Rejecting 'Do Not Destroy' When it Comes to Nature: An Ecofeminist Argument to Expand the Traditional Jewish Category of the Poor to Include Nature and Its Care

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Abstract: This work of constructive Jewish ecofeminism argues for an expanded category of the poor to include nature, as both nature and the poor have similar states: they are in need. After a survey of the Torah and the tannaim, the author concludes that both sources do not define the category of the poor as anything more than those in need, thus we are well within our means to make the change. In addition, the current state of the environment, detailed by the most recent IPCC report, illustrates just how much the environment is in need. In this expansion of the category of the poor, the author also critiques traditional Jewish models of what constitutes care and suggests instead Carol Gilligan's ethics of care as a starting point towards a more holistic, feminist understanding of the care. This argument to expand the category of the poor is not possible without also a survey of traditional Jewish understandings of nature and embodiment because how Jews understand the divine is related both to our bodies and to how we treat nature. As part of this, the author examines contemporary Jewish scholarship, both ecofeminist and not, in search of various models for understanding the relationship between humanity, nature, and the divine, which lend themselves towards a more ecofeminist Judaism.
Keywords: ecofeminism, Judaism, the poor

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In March 2023, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a body of the United Nations, released its latest assessment on the current state of our planet. It declares unequivocally that the earth is warming in no small part due to human

activity, including the release of greenhouse gasses, land overuse, and uncontrolled production and consumption. The report describes the effects of this planetary warming as new forms of severe weather patterns, the destruction of environmental habitats, rising ocean temperatures, changes in the carbon cycle, and temperature extremes throughout the globe. It maintains that if current trends continue the earth will continue to warm, which will raise sea levels, increase temperature extremes, and bring on drought, which will affect soil quality and thus food production (4.3). The IPCC report also confirms what we already know: this warming unproportionally affects those who have both contributed the least to the crisis and are the most vulnerable to such environmental change: the world's poor (2.1). Yet, globally, everyone will be affected. Food and water insecurity as well as health, including mental health, will become some of the most pressing issues in the years to come (2.1, 4.3). This is also an issue being addressed by Jewish ecofeminists, as we will come to see.

Yet, the IPCC report is not all doom and gloom. Thanks to the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Convention, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, governments have heeded the call to curb greenhouse gas emissions and introduce other mitigating practices into policies (2.2.1). We have even seen some reductions in the amount of greenhouse gasses produced (2.2.2). In addition, a large range of grassroots movements, including indigenous, gender, human rights, and other activists and social media campaigns, have raised awareness of the issue of climate change among the general public, which the report believes to be helpful in convincing individuals and governments to make changes on the policy level (2.2.1). According to the report, the most helpful initiatives for environmental sustainability are 'multisectoral solutions…that cut across systems. When such options are combined with broader sustainable development objectives, they can yield greater benefits for human well-being, social equity and justice, and ecosystem and planetary health' (4.9). These solutions should be local and site-specific and utilise local knowledge (4.7). Yet, the report seems to rely heavily on technology, governments, and money to reverse the tide, and it only rarely mentions the gendered dimensions of these problems and never once names patriarchy or capitalism as its causal agents.

Nevertheless, the report clearly illustrates the needs of nature. In this article, I focus on how, from a Jewish ecofeminist standpoint, these needs of nature can be addressed. Given the state of nature summarised in the IPCC report, in my opinion, traditional Jewish environmental ethics focusing on 'do not destroy' (*bal tashchit*) are no longer enough. Instead, I suggest including nature within the traditional Jewish category of the poor. This inclusion then situates nature as something needing care. In other words, I reject the traditional understandings of Jewish environmental ethics as do not destroy (*bal tashchit*) and instead promote the commandment (*mitzvah*) to care, which I consider to be a more ecofeminist stance. Another goal of mine

is to further both ecofeminists' knowledge of and interaction with Judaism and Jewish scholars' understanding of ecofeminism. Thus, I build my argument gradually, including information that, depending on the audience, may seem unnecessary or even elementary, yet all of it I deem necessary to bring the two audiences together.

The Poor in the Torah

In the Torah,[1] we find the poor as one of five categories of people in need of specific treatment by the Jewish community, the other four being: the Levite; the stranger; the widow; and the orphan. Yet, each grouping is vulnerable for quite different reasons. The Levite relies on the prosperity of the community for their support as they have been granted specific important religious functions and thus not land. The widow is in a culturally precarious situation (and may or may not be destitute). The stranger is unfamiliar with the community and vice versa. The orphan lacks family to provide for them. Finally, the poor, whether due to recent circumstances or distant events, lack the basic means of survival. The poor are mentioned many times in the Torah utilising a variety of words. According to Rosenfeld and Perlmutter (2016), it is not always clear what the different words mean, although the word *ani* means poor while *evyon* is someone who is destitute.

The Torah also outlines how one should provide for and treat the poor. One who farms should provide for the sustenance of the poor by leaving for the poor gleanings (of a field, Leviticus 19:9; of grapes, Leviticus 19:11 and Deuteronomy 24:21), forgotten bundles of grain (Deuteronomy 24:19), and improperly formed grape bunches (Leviticus 19:10). In addition, they should not cut the corners of their fields (Leviticus 19:10), so that the poor may harvest what they need.

While much of caring for the poor includes the land, as the Israelites were a predominately agricultural people, the land is not always considered. For example, judges must treat poor individuals the same as those who are not poor (Exodus 22:24). There should be a tithe for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28). Finally, one should not refuse to help the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7) and in particular to loan them money (Exodus 22:24). If they cannot pay, no one should force them to do so (Exodus 22:24).

[1] This article follows the methodology of Julia Watts Belser (2014) in 'Privilege and Disaster: Towards a Jewish Ethics of Climate Silence and Environmental Unknowing'. She sees Jewish texts 'as a goad, a provocation to consider unexpected dimensions of the question - not as a straight-forward source of normative instruction about Jewish obligation' (Watts Belser 2014: 87). In other words, while, for some, texts may provide one with rules or better understandings of obligations even if there is still room left there for debate, for Watts Belser and myself, textual study emphasises, not the looking for rules or even the understanding them, but specific concern when readings those texts for additions, reinterpretations, creativity, and renewal (2014: 87).

