

## ARTÍCULOS

### **A Possible Influence: Ibn Masarra's (d. 931) *Epistle of Contemplation* (*Risālat al-i'tibār*) and Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 1185) *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* (*Risālat Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*)**

Una posible influencia: la *Epístola de la Contemplación* (*Risālat al-i'tibār*) de Ibn Masarra (m. 931) y *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* (*Risālat Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*) de Ibn Ṭufayl's (m. 1185)

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#### **Abstract**

This article makes the case for considering Ibn Masarra's *Epistle of Contemplation* (*Risālat al-i'tibār*) another possible influence on Ibn Ṭufayl's famous philosophical tale, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*. The overlap in the basic arguments the two works make regarding the compatibility of reason and revelation as the two paths of attaining knowledge and the works' similar epistemological uses of the concept of *fiṭra* as basic to the rational ascent they both discuss suggest that Ibn Masarra's epistle provided some inspiration for Ibn Ṭufayl's tale. However, a comparison of the two works also demonstrates important differences in their respective conceptions of the end of contemplation and of *fiṭra* and, relatedly, their takes on the parity of reason and revelation. Weighing both the significant overlaps and the important differences, this article makes the case for a meaningful connection between the two Andalusian texts. Given the relative scarcity of historical data on the two authors, the article does not make any arguments regarding the material history of either text or the historical circumstances of their authors. Instead, it concludes that in spite of the divergent nuances between the two works, their parallels justify considering Ibn Masarra's epistle another potential influence on the structure and overall aims of Ibn Ṭufayl's tale.

**Key words:** Ibn Masarra; *Epistle of Contemplation* (*Risālat al-i'tibār*); philosophy in al-Andalus; *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*; Ibn Ṭufayl.

#### **Resumen**

Este artículo plantea la posibilidad de considerar la *Epístola de la Contemplación* (*Risālat al-i'tibār*) de Ibn Masarra como otra posible influencia en la famosa novela filosófica de Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*. Las características compartidas en los argumentos básicos de las dos obras sobre la compatibilidad de la razón y la revelación como los dos caminos para alcanzar el conocimiento y su similar uso epistemológico del concepto de *fiṭra* como la base del ascenso racional demuestran que la epístola de Ibn Masarra constituyó una fuente para la historia ideada por Ibn Ṭufayl. Sin embargo, una comparación de ambas obras demuestra diferencias importantes en sus concepciones del fin de la contemplación y de la *fiṭra* y, de ahí, en las ideas de cada autor acerca de la paridad entre razón y revelación. Considerando tanto sus características compartidas más significativas como sus diferencias más importantes, este artículo plantea la posible existencia de una conexión significativa entre los dos textos andalusíes. Dado que hay una escasez relativa de datos históricos sobre los dos autores, este artículo no aborda la historia material de ninguno de los textos o las circunstancias históricas de sus autores. En cambio, concluye que, a pesar de los matices divergentes entre las dos obras, sus paralelos justifican considerar la epístola de Ibn Masarra como otra influencia posible en la estructura y objetivos de la novela de Ibn Ṭufayl.

**Palabras clave:** Ibn Masarra; *Epístola de la Contemplación* (*Risālat al-i'tibār*); filosofía de al-Andalus; *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*; Ibn Ṭufayl.

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## 1. Introduction

Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* is one of the most influential Arabic works outside the Islamic world. In fact, for about four decades since its first Latin translation in 1671, the tale was the only work from the Arabic literary heritage available to Europeans in translation. As Lawrence Conrad has pointed out, "with the possible exception of *One Thousand and One Nights*, no work from the literary heritage of classical Islam has been published or translated so frequently."<sup>1</sup> The influence of the tale's idea of an autodidactic philosopher upon the European Enlightenment, in particular, has been a lively topic of research in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have vigorously traced and heatedly debated the tale's impact on works such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Rousseau's *Emile*, as well as on the wider European interest in humanity's emancipation from religious tradition from the seventeenth century onwards. However, even as our understanding of the story's influence has expanded, the sources of and possible inspiration for Ibn Ṭufayl's unique work remain a matter of scholarly debate.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true with respect to his somewhat

unusual use and conception of *fiṭra*, or the created nature of human beings, in the tale.<sup>4</sup>

The relative uncertainty regarding Ibn Ṭufayl's intellectual influences is particularly surprising since Ibn Ṭufayl himself acknowledges in the introduction that he took the names of the main characters from Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037); as he puts it, the tale's three main figures "were given their names by Avicenna himself."<sup>5</sup> However, as anyone familiar with the Avicennian corpus knows, the commonalities end with these names.<sup>6</sup> The central ideas of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and the course of its narrative appear unique and without parallel.<sup>7</sup> To recap in brief, the tale follows the story of Ḥayy from his birth on a remote, otherwise uninhabited island through his physical, intellectual, and spiritual maturation. Prompted by the death of his foster mother (a doe), Ḥayy begins to contemplate the origin, purpose, and meaning of life, eventually achieving a vision of the divine after years of spiritual exercise. Ḥayy then encounters other humans in the form of Absāl, a fellow seeker of solitude from a neighboring island, who teaches Ḥayy to speak and tells him about human society and the revealed religion brought by a messenger sent by God. Ḥayy perceives the congruence of the insights he has gained through contemplation

<sup>1</sup> Conrad, *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl*, p. 267. Eleven manuscripts of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* survive today, though seven are usually used in studies of the work. While we do not have a certain date for the writing of the tale, Conrad suggests that it was composed between 1177 and 1182.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Shelly Ekhtiar examines how *Ḥayy* served "eighteenth-century Europe's drive to satisfy its own most basic ideological and aesthetic needs" ("*Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*", p. 245). Avner Ben-Zaken's *Reading Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* traces *Ḥayy*'s journey from twelfth-century Marrakech to the seventeenth century and the beginnings of the European Enlightenment. And Murad Idris, in "Producing Islamic Philosophy", sheds light on the important issue of European colonizers' use of *Ḥayy* underlying all the studies on *Ḥayy*'s relation to (enlightened) European thought.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl's goal in writing the tale is as disputed as is the work's overall message. Central contributions to the discussion have been made by Edward Pococke (*Philosophus autodidactus*), Leon Gauthier (*Ḥayy ben Yaqdhān*), George Hourani ("The Principal Subject of Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*"), Conrad (*The World of Ibn Ṭufayl*), Salman Bashier (*The Story of Islamic Philosophy*), Aaron Hughes (*The Texture of the Divine*) and Goodman, who sees an engagement with Avicennian thought experiments and the application of Avicenna's challenge of the floating man to the social realm: "What would human thought be like in the absence not of a body but of culture and tradition? What would a curious, insightful, and dedicated human being think about God and the world, the self, and its place in the cosmos, without the help—or interference—of religion, or even language?" (*Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, p. x). For a recent attempt to read the tale and its creation as inextricably linked to its Almohad context, see Fierro, "Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*".

<sup>4</sup> Like many other *falāsifa* (Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad*, p. 100 and Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*", pp. 25–26), Ibn Ṭufayl does not consider *fiṭra* an inborn, natural Islam shared by all or most human beings (cf. Hoover, "Fiṭra"). I will engage his conception of *fiṭra* in section 3 below. For a fuller discussion of Ibn Ṭufayl's use of *fiṭra*, see von Doetinchem de Rande, "An Exceptional Sage and the Need for the Messenger".

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, trans. Goodman (henceforth "trans. Goodman"), p. 103. For a discussion of Ibn Ṭufayl's claims regarding his relationship to Ibn Sīnā, see Gutas, "Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sīnā's Eastern Philosophy". Gutas notes that most likely all Ibn Ṭufayl knew of Ibn Sīnā's tale was the names (*ibid.*, p. 234). For a fuller discussion of Ibn Ṭufayl's potential sources and particularly his relation to Ibn Sīnā, see Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*", pp. 11–13. For a more in-depth discussion of Ibn Ṭufayl's broader abilities as a philosopher, his predecessors, and his sources, see Hawi, "Ibn Ṭufayl's Appraisal of His Predecessors".

