibate/sh2 (accessed on 3 June 2022).

[21] "Magian Pir" symbolizes the person of the Sufi master.

[22] Pickthall (1996). All the translations of the Qur'an are from Pickthall, with my modifications.

[23] Taylor fails to account for the influence of Persian Sufism on such figures as Goethe, Emerson, and others. See Goethe (2010), Einboden (2014), and Aminrazavi (2014).

[24] This is not the place to debate Lalan's Muslim or Sufi identity. Although information about his life is scarce, the reader will find plenty of explicit references to various Sufi doctrines in his poetry. It is also true that his Sufi philosophy is influenced by Tantric (*sahaja*) and Vaishnava teachings. For more information on these issues, see various essays in Choudhury (2009).

[25] Lalan is not against scripture per se, but like many Sufis, he is against a literalist understanding of the text; see Salomon (2017).

[26] The pronoun in Bengali is neuter and can refer to both "him" and "her".

[27] Cf. "Between the lover and beloved there is no barrier./You are your own veil, Hafez! Lift yourself out of the way". (Hafez, *Divan*, no. 260, trans. mine).

[28] Although Taylor seems to be a friend of different cultures, his work is still marred by Eurocentrism. Referring to Western culture, he claims how "civilized" people are capable of taking an objective stance toward ethics, ontology, etc. (Taylor 1989, pp. 576–77).

[29] As one can imagine, there are many versions of the "modern self", just as there are many versions of the "Sufi–Islamic self".

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