While what we should do for the poor is clear, it is not clear who exactly the poor are. The most we can say at this point is that they are in need and that need affects their ability to survive.

We are not helped by Judaism's oral Torah either. In fact, there is a difference of opinion as to whether or not the rabbis provide us with a definition of the poor. Rosenfeld and Perlmutter (2016) note a marked increase in concern for the poor with the destruction of the second temple. According to them, the rabbis define someone in need as poor and one who has no needs as not; they also draw the reader's attention to the five levels of poverty described in the Mishnah (Rosenfeld, Perlmutter 2016: 424). Gregg E. Gardner (2014), on the other hand, in 'Who Is Rich? The Poor in Early Rabbinic Judaism', suggests that the rabbis of the Mishnah (tannaim) are more worried about their own religious obligations to the poor than they are about defining what poor means (2014: 517). He writes, '…the tannaim are uninterested in the poor as such. Rather…the poor are understood as a legal category constructed and explored for the sake of clarifying the rabbinic audience's religious obligation' (Gardner 2014: 529–530). In other words, the rabbis need the poor so that they can be Torah observant and that is why they care. The tannaim also show a lack of concern for the specifics of the poor by labelling all of the poor using the same word, *'ani*, which unfortunately ignores their social status and situation (Gardner 2014: 529–530; Gardner 2015a: 20). Gardner also begrudges the fact that the rabbis have decided what they think the poor need without really knowing them (Gardner 2014: 534). In other words, the poor are not given a voice. Not only that, but the rabbis on occasion are wary that the poor are lying about their situation but decide to err on the side of caution assuming the liars will be exposed eventually (Gardner 2015a: 19). Much of this happens because the rabbis are not poor. Most of the tannaim are well-to-do landowners (Gardner 2014: 517–520).[2]

Despite this, the tannaim do acknowledge that a spectrum of wealth exists in Jewish society and thus provide various ways to fulfil one's obligations to the poor (Gardner 2014: 522–523). For example, they allow spoken words to be counted as an act of charity for those who do not really have enough to give but want to fulfil their religious obligation to the poor (Gardner 2014: 525). They also outline how much the poor must give. But really, they create a system to care for the poor that consists of a soup kitchen and monetary donations to a charitable community fund (Gardner 2015a: 17).[3] They also expand the biblical category of produce forgotten in

[2] Although, there exists among them some diversity in their means

[3] See also Gardner (2015b) 'Pursuing Justice: Support for the Poor in Early Rabbinic Judaism' and Frank Loewenberg (2018) *From Charity to Social Justice : The Emergence of Communal Institutions for the Support of the Poor in Ancient Judaism*.

the fields to include olives, grapes, and vegetables (Gardner 2015a: 16). Finally, they outline the amount of help needed; newly poor individuals must be supported in the manner to which they are accustomed (i.e. giving to the point that it restores their previous state) (Gardner 2015a: 16; Rosenfeld, Perlmutter 2016: 421).

The rabbis of the Talmud also worry about the causes of poverty, blaming it on either immorality (for the newly poor) or outsider domination. According to Rosenfeld and Perlmutter, in the writings of the rabbis, one can tell that they worry about humiliating the poor and work to make the poor feel included in society (2016: 425). In addition, the rabbis offer suggestions to prevent poverty by advising Jews to teach their sons professions and by warning them about selling property prematurely lest it lead to trouble down the road (Rosenfeld, Perlmutter 2016: 432). For the most part, the rabbis do not blame the poor for their own circumstances, but they do on occasion conjecture that a rich man who is now poor may have behaved immorally and lost his fortune due to divine punishment (Rosenfeld, Perlmutter 2016: 434). Yet, while the newly poor may have lost their fortune due to their own shortcomings, 'the rabbis instruct that the charity fund must restore the poor at any cost, which could entail expensive outlays if he [sic] used to be rich' (Gardner 2015a: 17). Thus, the rabbis see that some might qualify as poor on account of a change in circumstance. That situation requires specific, perhaps considerable, contributions from the community.

As is clear from what is mentioned above, the poor are those in need and their level of need affects their ability to survive. The same is true about nature, according to the IPCC report. Thus, I suggest that nature fits into the category of poor in the Torah because it needs so much that its very survival has been threatened. How we see and treat nature has to change. It is only through an ecofeminist lens and the rejection of the traditional Jewish environmental ethics of 'do not destroy' that we will be able to bring about positive ecofeminist change when it comes to the health of our planet. Let us start with ecofeminism.

Foundations of Ecofeminism

The term ecofeminism was coined in 1974 by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne. Mary Mellor (1997), in *Feminism and Ecology*, defines ecofeminism as 'a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women' (1997: 1). This movement argues that we cannot solve the environmental crisis without addressing gender relationships and patriarchal systems of oppression, such as racism, classism, colonialism, capitalism, globalisation, Western imperialism, and so on. Thus, as Stephanie Lahar (1991) puts it, 'Ecofeminism is transformative rather than reformist in orientation, in that ecofeminists seek to radically restructure social and political institutions. Women's liberation is

contextualised in human liberation and a more ecological way of living on the earth' (1991: 30). In general, ecofeminists agree on the following: all life is interdependent and interconnected, humans, as embodied beings, are part of nature, and hierarchical dualism needs to end.

Ecofeminists trace the connection between women and nature to patriarchy and its system of hierarchical dualism. Dualist thinking sets up either/or categories and is not in and of itself problematic. It becomes problematic when it values one side of these categories more and thus creates hierarchy. In the context of Judaism, hierarchical dualistic thinking often becomes evident in the relationship between the divine and creation (humans and nature) and between those very aspects of creation, humans and nature.