<sup>6</sup> Simon Ockley articulates the current scholarly opinion when he says about the Ṭufaylian *Ḥayy*: "Our author borrowed the name of his characters, but little more than this, from ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) [...] [whose] allegorical tale of a few pages entitled *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* [is] a mechanical and lifeless production compared with Ibn Ṭufayl's story, and quite different from it in plan" (*The History of Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, p. 23). For a discussion of the Avicennian tales, see Stroumsa, "Avicenna's Philosophical Stories".

<sup>7</sup> On Ibn Ṭufayl's unique reworking of the Avicennian tale, see Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*". Stroumsa argues that while Ibn Ṭufayl "borrowed Avicenna's protagonists and framework", he introduced a dramatic break from his inspiration by eliminating "the figure of the guiding sage" (*ibid.*, p. 2).

and the symbolic message of the messenger, and he insists on travelling to Absāl's island to share what he has learned. However, the islanders reject his teachings, and Ḥayy, realizing his mistake and fearful of diverting the islanders from their religion, returns with Absāl to a life of quiet contemplation and mystical union on his own island.

The current scholarly consensus is that the story of Ḥayy probably does not have a singular origin.<sup>8</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl himself acknowledges the influence of central Islamic thinkers such as al-Fārābī (d. 950), Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111),<sup>9</sup> and Ibn Bāḡḡa (d. 1138)<sup>10</sup> on his own thought in the introduction.<sup>11</sup> In addition, scholars have identified traces of the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā',<sup>12</sup> as well as more diffuse Platonic or Neoplatonic and Aristotelian influences. The present article hopes to add another, more concrete inspiration to this collection of possible influences: the *Epistle of Contemplation* (*Risālat al-i' tibār*) by Ibn Masarra (d. 931). In its basic idea (a rational ascent), the basic goal of that ascent (contact with God), and its overall claim (the compatibility of reasoned and revealed knowledge of God), Ibn Masarra's work displays clear points of overlap with Ibn Ṭufayl's. Additionally, the central use and epistemological conception of *fiṭra* in the *Epistle of Contemplation* lends further support to the possible connection.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Though Stroumsa recently argued that Ibn Sīnā's tale was "ostensibly the immediate source of inspiration" for Ibn Ṭufayl ("The Makeover of *Ḥayy*," p. 2).

<sup>9</sup> On al-Ghazālī's influence on Ibn Ṭufayl, see Kukkonen, *Ibn Ṭufayl*, pp. 25-26, 31, 72, 100, 108, 120-121. In Kukkonen's view, Ibn Ṭufayl's ideas and style show familiarity with some of al-Ghazālī's works and place Ibn Ṭufayl in the tradition of al-Ghazālī, as Ibn Ṭufayl himself claims. But Kukkonen also notes differences between the two thinkers (*ibid.*, pp. 87, 97).

<sup>10</sup> On Ibn Bāḡḡa's influence on the tale, see Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*," pp. 22-24; she mentions the widely accepted opinion that the story of Ḥayy can be seen as a dramatization of Ibn Bāḡḡa's *Regimen of the Solitary* (*Tadbīr al-mutawahhīd*), though she stresses that Ibn Ṭufayl was no fan of Ibn Bāḡḡa's lifestyle and never mentions the *Tadbīr* by name in the introduction.

<sup>11</sup> Trans. Goodman, pp. 95-103. However, determining the exact relation between Ibn Ṭufayl's work and the thought of predecessors such as Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī is fraught with difficulty because, as Conrad notes, "in appropriating pieces of text that suit his purpose, [Ibn Ṭufayl] does not hesitate to deploy them in ways that the original authors had never intended or [...] with results they would have categorically rejected" (*The World of Ibn Ṭufayl*, p. 33).

<sup>12</sup> On the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' 's potential influence on Ibn Masarra's *risāla*, see de Callatāy, "Philosophy and Bāṭinism in al-Andalus". On the influence of the Iḥwān on Ibn Ṭufayl, see *idem*, "Did the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'* Inspire Ibn Ṭufayl?"

<sup>13</sup> It is, of course, likely that Ibn Ṭufayl was also familiar with al-Fārābī's and Ibn Bāḡḡa's conceptions and uses of *fiṭra* and possible that he just drew on these.

However, I do not focus solely on the significant parallels between the two works. As I will show, there are also significant differences between Ibn Masarra's and Ibn Ṭufayl's respective engagements with the possibility of a reasoned ascent to the divine. For one thing, we will see that their final goals are slightly different. For another, although they share an epistemological conception of *fiṭra*, it is precisely on the issue of *fiṭra*, its role in human knowledge, and the political implications of human diversity that the two works diverge. Even though Ibn Masarra and Ibn Ṭufayl agree on the basic claim that contemplation and revelation lead to the same truth, I will show that each weighs those two paths differently: Ibn Masarra confirms the importance of revelation whereas Ibn Ṭufayl elevates the power of reason. The point of this article, then, is to draw attention to a possible connection between the two texts and to substantiate that possibility through a literary comparison.<sup>14</sup> In the following I highlight both substantial parallels and important differences between the works in line with Sarah Stroumsa's proposal for a "dynamic comparison."<sup>15</sup> I do not suggest possible sources, historical or literary, for what I see as the likely influence of Ibn Masarra's *Epistle* on Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*; nor do I merely draw attention to linguistic parallels. Rather, through a close reading of both visions of rational ascent, I make the case that Ibn Masarra's *Epistle* should be considered another potential influence on Ibn Ṭufayl's famous tale.<sup>16</sup>

Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Masarra al-Ġabalī was born in Cordoba in 883 and died there in 931.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Stroumsa, in fact, has already raised the possibility that Ibn Masarra's *Epistle* inspired Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy*, particularly in view of the overlapping importance and conception of *fiṭra* in the two works ("The Makeover of *Ḥayy*," pp. 26-27).

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion of this method, see Stroumsa, "Comparison as a Multifocal Approach," pp. 140-147.

<sup>16</sup> Borrowing Stroumsa's vocabulary ("Thinkers of 'This Peninsula'", p. 53), I would place their connection somewhere between the general Andalusian whirlpool of ideas and direct dependence, in what I call, throughout this article, a possible influence.

<sup>17</sup> This sketch is based on Ebstein, "Ibn Masarra". For a slightly dated discussion of Ibn Masarra's life and work (written before the discovery of manuscripts of his writings), see Asin Palacios, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra and His Followers*. De Callatāy ("Philosophy and Bāṭinism in al-Andalus", p. 261, n. 2) also draws attention to the following two unpublished works that aid in the reconstruction of Ibn Masarra's biography: Morris, "Ibn Masarra", and Brown, "Muḥammad b. Masarra al-Jabalī". See also Ebstein's *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus*, which discusses Ibn Masarra and his thought in their historical context. For a discussion of the contents of Ibn Masarra's other surviving work, *The Book*

He studied the religious sciences in his native al-Andalus and took a trip east to expand on his studies. As Michael Ebstein notes, after his return to al-Andalus, “*Ibn Masarra*, joined by a group of devotees, withdrew to the mountains in the vicinity of Córdoba (hence his nickname, ‘al-Ġabālī’, that is, ‘the mountain dweller’), possibly to engage in ascetic-contemplative practices or in order to evade confrontations with the authorities.”<sup>18</sup> His students appear to have carried on his legacy after his death. Ebstein further explains that authorities in the 950s and 960s “accused *Ibn Masarra*’s followers of heresy and unbelief and demanded their repentance. In at least one instance, their books were publicly burned.”<sup>19</sup> Although the number of *Ibn Masarra*’s followers declined over time, “certain teachings of his (or attributed to him) continued to circulate in al-Andalus.”<sup>20</sup> We might say that the man and his teachings became more a myth than a clear school of thought or a circle of active disciples.

Nevertheless, the fact that *Ibn Masarra*, like *Ibn Ṭufayl*, lived and worked in Muslim Spain might indicate a plausible route of influence. However, given how much fog still surrounds the life and legacy of *Ibn Masarra*, my argument in this article rests on a literary and linguistic analysis. The *Epistle of Contemplation* is a *unicum*, and we still know relatively little about *Ibn Masarra*’s thought and legacy. As Stroumsa notes, “*Ibn Masarra* seems to be everything to everyone”<sup>21</sup>—a mystic, a Neoplatonist, a Mu‘tazili, a Sufi. His works had been considered lost until 1972, when Muḥammad Kamāl Ibrāhīm Ġa‘far discovered and published both the *Risālat al-i‘tibār* and *Kitāb ḥawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* on the basis of manuscript 3168 in the Chester Beatty Collection in

Dublin. Recent years have seen new editions of both works, as well as translations of the *risāla* into English (by Stroumsa and Sara Sviri) and Spanish (by Pilar Garrido Clemente).<sup>22</sup> Still, as Godefroid de Callatāy has observed, much recent work is devoted to deciphering “*Ibn Masarra*’s complex and elusive intellectual profile”—that is, what kind of thinker *Ibn Masarra* was.<sup>23</sup> In what follows I highlight the parallels between the *Epistle of Contemplation* and *Ibn Ṭufayl*’s *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*. These parallels support the possibility of influence, but they do not constitute evidence of dependence or discipleship on *Ibn Ṭufayl*’s part. *Ibn Ṭufayl*’s story is unique and highly complex, and despite the multiple commitments it shares with *Ibn Masarra*’s thought, the comparison shows that the tale ultimately makes a distinct and nuanced point about the practical implications of the parity between reason and revelation in view of the limitations of most human beings. All my analysis can thus establish is that *Ibn Ṭufayl* may have had *Ibn Masarra*’s work in the back of his mind when constructing *Ḥayy*’s tale.

## 2. Comparison of the two visions of ascent

Although scholarship has yet to fully explore *Ibn Masarra*’s life and legacy, he is generally considered the first Andalusian mystic and philosopher.<sup>24</sup> The *Epistle of Contemplation* is one of only two works of his that are currently available.<sup>25</sup> Generally speaking, as Stroumsa has

of the *Properties of Letters*, see Stroumsa, “*Ibn Masarra* and the Beginnings of Mystical Thought in al-Andalus”, pp. 104–108 as well as Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus*, pp. 38–39. For a discussion of the larger context of *Ibn Masarra*’s life and work as well as his later influence in al-Andalus, see Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus*, particularly pp. 22–56 and 266–306.

<sup>18</sup> Ebstein, “*Ibn Masarra*”. As Ebstein points out, “the sources, it should be emphasized, offer no conclusive evidence for such confrontations during his own lifetime”. Yousef Casewit argues for the classification of *Ibn Masarra* and his thought on the basis of self-understanding and describes him as a *mu‘tabir*, that is, a contemplative who practices *i‘tibār* (*The Mystics of al-Andalus*, p. 36).

<sup>19</sup> Ebstein, “*Ibn Masarra*”.

<sup>20</sup> Ebstein, “*Ibn Masarra*”. As I mention towards the end of the article, the possible connection between *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* and the *Risālat al-i‘tibār* could further support the idea that *Ibn Masarra*’s teachings continued to circulate in al-Andalus.

<sup>21</sup> Stroumsa, “*Ibn Masarra* and the Beginnings of Mystical Thought in al-Andalus,” p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> Translations of the *Kitāb al-ḥawāṣṣ* in both languages are expected soon.

<sup>23</sup> De Callatāy, “Philosophy and Bāṭinism in al-Andalus,” p. 266.

<sup>24</sup> On the persecution of the so-called Masarrians and their potential continuation of the thought of *Ibn Masarra*, see Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad*, pp. 57–60. For Stroumsa, the “convulsive persecutions of the Masarrians remain strangely disconnected from *Ibn Masarra* himself” (*Andalus and Sefarad*, p. 60). What connects them is a growing disdain for philosophical, mystical, and scientific thought, motivated by anti-Fatimid sentiment. Their rejection in effect pushed mystical thought into Jewish circles, which became the “custodians of the forbidden lore until better times” (*Andalus and Sefarad*, p. 60). I will not address the issue of the so-called Masarrians in this article beyond noting that the potentially negative connotations of his name might explain why *Ibn Ṭufayl* did not mention *Ibn Masarra* in his introduction. Stroumsa highlights the Jewish elements in and potential Jewish connections of *Ibn Masarra*’s thought in “Thinkers of ‘This Peninsula’”, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> References in the following are to the English translation and discussion in Stroumsa & Sviri, “The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy”, pp. 201–253 (henceforth “trans. Stroumsa & Sviri”) and to the Arabic edition published by Garrido Clemente (henceforth “Ar. *Risāla*”).

argued, the work weaves together the Qur'an and Neoplatonic philosophy. The epistle appeals to the Qur'an in its basic claim that God "gave His servants intellects (*'uqūl*), which are light of His light, so that by them they may behold His order (*yabṣarū bihā amruhu*) and come to know His decree (*ya'rifū bihā qadruhu*)."<sup>26</sup> Ibn Masarra describes a reasoned ascent undergone by humans making use of this intellect that progresses through the different levels of the universe and culminates in an encounter with God. The epistle contends that whether one advances along this trajectory through reason upwards or through a prophetic message sent by God downwards, one arrives at the same result. There is no contradiction between the message inherent in the world and that conveyed by prophets: both proclaim God's lordship through their respective means.

Similarly, readers discover in Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* that a man born on an island can discover and gain access to God by himself. When he eventually encounters those who have learnt about God through organized religion, it becomes clear that both paths lead to the same insights; the rational Ḥayy, hearing of revealed religion, "found none of it in contradiction with what he had seen for himself from his supernal vantage point" (*wa-lam yara fīhi šay'an 'alā ḥilāf mā šāhadahu fī maqāmihi al-karīm*).<sup>27</sup> The two works thus agree on their most central claim: that there is no disagreement between the two methods of attaining knowledge of God, rational ascent and revelation.

To fill out this claim with more details, we turn first to Ibn Masarra's epistle. The introductory verses state unequivocally "that he who seeks indication by contemplation (*al-mustadill bil-iṭibār*) finds nothing by contemplating the world from below upwards other than what had been indicated by the prophets from above downwards," and that the goal of the epistle is to "validate and illustrate" this claim (*taṭalā 'tu ilā taḥqīq dālīka wa-tamṭīluhu*).<sup>28</sup> Ibn Masarra then outlines two premises to his argument. First, "God [...] gave His servants intellects which are light of His light, so that by them they may behold His order and come to know His decree."<sup>29</sup> He affirms that the *fiṭra* is the source of human knowledge of God by drawing on the Qur'anic idea of the

primordial covenant: "They [i.e. humans] gave testimony (*šahidū*) regarding God by what He testified regarding Himself, and so did also His angels and those among His created beings who possess knowledge (*'ilm*)."<sup>30</sup> Second, alongside the human intellect, God also "made all that He created, heaven and earth, to be signs indicating Him (*āyāt dalālāt 'alayhi*), expressing His Lordship and His beautiful attributes."<sup>31</sup> Thus, thanks to what we might call their intellectual make-up and God's placement of signs in the world, humans can attain knowledge of God if only they desire to do so. As Ibn Masarra puts it, "the world in its entirety is therefore a book, whose letters are His speech (*al-'ālam kulluhu kitāb ḥurūfihi kalāmihi*). Those who seek to behold read them by the light of true thinking (*bi-'iyān al-fikrā al-šādiqa*), according to their perception and the scope of their contemplation (*'alā ḥasab abṣārihim wa-sa'ā iṭibārihim*), while the eyes of their hearts are turned around the manifest and hidden marvels."<sup>32</sup>

Ibn Masarra reiterates that the combination of intellect and divine signs conveys the same knowledge as that which God gives humans through prophecy, with the latter confirming it and making it more certain: "Thinking (*al-fikrā*) gave them insight so that heaven and earth testified to them as to that which prophecy had declared."<sup>33</sup> The purpose of sending prophets was "to proclaim to people and to clarify for them the esoteric things (*al-umūr al-bāṭina*), and to attest to these things by manifest signs (*bil-āyāt al-zāhira*) [...] in order that they may attain certitude (*al-yaqīn*)."<sup>34</sup> Ibn Masarra intersperses his argument with numerous Qur'anic quotations and emphasizes that "the prophets [...] proclaimed the divine order (*amr allāh*),"<sup>35</sup> including God's exalted status, His attributes, His creative activity, and the place of creation. God ordered humans to contemplate this divine order "by contemplating

<sup>30</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 217; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 90. This is one of several invocations of *sūra* 7:172, in which God makes the primordial covenant that is traditionally connected with the human *fiṭra*.