Throughout its history, ecofeminism has addressed many aspects of patriarchy. One area of patriarchal society that has been both criticised and lauded by ecofeminists is religion.[4] Religion is particularly problematic because patriarchal religions often place humans in a specific relationship with the earth that causes harm, whether that is to proclaim humans as having control over the earth or being able to use the earth as they see fit. Some religions posit that this earth is not our true home and a better life awaits us at death. This offers the adherent little if any incentive to care for this world. In addition, images of the divine are often those that invoke power-over, such as king, lord, master, conqueror, warrior, and so on, rather than power-shared or a power that enables (Plaskow 1990: 257, footnote 21). The concept of power-over divides humans from the divine and weakens human capacity for action (Plaskow 1990: 130) and responsibility. More will be said about this later in the article.

Interestingly, one of the ways that some ecofeminists have dealt with the problem of patriarchal religion is to advocate a specific type of spirituality.[5] This spirituality emphasises women's bodies and directly connects them to the natural world and its cyclical nature. In addition, it emphasises the sacred feminine as Goddess. This is an alternative to the transcendent, predominantly male, warrior god addressing among others the concerns of Plaskow mentioned in the paragraph above. The spirituality is this-worldly focused advocating divine immanence. Divine immanence is fundamental, as Carol P. Christ (2013), one of the foremost thealogians,[6] argues that the body of Goddess and the earth are coterminous. In this way, it seeks to revalue the earth, since it directly connects nature with divinity in a tangled web.

How does Judaism see nature? Is its understanding of nature different from the

[4] The basics of this paragraph can be found in my blog post: 'The Importance of Religion for Ecofeminism.' Some of the ideas are also expanded upon further there.

[5] It is rather unclear whether this spirituality grew out of ecofeminism or if ecofeminism grew out of it.

[6] Thea means goddess here. Thus, thealogy speaks to who Goddess is.

understanding of ecofeminist spirituality described above? If so, how? What is the divine's relationship to nature? These are the questions to which we now turn.

Nature in Judaism

Nature has a mixed heritage in Judaism. Perhaps one of the most well-known names in Jewish environmental ethics is Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, the Director of Jewish Studies and a professor of modern Judaism at Arizona State University. Before I discuss what I find problematic about her solutions to environmental ethics, we need to explore her argument itself.

In 'Nature in the Sources of Judaism', she lays out a more traditional Jewish perspective regarding nature (2001). First, Judaism acknowledges God as the creator of the world and humans and nature as God's creation. For Tirosh-Samuelson, this cannot be denied. In fact, our failure to respect the environment and treat it properly is directly related to our denial of having a creator and being created beings (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 118). And, given the state of the earth, we have the religious and moral obligation to act (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 118). Yet, we can find inspiration for a renewed sense of care for the land in the Jewish principle of do not destroy (*bal tashchit*) (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 116) and 'the rabbinic values of loving-kindness, humility, moderation, and self-control' (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 118).

She begins by examining the rich history of Jewish interaction with nature both in the oral and written Torah, starting with the creation story. To create the world, God has imposed order onto the existing chaos causing separation and boundaries between land and water, earth and sky, humans and animals, and so on. As a distinct creation, humans have looked to nature as a source of inspiration and pummelled it for a deeper understanding of the divine. Yet, Judaism also acknowledges how the sequence of creation has humanity at its pinnacle. While this requires great responsibility in partnership with the divine, we do not create like the divine does (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 102). We will see later how this dualist thinking between divine, human, and nature is harmful.

Besides nature as created, we often see and understand nature through the lens of the Torah, where nature is the gift of the Promised Land, the ploughed field, the olive orchard, and the vineyard. In the Torah, there is often a direct connection between Torah observance and land flourishing; follow my commandments and you will flourish and live long in the Promised Land. For example, Tirosh-Sameulson directly connects the poor and the land. She writes, 'What makes the Jewish approach to nature most distinctive is the links it establishes between the human treatment of God's earth and social justice… By observing these particular commandments [all part of what is to be left for the poor - *pe'ah*, *leket*, *shikhekhah*, *peret*, and *olelot*], the soil itself

becomes holy, and the person who obeys these commandments ensures the religio-moral purity necessary for residence on God's land' (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 109).[7] In other words, do not follow my commandments and the land will not provide for you. Yet, it is more than just observance/flourishing or non-observance/destruction. There are holy days timed with the cycles of the seasons, requirements to leave the land fallow for a year, ritual bathes in living waters, and the principles of *bal tashchit* (do not destroy) and *tza'ar ba'aley hayim* (the suffering of a living creature). The rabbis expanded the Jewish connection with the land, according to Tirosh-Samuelson, in daily prayers and in blessings for such things as rainbows, storms, blossoming trees, and the workings of the human body (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 104).

Yet, it must be acknowledged, according to Tirosh-Samuelson, that Jews have lost much of their connection to the land on account of the exile. We have become people of the book, where study is our primary form of worship and city-life our main abode.[8] Nonetheless, both the Kabbalah and Hasidic practices have attempted to reconnect us to our roots in the land. Yet, Tirosh-Samuelson believes it is an individual choice as to how we view nature (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 116). Opposed to deep ecology, we cannot as Jews choose a biocentric viewpoint as it amounts to paganism and the worship of nature (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 116). To be true to the Torah, we must acknowledge God as Creator and the planet as well as us as created (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 117).

To Tirosh-Samuelson (2001), Jewish tradition finds that 'the obligation to respond to the needs of the other is at the core of the covenantal model, the foundation of Judaism…If extended to the earth as a whole, a covenantal model would spell out obligations of humanity toward the earth and its inhabitants as manifestations of humanity's obligation to God' (Tirosh-Samuelson 2001: 117). On the whole, I find this idea agreeable. Unfortunately, though, she continually brings any concern for the environment back to the question of: is this good for humans? This, in turn, nullifies whatever supposed obligation we might have to consider the environment's needs.