<sup>31</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 217; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 217; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 90.

<sup>33</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 217; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 91.

<sup>34</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 217; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 91. We may note, as I discuss in more detail below, that Ibn Masarra sees contemplation and revelation as confirming and verifying each other. This is different from Ibn Ṭufayl's account, in which, it seems, the most exceptional human beings do not derive benefit from revelation.

<sup>35</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 217; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 91.

<sup>26</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, pp. 216-217; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 90.

<sup>27</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 161; Gauthier, *Ḥayy ben Yaqdḥān* (henceforth "Ar. *Ḥayy*"), p. 145.

<sup>28</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 216; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 90.

<sup>29</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, pp. 216-217; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 90.

the signs of the earth (*āyāt al-arḍ*);<sup>36</sup> the created world is thus “a ladder (*darağ*) by which those who contemplate ascend to the great signs of God on high.”<sup>37</sup> The means of this ascent are “the intellects (*al-‘uqūl*), who ascend from their lowly station to the point where they reach the highest signs described by the prophets.”<sup>38</sup> For Ibn Masarra, each of these two paths to knowledge, prophetic guidance and intellectual ascent, agrees with the other: “contemplation (*al-i‘tibār*) bears testimony to the prophetic message and verifies it; they find the prophetic message in agreement with contemplation (*wağadū al-nabā muwāfiqan lil-i‘tibār*), with no contradiction between them (*lā yuḥālifuḥu*). The proof (*burhān*) is thus [doubly] supported, certitude is revealed (*tağallā al-yaqīn*), and the hearts attain the realities of faith (*ḥaqā’iq al-īmān*).<sup>39</sup>

This basic idea of an agreement between reason and revelation also lies at the heart of Ibn Ṭufayl’s *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*. As described above, once Ḥayy learns about religion from Absāl, the man reared on a neighbouring island, he realizes that there is no conflict between Absāl’s revealed religion and the results of Ḥayy’s own rational ascent. We read that Ḥayy “found none of it in contradiction with what he had seen for himself from his supernal vantage point.”<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Absāl finds that once he has encountered Ḥayy, “reason and tradition were at one within him” (*taṭābaqa ‘indihi al-ma‘qūl wal-manqūl*).<sup>41</sup> The two men and their lives illustrate Ibn Masarra’s claim that the intellect and prophecy confirm the same truth. However, as we will see below, beyond the general claim regarding the agreement of reason and revelation, the respective emphases of Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Masarra are slightly different. Whereas Ibn Ṭufayl appears to recommend different routes for different kinds of people, Ibn Masarra focuses on the double proof of both paths: contemplation verifies prophecy and prophecy makes certain what contemplation can attain. In fact, it appears that Ibn Masarra is somewhat less optimistic about the reach of reason.

Likewise, Ibn Masarra and Ibn Ṭufayl agree on the general goal of the reasoned ascent to the divine: a vision of God. However, the details of their respective conceptions of the encounter with

God differ. Ibn Masarra writes, “You will meet Him in your self and you will see Him with your inner vision (*fa-laqaytahu bi-naḥsika wa-abṣartahu bi-baṣīratika*). By ascending the path (*al-sabīl*) which He has opened for you towards Him, you will behold His innermost court (*sāḥā qurbīhi*).<sup>42</sup> Not only does the seeker behold God, he also surveys “His entire kingdom (*malakūt*), [...] constrained by His will and volition (*irāda wa-maṣī’a*).<sup>43</sup> At the end of his epistle, Ibn Masarra celebrates the salvation of the successful seekers who are compelled by reason and revelation to acknowledge the truth of God’s existence and lordship. Their intellect “comes close to God the helper” (*iqtaraba min allāh al-mu‘īn*).<sup>44</sup> Eventually, such successful seekers “enter God’s sanctuary (*ḡiwār allāh*) where He shelters His friends who, desiring His knowledge, look to be sheltered by Him.”<sup>45</sup> The goals of the contemplative seeker of truth are the vision of God and the universe, proximity with God, and His protection (*wilāya*).<sup>46</sup>

Whereas Ibn Masarra states the aforementioned goals of the reasoned ascent succinctly, Ibn Ṭufayl’s discussion is more expansive.<sup>47</sup> Although he stresses that any descriptions can be no more than “hints” (*iṣārāt*)<sup>48</sup> of what Ḥayy experienced at the culmination of his ascent, the overall theme is clear: after his self passes away, Ḥayy not only beholds God<sup>49</sup> but experiences “the complete death of his self and real contact with the divine” (*al-fanā’ al-tāmm wa-ḥaqīqat al-wuṣūl*).<sup>50</sup> And just like the successful seeker in Ibn Masarra’s scheme, Ḥayy sees all that is in God’s creation, including the different spheres of existence and

<sup>42</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 224; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 100. This is the path of contemplation.

<sup>43</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 224; Ar. *Risāla*, pp. 100–101.

<sup>44</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 225; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 103.

<sup>45</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 225; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 103.

<sup>46</sup> Ar. *Risāla*, p. 103.

<sup>47</sup> Trans. Goodman, pp. 149–156; Ar. *Ḥayy*, pp. 120–135.

<sup>48</sup> Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 122.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl writes: *wa-lam yara fī al-wuḡūd ilā al-wāḥid al-qayyūm wa-ṣāhada mā ṣāhada* (Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 122). We learn that Ḥayy “saw a being corresponding to the highest sphere, beyond which there is no body, a subject free of matter, and neither identical with the Truth and the One nor with the sphere itself, nor distinct from either!—as the form of the sun appearing in a polished mirror is neither sun nor mirror, and yet distinct from neither. The splendor, perfection, and beauty he saw in the essence of that sphere were too magnificent to be described and too delicate to be clothed in written or spoken words. But he saw it to be at the pinnacle of joy, delight, and rapture, in blissful vision of the being of the Truth, glorious be His Majesty” (trans. Goodman, p. 152).

<sup>50</sup> Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 127 (my translation).

<sup>36</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 218; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 91.

<sup>37</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 218; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 92.

<sup>38</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 218; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 92.

<sup>39</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 218; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 92.

<sup>40</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 161; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 145.

<sup>41</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 160; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 144.

their inhabitants.<sup>51</sup> However, Ibn Masarra does not discuss the death of the self (*fanā*) like Ibn Ṭufayl does.<sup>52</sup> Hayy goes further than Ibn Masarra's seeker, their final goals overlapping but not seemingly identical.

The general parallels between the two continue beyond the broad theme of the compatibility between reason and revelation and the general goal of rational ascent. Ibn Masarra and Ibn Ṭufayl also concur with respect to the means of achieving that ascent. Ibn Masarra devotes the final part of his epistle to explaining how the seeker can move via the intellect and the signs towards God. Although, he says, there are multiple ways this can be done, "they all lead to one source (*maḥrağ wāḥid*)."<sup>53</sup> He chooses to illustrate one of the potential paths, which begins with examining "one of the three [genera]: animals, plants and inanimate things."<sup>54</sup>

We find the same theme in Ibn Ṭufayl's description of how Hayy begins to learn about higher things by considering "the various species of plants and animals, minerals, and every sort of rock and soil, water, water-vapor and ice, snow, sleet, smoke, flame and burning embers,"<sup>55</sup> and by contemplating the fact that they all possess different attributes. Although Ibn Ṭufayl's discussion of Hayy's engagement with the physical world is much more detailed—taking up several pages—than Ibn Masarra's brief comment, for both of them it is this observation of the physical world that forms the basis of the rational ascent towards the divine.