David Vogel (2001) is quite pessimistic about how environmentally friendly Judaism can be and in exploring this argument also explains what nature is in Judaism. In 'How Green is Judaism? Exploring Jewish Environmental Ethics', Vogel states that 'Judaism may contain "green" elements … [but] it is not a "green" religion' (2001: 360). Its focus is mitzvot observance and thus quite anthropocentric. This does not

[7] She repeats those words on page 382 of 'Religion, Ecology, and Gender: A Jewish Perspective' (2005).
[8] She is not the only one to discuss this separation from the land as part of the problem for Jews. See also M. Immergut's 'Adamah (Earth): Searching for and Constructing a Jewish Relationship to Nature' (2008). Ellen Bernstein (2005) also acknowledges humanity's separation from the land in *The Splendor of Creation: A Biblical Ecology*, but as more of a general human condition than as related to Jewish history, However, the establishment of Israel has changed this. This topic is outside of the scope of this paper.

mean that there are not some ecocentric elements that can be found. For example, the principle of do not destroy (the fruit tree in a time of war) has been interpreted by Rashi in a way that gives inherent value to trees' existence independent of human need (Vogel 2001: 351). The rabbis also discuss certain animals, which are forbidden to eat in the Torah. They surmise that the existence of such animals as the lion, the eagle, the hippopotamus, and the crocodile is independent of human need (Vogel 2001: 353). Both of these ideas, according to Vogel, allow for an ecocentric position to exist within Judaism. In other words, nature, because it is God's creation, can exist for itself and outside of any discussion of how it meets humans' needs (Vogel 2001: 351).

Yet, that is perhaps not the primary position of the Torah. In fact, Vogel contends that nature has no inherent rights in Judaism and is often seen as something to be used or, perhaps, as an aspect of human responsibility (2001: 360). For example, looking at the substitution of a ram for Isaac's life, Vogel asserts that nature is never privileged over human life (2001: 360). If anything, it is up to us to draw the line when using nature for our benefit begins to infringe on protecting what God has created (Vogel 2001: 361).

Finally, we have to acknowledge the ways in which nature is destructive. Vogel cites the flood, the Egyptian famine, the drowning of the pursuing Egyptians in the Reed [Red] Sea, the plagues, and the wilderness during the years of wandering as all examples of the ways in which nature and humans interact. However, it is important to note that these events are all occasions where nature is used either to deliver divine wrath or to intimidate through displays of divine power (Vogel 2001: 357).

Following Tirosh-Samuelson and Vogel, nature is an aspect of divine creation made, more or less, for human use. We cannot gain principles by which to live, as nature can be rather destructive, although our observation of nature can help us understand nature's needs. We find out how to live rather from divine revelation, the written and oral Torah. These supply us with principles to follow, such as do not destroy, use in moderation, and so on. Both authors emphasise humans as the primary concern of Judaism and the Torah. In addition, we cannot forget how Tirosh-Samuelson puts it: '...from a Jewish perspective the current failure to interact respectfully with the physical environment is symptomatic of a deeper human failure to accept the existence of a creator and recognize the created status of all beings, including human beings' (2001: 118). She argues, as we will also see later in this article, that a Jewish environmental perspective is not Jewish if it does not acknowledge this creator/created dualism. In summary, for Judaism, how we act, how much nature we use, whether we choose to change our habits regarding nature, and even how we define nature is for the most part left up to individual choice. This is patriarchal, androcentric logic at work that, according to ecofeminism, fails to acknowledge humanity as embodied beings embedded within and interconnected to nature. Neither can survive

without the other. Yet, Jewish scholars, including Tirosh-Samuelson, have addressed some of this criticism. Let us turn to that now.

Jewish Ecofeminism

Tirosh-Samuelson (2005) continues her argument in 'Religion, Ecology, and Gender: A Jewish Perspective'. While she addresses ecofeminist concerns, she ultimately rejects ecofeminist propositions in favour of a principle-based Jewish environmental ethics. That principle is *bal tashchit*, do not destroy, which can 'be used as a useful guideline for a range of environmental policies' (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 397),[9] including how we use the environment, whether we are contributing to its pollution, concerns about conservation and the like.

Tirosh-Samuelson begins her argument outlining what is specific about Judaism as it relates to the environment. First, as Jews, we must acknowledge our existence as created beings and God as creator; we would be at pains to label any environmental ethic or approach as Jewish that does not adhere to this foundational relationship between humanity and divinity (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 394). Second, in the covenant, we see the direct impact our observance of the mitzvot have on the land (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 380). Third, within Judaism, there exists certain principles that can direct our environmental responsibility. For example, the Torah mandates both *bal tashchit*, do not destroy, and *tza'ar ba'aley hayim*, do not cause pain to animals (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 380–381). Tradition has also developed a range of virtues that have environmental benefits, including humility, modesty, and moderation (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 382).

She is willing to acknowledge some truth to the claims of ecofeminists. For example, we can see a direct connection between the patriarchal treatment of women and Jews with these humans being seen as closer to nature (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 384). In addition, ecofeminism and Judaism share similar values, such as 'contextualist, pluralistic, inclusive, rooted in lived experience, not value-neutral, not based on abstract individualism, relational, and concerned with care and love' (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 388–389). Yet, that does not mean that we can accept ecofeminism's form of earth-based spirituality (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 392). According to Tirosh-Samuelson, there was never a single goddess religion in the Ancient Near East and the worship of goddesses was already in decline well

[9] Arthur Waskow (1995) explains how the rabbis applied *bal tashchit* to more than just trees. Oil must be preserved and not needlessly wasted. Likewise, for the rabbis, even clothes should be respected. Waskow adds that the rabbis thought the waste of resources distanced us from the divine for two reasons. First, the world belongs to the divine, and, second, we reject the divine when we destroy the earth as the divine is the Creator of the world (Waskow 1995: 95–96).

before the emergence of monotheism. The critique of Judeo-Christian traditions by ecofeminists ignores and subsumes the position of Jews within that equation. Finally, she struggles with Jews who adhere to a Goddess-based spirituality (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 393). First, according to her they suggest that Judaism should be replaced with their religion, which *should not* be done. Second, Judaism should only be critiqued by insiders of the tradition. In a related fashion, any attempts to reclaim the Shekinah as a Jewish Goddess is misguided and, if using the Kabbalah as a source, highly problematic (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 395–396).