Ibn Masarra's further explanation of the process of ascent appears to mirror the core of Ibn Ṭufayl's much more detailed account of the process of Hayy's enlightenment. Ibn Masarra's observing seeker begins by contemplating seemingly inanimate beings.<sup>56</sup> Seeking to understand the way nutrition works in them, he turns to ponder elements such as water and fire and the way they participate in everything. The seeker concludes that by themselves these elements could not do all the marvellous things they do or come together the way they do. As a result, the seeker concludes that "there must [...] be one who brings these opposites together, who takes them out of their

natural disparity and combines them against their essence. There must be one who distributes the nutrition within their nature; there must be one who specifies this nutrition and transforms it into those diverse kinds, each in its season."<sup>57</sup> In other words, there must be a higher being. Although the process of deliberation and experimentation that Hayy undergoes is much lengthier, he, too, comes to realize, when pondering the qualities of water, that "the acts emerging from forms did not really arise in them, but all the actions attributed to them were brought about through them by another being" (*al-if'āl al-sādira 'anhum laysat fī al-ḥaqīqa lihā wa-innamā hiya li-fā'il yaf'al bihā al-if'āl al-mansūba ilayhā*).<sup>58</sup>

Having arrived at this insight, both Ibn Masarra's seeker and Hayy begin investigating this higher being's attributes. First, it is necessarily different from its creation. As Ibn Masarra puts it, "The restricted nature (*al-ṭabī'a al-maḥṣūra*) must have [...] someone who restricts it."<sup>59</sup> None of the four elements fits this description, and "observation (*naẓar*) thus compels him to raise his thought beyond these things, in his search for the one who, by the testimony of his *fiṭra* (*ṣahādat al-fiṭra*), made necessary something else, and to ascend, with his heart's vision, to what is beyond them."<sup>60</sup> The one who brings the different elements together, makes them do things, and controls them must be greater than them. The search for this being proceeds through the seven firmaments, all the way to the sun, the moon, and the stars, but these, too, point to a higher form: the "testimony of his *fiṭra* (*ṣahādat al-fiṭra*) requires that he who governs them should be above them and encompass them."<sup>61</sup> Looking for the source, the seeker finds in the lower world a fifth force, the "animate spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-ḥaywāniyya*),<sup>62</sup> which controls both the lower world and the firmaments. Through the "perception of the *fiṭra*"<sup>63</sup> (*li-hiss al-fiṭra*) he understands that "the place of the footstool (*makān al-kursī*) and the place of the spirit" are permanent and hold the firmaments and what they contain together.<sup>64</sup> Yet upon further

<sup>51</sup> Trans. Goodman, pp. 152-154; Ar. *Hayy*, pp. 127-131.

<sup>52</sup> For Ibn Masarra, the seeker's highest goal is proximity with God in His innermost sanctuary, sheltered as one of His friends; there is no mention of the passing of the self or a union.

<sup>53</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 219; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 93.

<sup>54</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 219.

<sup>55</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 119; Ar. *Hayy*, p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> Though, according to Ibn Masarra, the seeker may start with any of the three genera (trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 219).

<sup>57</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, pp. 219-220; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 94.

<sup>58</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 127; Ar. *Hayy*, p. 74.

<sup>59</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 220; Ar. *Risāla*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>60</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 220; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 95. Stroumsa & Sviri translate *fiṭra* as "innate knowledge."

<sup>61</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 220; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 95.

<sup>62</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 220; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 95. Ibn Ṭufayl does not discuss the animate spirit.

<sup>63</sup> Ar. *Risāla*, p. 96 (my translation).

<sup>64</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 221; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 96. By "footstool" Ibn Masarra means footstool of the divine.

consideration he realizes that this animate spirit, too, is limited in its power, and the same is true of its partner, the intellect.<sup>65</sup> Eventually, the observer reaches the insight that there must be a “supreme sovereign” (*al-mālik al-a‘lā*).<sup>66</sup> This sovereign is without limit, nothing is like him, and he has no contact with anything below him.<sup>67</sup> The observer concludes that “everything inevitably requires one who is lord, king, first, originator of this world (*rabban, malikan, awallan, mubtadi ‘an li-hādā al-‘ālam*),” and that this being is “distinct in essence and attribute from all that He has created, yet He is with all things in season.”<sup>68</sup>

Again, Ibn Ṭufayl’s account of the ascent is much more detailed. Ḥayy meticulously studies all his eyes can see and philosophizes about the nature of forms at all levels, from the smallest creature to the stars in the heavens. He considers the extension of bodies in space and the corporeality of the divine, as well as the question of eternity versus creation.<sup>69</sup> Eventually he arrives at the conclusion that the universe must have a maker and a creator who is perfect, uncaused, non-corporeal, infinite, and necessarily existent (*al-mawḡūd al-wāḡid*).<sup>70</sup>

Ibn Masarra and Ibn Ṭufayl also concur on the commitment required for reasoned ascent: nothing short of full devotion to contemplation will do. Ibn Masarra ends his epistle by emphasizing the need for dedicated contemplation. He notes that the philosophers (*al-falāsifa*) tried to articulate the same point but did so “speaking pretentiously.”<sup>71</sup> They did not get to the heart of the matter because they lacked a “firm intention” (*niyya mustaqīma*) and thus missed the truth.<sup>72</sup> Without proper focus and attention to the signs that God has given, seekers will stray. This is also clear from a statement at the beginning of the text, where Ibn Masarra argues that the signs are “revealed to those who see, but veiled from him who is distracted and turns away from remembering Us, desiring only the present life [Q53:29].”<sup>73</sup> Perceiving the signs God has placed in the world depends to some extent on one’s concentration.

In his usual fashion, Ibn Ṭufayl expands on and illustrates such firm commitment in the life of Ḥayy. Through observation and reasoning, Ḥayy concludes that “his ultimate happiness and triumph over misery would be won only if he could make his awareness of the Necessary Existent so continuous that nothing could distract him from it for an instant (*fī dawām al-mušāhada li-hādā al-mawḡūd al-wāḡid al-wuḡūd ḥattā yakūn baḥīṭ lā yu‘arīḍ ‘anhu ṭurfat ‘ayn*).”<sup>74</sup> Ḥayy devotes his life to contemplation, developing a regime of little food and no movement.<sup>75</sup> Eventually he is able to eliminate “his own subjecthood”, which until then had been “a blot on the purity of the experience” (*ṣūb fī al-mušāhada al-maḥadda*)<sup>76</sup> of focusing on “the Being Whose Existence is Necessity, alone and without rival” (*al-mawḡūd al-wāḡid al-wuḡūd waḥdahu dūn šarika*).<sup>77</sup> He “die[s] to himself” (*al-fanā’ ‘an nafsihi*)<sup>78</sup> and thus achieves the end goal. Everything that was Ḥayy passes away and “all that remained was the One, the True Being, Whose existence is eternal” (*wa-lam yabqa ilā al-wāḥid al-ḥaqq al-mawḡūd al-tābit al-wuḡūd*).<sup>79</sup>

As already mentioned above, the point on which Ibn Masarra and Ibn Ṭufayl diverge most clearly is the parity of reason and revelation as paths to knowledge of God. For Ibn Masarra, the downwards message of the prophets and the upwards route of contemplation confirm one another: “the two equal one another, there is no difference between them” (*sawā’ bi-sawā’ lā farq*).<sup>80</sup> This really is a double proof for Ibn Masarra, as revelation adds to contemplation by confirming and clarifying the signs one can find in the world: “In His book He [...] spelled out, reiterated, and urged people to think, to remember and to behold.”<sup>81</sup> Revelation thus allows the attainment of certitude (*al-yaqīn*).<sup>82</sup> At the same time,

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, pp. 221–222; Ar. *Risāla*, pp. 96–98.

<sup>66</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 222; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 98.

<sup>67</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, pp. 222–223; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 99.

<sup>68</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 223; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 100.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. trans. Goodman, pp. 128–133; Ar. *Ḥayy*, pp. 75–86.

<sup>70</sup> Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 92.

<sup>71</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 224; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 101.

<sup>72</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 224; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 101.

<sup>73</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 217; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 90.

<sup>74</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 143; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 107.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. trans. Goodman, pp. 144–148; Ar. *Risāla*, pp. 110–120.

<sup>76</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 148; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 120.

<sup>77</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 148; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 119.

<sup>78</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 148; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 120. For a fuller discussion of *fanā’*, see Mojaddedi, “Annihilation and Abiding in God”.

<sup>79</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 149; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 120.

<sup>80</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 225; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 103. The full paragraph reads: “The prophetic message, then, being initiated from the direction of the throne, descends towards the earth; it concurs with contemplation that ascends upward to the throne from the direction of the earth—the two equal one another, there is no difference between them.”

<sup>81</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 217.

<sup>82</sup> Ar. *Risāla*, p. 91.



he argues that “contemplation (*al-i'tibār*) bears testimony to the prophetic message and verifies it.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, without reason humans could not rely on revelation: “No mortal can attain knowledge of the science of the Book unless he brings together what is recounted with contemplation, and verifies that which he hears by that which he beholds.”<sup>84</sup> The two paths are not only equal but equally necessary for humans.

By contrast, although Ibn Ṭufayl agrees with Ibn Masarra's basic claim of compatibility between the messages of reason and revelation, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* does not affirm their equal pedagogical necessity or even their complete equality in content. In Ibn Ṭufayl's portrayal, the reasoned ascent and ascetic life that Ḥayy has achieved in fact represent the better approach, offering a direct route to God without the distractions of “particular rituals and duties” (*al-farā'id wa-waḥā'if al-'ibādāt*).<sup>85</sup> From his superior vantage point, Ḥayy comes to pity other humans and seeks to save them from their inferior ways, which is the reason for the tale's final dramatic twist: he and Absāl set out to meet and teach the path of contemplation to Absāl's fellow islanders. But the attempt fails because even the most gifted of the islanders lack the kind of excellent *fiṭra* that has allowed Ḥayy (and, presumably, Absāl) to access the divine directly.<sup>86</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl thus adds a pedagogical lesson to Ibn Masarra's theoretical claim of two equal paths: although the two approaches to the truth are compatible, they are not equally suitable for all humans. The final episode shows that “there is a man for every task and everyone belongs to the life for which he was created” (*li-kull 'amal riḡāl wa-kull maysar li-mā ḥalaqa lahu*).<sup>87</sup> The majority of people, because of their limited natural intellectual capacities, need revealed religion. It is what allows them to access the truth and live a better life. Only those of exceptional *fiṭra*, such

as Ḥayy, can live a solitary life of reasoned ascent and mystical contemplation.

Ibn Masarra's and Ibn Ṭufayl's differing views on the parity of the two approaches have implications. For Ibn Masarra, the complete agreement of evidence and prophecy and the fact that the prophets confirm and clarify what the signs indicate mean that the intellect must necessarily accept the double message: “When the two proofs (*burhān*) concur, when the prophetic message (*nabā'*) and the described intelligible evidence (*aṭar*) confirm one another, then the intellect (*'aql*) is compelled by necessity (*ḍarūra*) [...] to acknowledge this.”<sup>88</sup> Attempting to deny the obvious, doubly proved truth leads inevitably to perdition. Ibn Masarra writes: “Should [the intellect] counteract and aspire to leave its confinement (*ḥurūḡ*), it will leave the haven (*kanaf*) entirely and will have no refuge (*māwā*) but the great fire (*al-nār al-suflā*), for it has withdrawn from God's protection (*wilāyat allāh*).”<sup>89</sup>

Ibn Ṭufayl's view of the relation of the two ways of knowing is more differentiated: on the one hand, he is more optimistic regarding the reach of reason *for some*; on the other, he makes it clear that most people rely completely on religion to attain knowledge. He does not say explicitly whether Ḥayy in fact needed to acknowledge the truth of prophecy, or whether he merely saw no disagreement between what he discovered and what Absāl told him. Additionally, the tale leaves open whether and how Ḥayy and Absāl “worship” God after their return to the island.<sup>90</sup> It seems likely that Ḥayy returns to his previous contemplation, now with a disciple, after his return.

On the other hand, Ibn Ṭufayl, unlike Ibn Masarra, takes into account more than just the most capable of human beings when commenting on the relation of reasoned ascent and revealed knowledge. When Ḥayy tries to share his insights with the islanders, he learns something important about the human condition: not everyone can participate in the life of reasoned contemplation. The islanders' failure to grasp his lessons shows him that “all wisdom and guidance, all that could possibly help them was contained already in the

<sup>83</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 218; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 92.

<sup>84</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 219.

<sup>85</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 161; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 146. Indeed, when Ḥayy and Absāl compare notes, it is clear that the things revealed religion teaches are mere “symbolic representations of these things that Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān had seen for himself” (trans. Goodman, p. 160; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 144).

<sup>86</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl writes: “But the more he taught, the more repugnance they felt, despite the fact that these were men who loved the good and sincerely yearned for the Truth. Their inborn infirmity (*li-naqṣ fiṭarihim*) simply would not allow them to seek Him as Ḥayy did, to grasp the true essence of His being and see Him in His own terms” (trans. Goodman, p. 163; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 150).

<sup>87</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 164; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 153.

<sup>88</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 225; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 103.

<sup>89</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 225; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 103.

<sup>90</sup> Initially, Ḥayy takes on the prescriptions of worship Absāl tells him about (trans. Goodman, p. 161; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 146). However, after they leave the islanders and return to Ḥayy's island, we hear only that they “worship” (*'abadā*) God until they die and that Absāl imitates Ḥayy's contemplative practices (Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 154 [my translation]).

words of the prophets and the religious traditions” (*al-ḥikma kulluhā wal-hidāya wal-tawfīq fīmā naṭaqaṭ bihi al-rusul wa-waradat bihi al-ṣarī‘a*).<sup>91</sup> Indeed, Ḥayy realizes that instead of benefitting from his attempts to provide enlightenment, the islanders could in fact be jeopardized by them: “If ever they were to venture beyond their present level to the vantage point of insight, what they had would be shattered (*rafa‘at ‘anhu ilā biqā‘ al-istibṣār iḥtalla mā hiya ‘alayhi*), and even so they would be unable to reach the level of the blessed. They would waver and slip and their end would be all the worse.”<sup>92</sup> For Ibn Ṭufayl, then, failing to explore the conjunction of reason and revelation is not a way to hell either for the masses or for the elect, as it is for Ibn Masarra; rather, it is appropriate and even necessary for the masses, who are better off sticking to revealed religion in order to “win salvation and come to sit on the right [of God]” (*fāzat bil-amn wa-kānat min aṣḥāb al-yamīn*).<sup>93</sup> Ḥayy’s superior contemplative path is reserved for the few who can reap its higher rewards: “Those who run in the forefront [...], they will be brought near” (*ammā al-sābiqūn [...]* *fa-ūlā‘ika al-muqarrabūn*).<sup>94</sup> At the same time, it seems possible that those elect humans could do without revelation on their path to the truth. Rather than envisioning true parity, then, Ibn Ṭufayl seems to prescribe different paths for different human beings depending on their innate capacities.

Ibn Ṭufayl’s introduction of a *fiṭra*-based pedagogy that acknowledges the limited capacity of most people and does not condemn them for it stands in contrast to Ibn Masarra’s affirmation of the double proof.<sup>95</sup> This difference highlights the distinctness of the two texts. Ibn Ṭufayl’s work is a unique tale, with an individual’s complex life story at its centre, and it is clear that he did not simply copy Ibn Masarra. The seeker of Ibn Ṭufayl’s tale is uniquely capable, as well as sharply different from the majority of people. Although Ibn Masarra and Ibn Ṭufayl agree on the basic claim that contemplation and revelation can both lead to the Truth, each fills out the details of this

claim differently: Ibn Masarra confirms the importance of both paths in confirming and verifying the central message, whereas Ibn Ṭufayl draws a distinction between the two paths, reserving the power of reason for the elect and assigning them the path of contemplation while confining the majority to the path of religion.

That being said, I believe that the parallels I have outlined substantiate the possibility that Ibn Ṭufayl was influenced by Ibn Masarra’s *Epistle*. Indeed, I think it is possible to see his account of the life of Ḥayy as an illustration of the trajectory of Ibn Masarra’s contemplative seeker, and maybe even as literary pushback at the latter’s comparatively more sweeping vision of the parity between reason and revelation. Ibn Ṭufayl sharpens Ibn Masarra’s claims at both ends: for the most exceptional, reason can provide direct access to the truth without the confirmation of revelation, while for the majority of people contemplation is in fact out of reach and they depend on revealed knowledge delivered via religion. Ibn Ṭufayl’s engagement with the issue of reason and revelation takes the form of a narrative and adopts its figures from Ibn Sīnā’s stories. Central to the difference between Ibn Ṭufayl’s and Ibn Masarra’s visions is what we might call Ibn Ṭufayl’s *fiṭra*-based pedagogy.