Further, Tirosh-Samuelson finds ecofeminism and what to her is its accompanying spirituality suspect. First, one cannot find values in nature the way feminist spirituality attempts to do, as nature can be destructive and violent (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 394).[10] In addition, she argues that humans are more than just a body, and that the ecofeminist critique of the mind-body split, while it may be a central concern for Christianity, does not apply to Judaism and Islam (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 394–395). Likewise, not all dualistic thinking is necessarily hierarchical and thinking in dualisms is not in and of itself problematic as ecofeminists often claim (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 395). Finally, it would behove ecofeminists to increase their knowledge of Judaism so as to continue dialoguing and learning from each other (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005: 396).

I find Tirosh-Samuelson problematic in that in her conclusion she does not take ecofeminist criticism to heart. Rather, she perpetuates a principle-based form of Jewish environmental ethics, relying on *bal tashchit*, do not destroy, and ignores the patriarchal dimension of our current situation. In addition, she cannot separate ecofeminism from feminist spirituality and thus often equates ecofeminist ideas with idolatry. This is unfortunate. However, there are Jewish ecofeminists who do not shy away from ecofeminist criticism nor the insights of feminist spirituality and yet fully ground their work within the Jewish tradition, as we will soon see.[11]

Tirosh-Samuelson is also too quick to dismiss ecofeminist understandings of embodiment as too close to feminist spirituality. It is possible, and suggestable, however, to separate them as acknowledging embodiment is an important ecofeminist principle that should be more of a focus in Judaism. Instead, Tirosh-Samuelson contends, on the one hand, that Judaism and Islam are not as dualist as Christianity when it comes to the mind-body split but, on the other hand, insists that humans

[10] It is debatable how much feminist spirituality really wants to do this, and as Tirosh-Samuelson offers no models or examples of values which feminist spirituality have garnered from nature, it is hard to comprehend what she means by this critique.

[11] I also find it completely acceptable to do ecofeminist analysis without any reference to religion or spirituality, although given the entanglement of religion within patriarchy, religion must sometimes be, at the very least, acknowledged.

are more than their bodies. What she means by this, she unfortunately does not discuss, pointing instead to other authors for further explanation. Addressing her concerns about humans being more than bodies, she is correct that some feminist spirituality proponents, like Carol P. Christ (2011), do argue that we do not exist after the body dies, but it seems important to mention that not all ecofeminist theorists have such a clear opinion on embodiment in this regard. Rather, embodiment for ecofeminism requires us to acknowledge a few things. First, humans have bodies which have material needs. Second, humans' bodies and minds are connected in complex, interdependent ways, not all of which we completely understand and which we may never understand.

The final issue I have with Tirosh-Sameulson's work is her heavy reliance on a dualistic understanding of the divine as creator and humanity (and nature) as creation. Once again, she is so worried about idolatry that she fails to acknowledge an important ecofeminist insight: separating divinity from creation furthers the environmental crisis. For one, it furthers the dualistic thinking of creator/created and the power of one (creator) over the other (created). In addition, it fails to acknowledge from an ecofeminist perspective the complex relationship between humanity as embodied beings embedded within and dependent on nature for our survival. Rather, in a creator/created dualism, nature is for human use and/or human dominion. While in my opinion, it is possible to be grounded in Judaism and incorporate ecofeminist principles as well as different understandings of and relationships to the divine.

Irene Diamond (2004) offers us an example of this. In 'Towards a Cosmology of Continual Creation: from Ecofeminism to Feminine Ecology and Umbilical Ties', Diamond criticises those Jews who gate-keep, creating boundaries between Judaism/anti-idolatry and paganism/idolatry (2004: 13). For her, establishing firm boundaries between paganism and monotheistic religions is similar to the boundaries established between colonisers and the colonised or Jews (and other feminised peoples) and non-Jews (Diamond 2004: 13).[12] Both are highly problematic as they require firm boundaries when we should be dismantling and questioning boundaries.[13]

In addition, Diamond sees a need for more discussion in both Jewish ecofeminism and ecofeminism of embodiment in general. We are often too wrapped up in materialist explanations which ignore our connection to the sensual, although there are many examples of embodiment's connection to divinity in feminist spirituality movements (Diamond 2004: 9). We cannot deny the fact that ancient Israelites heard the Torah and experienced the divine through nature (Diamond 2004: 8). Diamond provides the mikveh as an example of a connection between nature, the body, and

[12] She does not explain here what she means by the Jews being lumped with other feminised peoples.
[13] These boundaries could also be called dualisms and dualist thinking.

divinity, if we are willing to explore it. Likewise, Judaism contains a rich tradition in the Torah and Talmud that discusses the body, which, to our own detriment, we do not look to much (Diamond 2004: 8).

In this quest, she suggests that we heed the book of Jeremiah as well as stories from the midrash and kabbalah that call for the return, or reascent, of the feminine (Diamond 2004: 13). She labels her brand of ecofeminism 'feminine ecology,' defining it as 'hold[ing] the potential of shifting attention to the sensuous ground that sustains all life and challenging the notion of ecological science as the master narrative for saving a planet at the brink of destruction' (Diamond 2004: 14). She uses the metaphor of the umbilical cord connecting us to the earth and grounding us in a location, much like the roots of a tree (Diamond 2004: 14). Importantly, this umbilical cord also attaches us to the divine. She concludes, 'My argument is that the strange and wandering Jewish tribe has served as the cultural umbilical tie between traditional tribal cultures that acknowledge the power of birth, magic, and a living, unfolding cosmos, and the belief in human agency, compassion for the oppressed, and continual learning and questioning that permitted the flourishing of Western science, tolerance, and human rights… Shabbat-observant Jews have prayed for the end of their exile, the return of the *shekinah* (the feminine presence of g-d),[14] and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, imaged as the navel of the world' (Diamond 2004: 15). In other words, Judaism can bridge the gap and connect us both to the earth and to the divine in much the way tribal religions have done for ages. We should embrace the feminine, not as a passive creation of patriarchy, but as holding the key to a more ecological future.

Diamond's emphasis on the umbilical cord connecting us, grounding us to the earth, highlights both our embodiment but also our responsibility – one cannot live without the other. That connection requires our care and compassion. This idea is also distinct from a creator/created dualistic vision of the divine. The cord literally connects us to the earth and not to some transcendent being who created it. If Diamond discusses any ideas around divinity at all, those ideas are grounded in the sacred feminine and immanent presence which is again a rejection of the creator/created dualism that Tirosh-Samuelson says we must embrace to be considered Jewish.

[14] Luke Devine's (2014) 'How Shekhinah Became the God(dess) of Jewish Feminism' offers the reader a good overview of Jewish understandings of the Shekinah even though the title is somewhat misleading; he does not conclude that the Shekinah becomes the goddess in Judaism as he acknowledges the scepticism of many Jewish feminists. For example, Marcia Falk (1987), in 'Notes on Composing New Blessings', rejects the Shechinah as a rather late development within Judaism that is also rather patriarchal, whereas Judith Plaskow (1990) finds that the term can be embraced for its ambiguity, bringing the divine down to earth and rooted among us, whereas traditional images do not do this (1990: 165–166).

Another important point in Diamond's thinking about the divine is the connection the Israelites have with the land. In the Torah, they literally hear and see the workings of the divine through the nature and land around them. God appears as clouds, fire, in earthquakes, in abundance, and in famine. The ancient Israelites partake in rituals, like the mikveh, to further connect themselves with the natural world and its elements surrounding them. The mikveh is a ritual that could have such meaning for us Jews today.

Irene Diamond continues her creation of a Jewish ecofeminism in conversation with David Seidenberg in 'Sensuous Minds and the Possibilities of a Jewish Ecofeminist Practice' (1999). The article begins with Diamond's experience of burying her mother and how that experience allowed her to see the ways in which Judaism is both connected to the earth and works within its seasons (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 186). Diamond reminds the reader that Judaism does not adhere to a mind-body split in the way that a basic Judeo-Christian perspective would have us believe. No, in Judaism, according to Diamond, the body and mind are all called by the same word, *nefesh*, thus signifying their oneness (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 186).[15] The article continues by describing the ways in which rituals and bodies interact and what this interaction means for a Jewish ecofeminism: arguing that Jewish rituals, first and foremost, relate to the body (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 190). They show how the body opens outward to connect with other bodies, both human and non-human, as well as the earth, Diamond describing these interactions as sensuous (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 190).

Be that as it may, we cannot ignore the ways in which in Judaism bodies are also gendered (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 190). The primary body in the Talmud and thus in Judaism in general is presumed to be male (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 191). One example of this is the mikveh and how in the Talmud and Halakhah it has been focused on women's bodies and their sexual availability to men, even though it used to apply to both men and women and their fertility equally (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 191). In the mikveh, Diamond sees great ecological potential in the way that bodies join with water and the earth and thus with creation (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 192).[16] In fact, Seidenberg notes the similarity between this ritual and Shabbat.

[15] Katja von Schöneman (2021), in 'From Primordial Being into Genders: Ecofeminist Reading of the Biblical Human Creation Narratives in Rabbinic Literature', addresses the creation of humankind arguing that what distinguishes humans from animals is the gift of divine wisdom (2021: 11). This wisdom, given upon our creation (Genesis 2:7), requires people to 'understand by nature their responsibility for both the environment as well as the all-encompassing equality of people…' (von Schöneman 2021: 11). She also argues that the 'verb *shamar* used in Genesis 2;15 means to protect, care, nurture, and respect…' nature (von Schöneman 2021: 11).

[16] This is a significantly different perspective than Carey Glass Morris (1995) in 'Jewish Women and

According to Seidenberg, Shabbat reminds us of creation for two reasons. First, it reconnects us to the animal world, which does not create in the way we do,[17] and second, it reminds us of the creation of the world, as the divine also rested (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 193). More importantly, Shabbat teaches us, by forbidding all activities associated with the construction of the Tent of Meeting, that our day-to-day lives should replicate the goals of the Tent of Meeting. As the Tent 'reproduce[s] the structure of creation', meaning that we spend the week building up creation and reproducing it, on Shabbat we have the opportunity to marvel at it (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 193).

For Diamond and Seidenberg, we need to restore the 'practical tribal wisdom about preserving the sacredness of the world amidst all the busy upheaval of humanity activity' (Diamond, Seidenberg 1999: 193). This wisdom is contained in our ancient rituals of once indigenous tribal people from the land of Israel who have been forced to live elsewhere. In other words, we have a tradition that was once deeply connected to the land through rituals involving our own bodies. The question is, according to Diamond and Seidenberg, whether we will use it and learn from it or not.

Diamond and Seidenberg are correct that Judaism used to be much more connected to the land than it is now. The Torah is full of land-based symbolism and rituals like the mikveh, and the divine often interacts with humans in nature-based phenomena. The Torah also stresses the need for the land to rest (Shabbat and the sabbatical years) and associates holy days with the seasons.[18] Finally, they point to something that we must be reminded of when we attempt to disconnect ourselves from nature: the Torah connects mind and body in the one word, *nefesh*. Just as the mind and body are connected, so are our bodies connected to the natural world that surrounds us. As we have already discussed, ecofeminism labels this embodiment.

Building on what Diamond and Seidenberg begin, I suggest that rather than rejecting embodiment, the Torah actually acknowledges our embodiment. We see this in the laws concerning care for the poor in the Torah. Let us explore further the relationship between nature and the poor before we look at what it means to care.

Ecofeminism', who suggests that women are welcome to reimagine the ritual or use the ritual to reconnect with their life-giving potential (1995: 77). She does not imply that the ritual itself has a deeper ecological meaning except perhaps for its association with the feminine (as it is described in Halakhah). She believes affirming the feminine could help us develop a more environmentally friendly way of life.

[17] Seidenberg specifically mentions baking bread, tilling fields, using fire, and building the Tent of Meeting on page 193.