### 3. The conception and use of *fiṭra*

In addition to the commonalities already discussed—the overall claim of compatibility between reason and revelation, the theme of a reasoned ascent, the route and general goal of such an ascent, and the need for full a commitment to contemplation—a further striking parallel between the two works is the central role of *fiṭra* in both Ibn Masarra’s and Ibn Ṭufayl’s proposals.<sup>96</sup> In fact, the difference between Ibn Masarra and Ibn Ṭufayl regarding the parity of reason and revelation turns on their respective uses of *fiṭra*.

In terms of general overlap, the concept of *fiṭra* directs the inquiry in Ibn Masarra’s epistle at crucial points. It first shows up when the seeker of knowledge raises contemplation above nature to find the ruling force that governs nature and its diverse processes. In this quest, the seeker is guided by the “testimony of the *fiṭra*” (*ṣahādat al-fiṭra*).<sup>97</sup> Similarly, after observation of the firmament it is again the “testimony of the *fiṭra*”

<sup>91</sup> Trans. Goodman, 164; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 153.

<sup>92</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 165; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 154.

<sup>93</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 165; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 154.

<sup>94</sup> Trans. Goodman, p. 165; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 154. As Goodman notes, this is an allusion to the opening of Q56 (trans. Goodman, p. 237 n. 286).

<sup>95</sup> It is, of course, possible that Ibn Masarra shared the idea that different kinds of humans need different pedagogical means in theory but chose to address only the exceptional in his account. If that is the case, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* directly addresses what Ibn Masarra left unanswered.

<sup>96</sup> For a more traditional account of the concept of *fiṭra* as the source of human religiosity (and particularly of a form of natural *islām*/Islam), see Hoover, “*Fiṭra*”.

<sup>97</sup> Ar. *Risāla*, p. 95 (my translation).

(*ṣahādat al-fiṭra*)”<sup>98</sup> that tells the seeker that there must be something that guides the movements of the planets. These two instances appear to build on the idea of the primordial covenant and its central insight, God’s lordship and oneness. Like a witness, the *fiṭra* recalls and guides the seeker towards knowledge of God ingrained from before time. However, Ibn Masarra’s use of *fiṭra* does not stay with this more traditional interpretation. When the seeker reaches the place of the footstool, he realizes by “the perception (*ḥiss*) of the *fiṭra*” that there has to be a still higher power.<sup>99</sup> The same phrase, “by the perception of the *fiṭra*,” recurs when the seeker further contemplates the great soul.<sup>100</sup> Finally, “the perception of the *fiṭra*” also shows the seeker that the divine is neither restricted nor in any contact with restricted things.<sup>101</sup> Having moved beyond the idea of witness or testimony, Ibn Masarra now uses *fiṭra* to mean the source of the knowledge that propels the seeker forwards as they reach towards the cause of everything. Although the quest is aimed at God and thus theological in focus, Ibn Masarra’s conception of *fiṭra* here is an epistemological one, not merely a form of innate awareness of God or His oneness. Rather, it is the source that allows a reasoned realization of God’s necessary existence. Overall, *fiṭra* in the epistle appears at crucial junctures in the process of contemplation and fuses a purely philosophical conception with a more theological one.

Ibn Masarra even makes clear where the power of *fiṭra* comes from: God. For even though God is completely unlike His creation, His creatures can know Him through proofs and the traces that He has etched onto them. As Ibn Masarra writes when discussing the divine nature, “the supreme king transcends the entire species and is above it, except by means of the proofs (*al-barāhīn al-dālla*) which give indication of Him and the traces (*āṭār*) which He imprinted in His creation (*rasamahā fī bariyyatihi*), bearing witness (*ṣāhida*) to His lordship.”<sup>102</sup> *Fiṭra* is the human proof and trace that allows humanity to reach upwards to God through contemplation. That this conception of *fiṭra* is epistemological, meaning it is the source of

contemplation, becomes clear when Ibn Masarra then writes that we know “in the perception of the intellect (*fī ḥiss al-‘aql*)”<sup>103</sup> that although everything depends on God, He does not resemble anything but rather is distinct from everything else. *Fiṭra* and *‘aql* are used interchangeably here, showing that *fiṭra* is a form of reasoning aimed at the divine.

As Stroumsa points out, Ibn Masarra’s conception and use of *fiṭra* seems curious since it “differs from the one found in canonical sources which identifies it with inborn Islam.”<sup>104</sup> Instead, he conceives of *fiṭra* in a more philosophical sense, as “the inborn faculty to know and the innate perception of certain universal truths.”<sup>105</sup> Although Ibn Masarra clearly links *fiṭra* to the inquiry into the nature of the divine, his epistemological conception of it connects with that of thinkers such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Bāḡḡa, and Ibn Ṭufayl.<sup>106</sup> Broadly speaking, Ibn Ṭufayl’s use of *fiṭra* overlaps with Ibn Masarra’s, though he is less explicit about the theological origins and purpose of the concept than the latter. Ibn Ṭufayl uses *fiṭra* to denote Ḥayy’s exceptional intellectual abilities.<sup>107</sup> For example, *fiṭra* is foundational for Ḥayy’s musings about the universe and his eventual recognition of its oneness. Pondering whether the heavenly bodies are finite or extend infinitely through space, he comes to the former conclusion “by the power of his *fiṭra* and the brilliance of his mind” (*bi-quwwa fiṭratihi wa-ḍakā’ ḥāṭirihi*),<sup>108</sup> which make him realize that there is no such thing as an infinite body. *Fiṭra* thus signifies an intellectual distinction, in this case in logical insight, which allows Ḥayy to solve a difficult issue.<sup>109</sup>

That *fiṭra* for Ibn Ṭufayl stands for particular intellectual abilities is also clear in the context of the comparatively deficient islanders. When

<sup>103</sup> Ar. *Risāla*, p. 99 (my translation).

<sup>104</sup> Stroumsa, “The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy”, p. 233.

<sup>105</sup> Stroumsa, “The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy”, p. 233.

<sup>106</sup> For a fuller discussion of the importance and intellectual use of *fiṭra* in Ḥayy *ibn Yaqzān*, see von Doetinchem de Rande, “An Exceptional Sage and the Need for the Messenger”.

<sup>107</sup> For example, we read that Ḥayy pursued knowledge of the heavens “once the exceptional *fiṭra* (*fiṭra fā’iqā*), which had made him aware of such a remarkable argument, had demonstrated to him the finitude of the heavens” (trans. Goodman, p. 129; Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 77).

<sup>108</sup> Ar. *Ḥayy* p. 75 (my translation). Goodman renders this simply as “his inborn talent and brilliance” (trans. Goodman, p. 128).

<sup>109</sup> Although they do not produce simple awareness or knowledge of God (as many modern readers would assume), the nature of the heavenly bodies provides an intermediate step on Ḥayy’s way towards God.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* Note that a variant reads “testimony by the *fiṭra*” (*ṣahāda bil-fiṭra*) (Ar. *Risāla*, p. 95 n. 81).

<sup>99</sup> Ar. *Risāla*, p. 96 (my translation).

<sup>100</sup> Ar. *Risāla*, p. 98 (my translation).

<sup>101</sup> Ar. *Risāla*, p. 99 (my translation).

<sup>102</sup> Trans. Stroumsa & Sviri, p. 223; Ar. *Risāla*, p. 99. This is another invocation of the primordial covenant, of course. One may also note that in contrast to this particular use of *fiṭra* as the trace of the divine, Ibn Masarra speaks more generally of the nature of things such as water as *ṭabī’a* (see Ar. *Risāla*, pp. 93 and 94).

Ḥayy encounters the islanders in the last part of the tale, his exceptional *fiṭra* is implicitly juxtaposed with their weaker *fiṭras*. The commentator explains that the reason for Ḥayy's surprise and indignation at the islanders' religion is due to his erroneous assumption that "all men had excellent intellectual capabilities, piercing intellects [or great mental acumen], and determined spirits" (*al-nās kulluhum dawū fiṭar fā'iqā wa-aḍḥān thāqiba wa-nufūs 'āzima*).<sup>110</sup> In Ibn Ṭufayl's work, then, *fiṭra* is the source both of Ḥayy's exceptional abilities and of the islanders' inability to follow his example. It is because of their differently abled *fiṭras* that Ḥayy and the islanders must make use of different means for reaching God. For most human beings, *fiṭra* dictates a need for religion and society, but for Ḥayy, it permits direct and independent access to God.