[18] For a good resource on the connection between Jewish holy days and the seasons, see Arthur Waskow's *Seasons of Our Joy: A Modern Guide to the Jewish Holidays* (1982).

Nature within the Category of the Poor

As we have already discussed, I suggest that nature should be included within the Torahic[19] and rabbinical category of the poor, as nature's poverty is evidenced in the IPCC report, which lays out how, like the poor, nature's very survival is at stake. Further evidence for nature's inclusion within the category of the poor comes from the rabbis' acknowledgement that a change in circumstance could create poverty. We have misused and abused the planet and created a change of circumstance: the environmental crisis. Most importantly, including nature within the category of the poor, then, would give us the obligation (the *mitzvah*) to work at returning nature as close to the way it once was as possible, just as we have to attempt to return the once-rich person to their previous state.

Perhaps the closest we get in Jewish thinking to this ecofeminist suggestion is Rabbi and Jewish thinker Arthur Waskow's book *Down-to-Earth Judaism: Food, Sex, Money, and the Rest of Life* (1995). In the book, Waskow, like others I have discussed, contends that the Torah is a source of wisdom for the modern age, as it is much closer to the earth than either rabbinic or modern Judaism (1995: 228). He also acknowledges that Judaism has been quite patriarchal. He writes, 'Many of the men who have shaped religion and society have seen both the earth and women as sensual, pleasurably seductive, and productive only if subjugated to the will and work of men' (Waskow 1995: 229). Judaism is no exception, as it, too, has been shaped by men to focus on transcendence (other-worldly, world-denying) rather than immanence (this-worldly, world-embracing), and women and nature have often suffered the consequences (Waskow 1995: 230). This echoes ecofeminist concerns.

Yet, much of the book is more practical, so to speak, diving into, as the title suggests, food, money, and sex.[20] When it comes to our use of the land for food, Waskow, with the help of others, has developed the concept of eco-kosher, a dialogue between the current state of our environment, how we treat it, our traditional laws of *kashrut*, and other Jewish principles. The term eco-kosher comes from the 1970s and Waskow credits Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi with its creation (1995: 117). Waskow defines eco-kosher and its purpose as '…joining the most expansive sense of the healing of the earth to the most precise code of daily conduct [halakah], it signaled the importance of broadening *kashrut* at the same time as it signaled the importance of turning ecological consciousness into everyday action' (Waskow 1995: 126). While kosher separates the permitted from the forbidden, eco-kosher acknowledges the

[19] As pertaining to the Torah.

[20] The sex section of the book is beyond the scope of this article and thus will not be discussed.

separation at the same time that it stresses the need for a sense of awareness of the interconnectedness of life (Waskow 1995: 129).

Addressing money, Waskow connects it both to the land and to the poor. The Torah includes proscriptions as to how to care for the land, importantly requiring its need to rest, as we can see from the commandment for the sabbatical and Jubilee years (Waskow 1995: 153). In addition, the Torah brings the land into conversation with the political, the economic, and the spiritual (Waskow 1995: 162). For example, the divinely created land is considered an integral part of how we, as divine creations, care for the poor. 'Money is in fact land… *a fluid version of the earth*', says Waskow (1995: 213). Thus, he cautions us when it comes to money.[21] Relating what the Torah says about land to money, Waskow asks: do we spend our money in ways that allow for the earth to rest? If we do not, then we should look for ways in which our money creates Shabbat for the earth. Do we further the exploitation of the earth in our use of money? If we do, then we should look for less or non-exploitative uses for our money (Waskow 1995: 214).

Waskow spends considerable time discussing how we care for the poor, most of which should sound familiar. The primary method the rabbis used to care for the poor is *tzedakah*, which 'invokes social responsibility more than it does individual generosity' (Waskow 1995: 186). He explains this by mentioning that even the poor have been required to contribute a share of their money to help others (Waskow 1995: 186). Yet, the rabbis also prioritise one's responsibility, first to relatives, then to the community, and then outwards from there (Waskow 1995: 188). And, in rabbinical writing, there has also been a concern for the psychological health of individuals according to Waskow. The rabbis decree that a once wealthy individual should be provided enough food that it mimics how they used to eat so as not to stress them more with only a very meagre amount (Waskow 1995: 188).

In addition to *tzedakah*, Waskow also discusses the use of the land in caring for the poor. We are commanded to leave the corners of the fields (*pe'ah*) so that the poor might glean food from them. Waskow argues that this *pe'ah* connects the individual landowner to the community, this community being identified not with king or priest but with the poor (1995: 163). He continues the association by adding that just as the fringes on the four corners of our garments remind us of our connection to the divine, so do the left corners of the fields remind us of our connection to the poor, and all of this '…affirm[s] that what connects us with others is what makes us holy'

[21] Waskow does not seem to be concerned here with saving money or the like for the purposes of capital growth, but rather that there is a direct relationship between the buying power of money and the exploitation of the earth. Money is how, in our modern world, someone who doesn't own land participates in the destruction of the earth and its resources. One can be rich without land ownership today, whereas in the Torah and at the time of the rabbis that was unthinkable.

(Waskow 1995: 163). In other words, our relationships with the land and amongst ourselves are holy. Thus, he believes that how we treat the earth and each other as well as how we use money are spiritual questions, and Judaism can help provide the answers, as we have just seen (Waskow 1995: 216).

Waskow's book raises important points. There is a connection between the food we eat, how we produce it, who grows and picks it, and social justice. As ecofeminists, I think there is much to learn from Waskow's position. For example, we cannot call food kosher, or permissible, without taking into consideration the interconnections between humans with each other as well as between humans and nature. Correspondingly, he highlights the connection between the poor and nature, finding the poor dependent on nature and money, the new 'fluid' form of nature. Yet, nature has been misused and overused by humanity. To fix this, Waskow argues that we have to change the way we think about nature and like Tirosh-Samuelson incorporates the Jewish principle of *bal tashchit*, do not destroy, into his approach to nature. Yet, he also goes further. We have to allow nature time to rest and be considerate with our use of money. Unfortunately, again like Tirosh-Samuelson and in spite of acknowledging feminist concerns about transcendence, Waskow upholds the divine as Creator and insists that the destruction of nature distances humans from their Creator, instilling again a dualism between creator and created.