It is thus clear that for both authors, *fiṭra* provides the means of the reasoned ascent that culminates in recognition of the divine, and the similarity of their conceptions of *fiṭra* lends further support to the idea of Ibn Ṭufayl's familiarity with Ibn Masarra's work. However, the use of *fiṭra* in the two works also differs in an important way; in fact, this difference is linked to the difference in their views regarding the parity of reason and revelation discussed above. Ibn Ṭufayl's use of *fiṭra* is deeply connected to his more differentiated take on the latter topic.<sup>111</sup> For him, *fiṭra* is not just the means of the human being's ascent towards God but also what separates the elect from the masses. As such, his use of *fiṭra* to refer to differing rational capacities provides an anthropological reason for his broader claim regarding the non-equality of reason and revelation. Revelation is the means suitable for those of lower *fiṭra*, while reasoned ascent is reserved for those of exceptional *fiṭra*. Ibn Masarra, by contrast, does not differentiate among humans in the political realm; he simply asserts the parity of the two means of reaching the divine. For him, these paths are fully equal and equally necessary, and they come together in the human *fiṭra*, which is their origin and driving force. Although Ibn Masarra and Ibn Ṭufayl agree on an epistemological reading of the concept and on its centrality to the idea of a reasoned ascent

on a general level, Ibn Masarra's more theological and Ibn Ṭufayl's more rational take on *fiṭra* is foundational to the particular stance that each takes on the parity of reason and revelation and its political impact.

A final point is worth noting in connection with the foundational role *fiṭra* plays in the reasoned ascent central to both Ibn Masarra's and Ibn Ṭufayl's works. In her analysis of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, Stroumsa notes that Ibn Ṭufayl—in a radical break with Ibn Sīnā—eliminates the idea of a guiding sage from his tale.<sup>112</sup> Stroumsa speaks of "an unexpected departure from the literary model" of initiation<sup>113</sup> and a "momentous change" with respect to the Avicennian legacy.<sup>114</sup> "By eliminating the guide, and leaving the initiate alone on a desert island, Ibn Ṭufayl transforms the initiation into a totally internal process that must be lived step by step by the initiate himself."<sup>115</sup> Ibn Masarra's *Epistle*, too, lacks the literary figure of a guiding sage. In both cases it is the human being alone, through their *fiṭra*, who accomplishes all the work.<sup>116</sup> This shared break with genre, in addition to the already discussed literary, linguistic, and conceptual overlaps with regard to *fiṭra*, lends further support to the possibility that Ibn Masarra's *Epistle* influenced Ibn Ṭufayl. According to Stroumsa, Ibn Ṭufayl fused elements from two well-known initiation stories,<sup>117</sup> thereby making the "main character [of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*] a personification of Ibn Masarra's contemplator, thus transforming the initiation story into a *Bildungsroman*."<sup>118</sup> Whether or not Stroumsa is right about the significance of this departure from the classic initiation tale or the individual roles of Ḥayy's multiple and possible influences overall, the lack of a guide in both Ibn Masarra's *Epistle* and Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy* appears to constitute another significant connection between Ibn Masarra and his Andalusian successor.

<sup>110</sup> Ar. *Ḥayy*, p. 147 (my translation).

<sup>111</sup> It is likely that Ibn Ṭufayl's conception of *fiṭra*, like the tale itself, was influenced by multiple sources. A likely candidate would be al-Ghazālī. For a more detailed discussion of al-Ghazālī's conception of *fiṭra* and its influence on Ibn Ṭufayl, see Kukkonen, "Al-Ghazālī on Error", pp. 4-7; and Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*Fiṭra*)".

<sup>112</sup> Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*", p. 7.

<sup>113</sup> Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*", p. 10.

<sup>114</sup> Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*", p. 21.

<sup>115</sup> Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*", pp. 21-22. In Stroumsa's eyes, this break with genre ultimately means that Ibn Ṭufayl wrote the first novel (*ibid.*, p. 29).

<sup>116</sup> Of course, the possibility remains that the author or reader of the work is an implied sage, supplying guidance to a listener/student.

<sup>117</sup> That is, Hunayn's story of Salāmān and Absāl and Ibn Sīnā's story, with Ibn Ṭufayl taking the names of his central characters from the latter and the idea of autogenesis from the former (Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*", p. 28).

<sup>118</sup> Stroumsa, "The Makeover of *Ḥayy*", p. 28.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this article I have sought to make the case that when considering the intellectual background of Ibn Ṭufayl's unique literary achievement, one should note the significant overlap between his work and that of Ibn Masarra in two areas: first, in the broad theme of the compatibility of revelation with contemplation as well as in the details of how to achieve the latter, what to expect at its end, and how to integrate these findings with a religious worldview; and second, in the use of an epistemological conception of the Qur'anic *fiṭra* at crucial junctions. At the same time, these parallels, upon further investigation, reveal important differences: not only does Ibn Ṭufayl's seeker pass away in his contact with the divine but the two authors have different ideas about how, exactly, the two paths of contemplation and revelation work together. Whereas Ibn Masarra speaks of full parity and equal necessity, with the two paths confirming and verifying each other, Ibn Ṭufayl assigns different paths to different people and is clear that he considers the path of reason superior for those who can traverse it. As I have demonstrated, their respective conceptions of an overall epistemological *fiṭra*—one more theological than the other—ground their differing takes on the parity of reason and revelation and its political impact. Nevertheless, both parallels and differences, I have argued, make it seem as if Ibn Ṭufayl might have had knowledge of Ibn Masarra's epistle.

However, I have not made any arguments about the material history of Ibn Masarra's *Epistle*, nor about the likely route through which Ibn Ṭufayl might have had access to it. Given the limited extant manuscript evidence of Ibn Masarra's work and the relative scarcity of scholarship on him, making such arguments seems impossible at this point.<sup>119</sup> This is not to say that my argument for

Ibn Masarra's possible influence on Ibn Ṭufayl does not have implications for the dissemination of ideas in al-Andalus.<sup>120</sup> Although it is clear that Ibn Ṭufayl's tale is a complex and idiosyncratic narrative that embellishes and develops further many of the overlapping themes that I highlight, I have sought to defend the possibility of a significant connection between the two Andalusian views of rational ascent.

As noted in the introduction, the multiple possible influences on *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* are still a topic of lively scholarly debate, and it seems likely that a variety of thinkers and writings provided Ibn Ṭufayl with impulses and inspiration for his tale. I hope to have shown that Ibn Masarra and his *Epistle* should be included in this roster of potential influences given the two figures' geographical proximity and the overlaps in their work, especially considering the importance they both accord to *fiṭra*. Ibn Masarra's work sets the stage for a complex narrative that uses *fiṭra* as the guiding principle of a reasoned ascent to God and thus the intellectual basis of human beings as creatures of the divine. Although many historical and conceptual details await exploration, it seems likely that Ibn Ṭufayl, in crafting his complex and unique tale, drew on Ibn Masarra's *Epistle* for significant inspiration.

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<sup>119</sup> I do, however, want to note that recent works such as Casewit's *The Mystics of al-Andalus* claim that Ibn Masarra's ideas were circulating widely in al-Andalus in the twelfth century. He speaks of the "survival and power of Ibn Masarra's intellectual legacy in al-Andalus, which became wed to broader bodies of knowledge that were available to the sixth-/twelfth-century Andalusī scholarly tradition" (*The Mystics of al-Andalus*, p. 76). See also Stroumsa's argument for al-Andalus as a complex philosophical space shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims who were characterized by a distinct "Andalusian identity" common to them all ("Thinkers of 'This Peninsula'", p. 47). Stroumsa argues that "the strongly felt Andalusian identity of both Jewish and Muslim intellectuals, along with their close proximity, requires an integrative approach to the study of philosophy in al-Andalus" (*ibid.*). By this she means a "multifocal approach" that considers "Jewish, Christian, and Muslim intellectual history together" (*ibid.*, p. 53).

<sup>120</sup> For a brief sketch of the development of philosophy in al-Andalus, see Stroumsa, "Thinkers of 'This Peninsula'", pp. 48–53.

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