While I think Waskow's ideas are a start in the right direction and much of what he says echoes some ecofeminist arguments, he returns again to the Jewish principle of *bal tashchit* when looking at the environment. In fact, one could argue that he grounds the entire premise of his book on the principle of *bal tashchit* (Waskow 1995: 94-96) and thus individual choice and action. The problem with *bal tashchit* is that, as the IPCC report illustrates, the state of nature is not in a condition where individual choice and action work. In other words, nature now needs more than a principle-based ethics of self-imposed limitations regarding destruction and waste, with occasional rests built in; nature needs concerted help in order to ensure its basic survival.

That is why I suggest we include it within the talmudic category of the poor and thus we are required to care for it. The question then becomes: how do we care for nature? The best model I have found to date is the feminist *ethics of care*.

The Ethics of Care

As we have seen, the rabbis argue that care concerns money and soup kitchens run in the public sphere. Yet, Angy Cohen (2020), in 'Hospitality, the Ethics of Care, and the Traditionalist Feminism of Beit Midrash Arevot', argues that care does not take place in the public sphere. Rather, it takes place in the home, the traditional domain

of women. While men may offer hospitality, it is the women who care for the guests (Cohen 2020: 94). This caring entails feeding, healing, sheltering, and providing. Yet, the important work of the private sphere has been ignored in the Torah and by the rabbis;[22] and not even in the stories about hospitality in the Torah do we learn anything about the home itself (Cohen 2020: 98). The work done in the home is not seen, and it is not valued. Yet, according to Cohen, it, too, is a moral and religious contribution to society, even if women have been forced to develop it under patriarchy (Cohen 2020: 102).

Carol Gilligan (2003) echoes many of these thoughts and ideas in her book *A Different Voice*, defining further this unique contribution of women and the moral voice through which they speak, naming it the *ethics of care*. When making decisions that affect themselves and others, women have often considered relationships to be important factors. How will my decision hurt or impact someone else? Who will suffer more? Am I being selfish by doing what I consider important? In other words, women emphasise connection and responsibility to others rather than separation, differentiation, or individualisation (Gilligan 2003: 19). Part of this different emphasis certainly comes from the way girls are socialised and the gendered roles assigned to women under patriarchy as nurturer, carer, helper, child-raiser, and so on. However, it is important to acknowledge that, for Gilligan, while arising out of patriarchally assigned roles, *the ethics of care* can be practised by any gender as it is more concerned with certain themes (Gilligan 2003: 2). The themes of responsibility, care, concern, and careful consideration of the needs of others are key aspects of Gilligan's *ethics of care*.

This *ethics of care* Gilligan describes has been applied to the environment by ecofeminists. Karen Morrow (2019), in 'The Fragility of Climate, Human Responsibility, and Finding the Impetus to Act Decisively – Investigating the Potential of the Ethics of Care', argues that given the current state of the environment, we have no choice but to act responsibly and care for our environment (2019: 115, 131). She sees the *ethics of care* to coincide well with ecofeminist principles (Morrow 2019: 119), writing, 'As the ethics of care acknowledges, the human condition is indeed concerned centrally with human relationships; but this is not an exclusive focus, and in ecological terms these connections are themselves grounded in our relationship to the natural world. The concepts of connection, knowledge, power and responsiveness that characterize Gilligan's ethics of care can, and indeed must, also be applied to the human relationship with nature, because our interdependence with it too is pervasive and inevitable' (Morrow 2019: 120). Not only are we in relationship with other humans but we are also importantly in relationship with nature, upon whom we depend for our very

[22] Thus, one could say that the care the rabbis provide in their allocations of money and food is not really care at all. But this is a topic for another article.

survival as embodied and embedded beings. Thus, we must care; we must respond to the ways in which we have harmed our connection with nature and threatened the survival of not only ourselves but the planet as a whole, since we are part of nature, not above it (Morrow 2019: 123–124).

Importantly, Morrow finds that one can care for nature even if nature cannot speak for itself. Just as one cares for babies and humans of differing abilities who often cannot express their own needs well, we can understand what the environment needs through observation. Likewise, as embodied, embedded beings our care for each other is linked to the environment that surrounds us and a poor environment hinders our ability to care. Thus, we have a responsibility to start local as an individual knows the specifics of their location better (Morrow 2019: 124; 127–128). However, local care may translate into larger and larger circles. We should base our care, according to Morrow, minimally on the survival of the next few generations (Morrow 2019: 128). We are no longer in a position where we can ignore the damage we have done to the earth.

Hence, nature belongs, within Judaism, within the category of the poor. This shift in religious thinking is one small step in creating a more ecofeminist Judaism. Yet, it can, as we have seen, have larger consequences. These include creating a Judaism that honours human embodiment, connecting humanity to nature in a more profound way, and developing how we care in a way that addresses real needs and specific contexts. Expanding our definition of the poor to include nature also, and perhaps more importantly, requires us to look at traditional understandings of the divine and question their hierarchical dualistic mindset. In other words, a more ecofeminist Judaism, that requires us to care for the impoverished world around us, will no longer find spiritual sustenance in distancing both divinity and humanity from the world, so in need of care.

In conclusion, I have argued that, from a Jewish ecofeminist point of view, we should add nature to the Jewish category of the poor as both are in need to the point that their very survival is at stake. *Bal tashchit* (do not destroy) is no longer enough given its individualistic approach and the dire state of our environment as laid out in the IPCC report. Furthermore, I have explained how rabbinical teachings surrounding care are inadequate when it comes to both the needs of the poor and the needs of nature. Rather an *ethics of care*, like those of Morrow and Gilligan, should be embraced. Finally, an ecofeminist Judaism takes embodiment seriously and honours the interconnections between humanity, nature, and the divine in ways that bring us closer together. In this radical shift towards caring for nature, the Jewish ecofeminist contribution hopes to bring humanity one step closer to healing the damage we have done to our one and only home, planet Earth.

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