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Three Religious-Cultural Worldviews in *Noah* (2014)—Hedonism, Fundamentalism, and Ecofeminism

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Abstract: *The article proposes an interpretative study of Darren Aronofsky's film* Noah. *The film draws inspiration from various spiritual traditions ranging from shamanism to Buddhism, whilst relying heavily on Jewish midrash, and adds a layer of innovation. Our main assertion is that the film attempts to present three viewpoints on issues of religion, humanity, nature, and God—while negating two of them and preferring one. Each of the various characters and groups in the film represents one of the three stances, as the film's protagonist must cope with the problematic nature of his worldview and revisit it. The film engages with current pivotal issues: climate change, the depletion of natural resources, materialism and hedonism, fundamentalism in both religious and environmental trends, suspicion of religious institutionalized interpretations, and gendered spiritual religious beliefs. Thus, the film* Noah *is a cultural product that disseminates spiritual ideas and values within mainstream culture.*

Keywords: *Bible and film, Ecofeminism, Flood myth, Fundamentalism, Noah, New Age and Alternative Spiritualities*

> We broke the world—we did this. Man did this. Everything that was beautiful, everything that was good, we shattered. Now, it begins again.
>
> —(Noah, in *Noah*)[1]

In our interpretive analysis of the movie *Noah* (Aronofsky 2014), we shall identify the three religious–cultural worldviews it presents and interpret the cinematic[2] message as favoring one of them. This analysis will show to what extent this film, which depicts the ancient biblical myth of the Flood, expresses a view on contemporary cultural "hot topics" while presenting different worldviews on ecology and religion.

In this paper, we attempt to put into words the ideas and messages that the film denotes by analyzing its traditional, cultural, and aesthetic contexts. For this purpose, we will provide a short introduction to the film and its makers and their various cultural-religious sources of inspiration. Next, we present the film's three identifiable religious-cultural worldviews, and then we summarize our findings with an emphasis on the film's concluding and prevailing worldview.

***About* Noah**

The film Noah, starring Russell Crowe, was released in the United States in 2014. It cost US $125 million to make and made about US$362.6 million, making it a big box office success (Wikipedia 2016).

The Plot

The film recreates (Pegg 2015) the biblical story of the Flood, in which Noah, the tenth generation after Adam, receives a message from God about a coming flood that will destroy life on earth. The movie presents the world before the flood as a wasteland in which animals are nearly extinct and vegetation is rare, all as a result of humanity's actions. The film portrays humanity as cruel and greedy, which drives Noah's family to lead a life of seclusion. Following the divine message, Noah builds an ark, to be occupied by him and his family members as well as representatives of all animal species. The family consists of Naameh, Noah's wife, their three sons—Shem, Ham, Japheth—and their adopted daughter Ila. The latter is part of a new plot development added by the filmmakers, which was not part of the biblical tale. As the film unfolds, Noah becomes increasingly convinced that God intends to end the human dynasty, and that his intent is just. The drama around which the movie revolves appears to be focused on the position Noah undertakes, which eventually leads him to become hostile even towards his own family members.

The Filmmakers

The director, Darren Aronofsky, wrote the script, together with Ari Handel. The two Jewish-Americans define themselves as secular.[3] Before this film, Aronofsky directed and wrote scripts for other movies that deal with religious and spiritual motifs, such as *Pi* (1998) and *The Fountain* (2006; Dillon 2006; Johnson 2015; Skorin-Kapov 2015). Aronofsky revealed that the story of Noah and the flood had been with him ever since his childhood, and that, when he started out as a director, he had already considered making a movie about Noah (ScreenSlam 2014). He began working on the script in 2003, and it took a decade to complete (Center for American Progress 2014).

Genres and Ideology

Noah belongs to several cinematic genres. On one hand, it is a biblical and even mythological epic, and on the other hand, an ecological–apocalyptic movie. The filmmakers' reliance on the aesthetic conventions associated with these genres in contemporary mainstream cinema results in a unique link between religious, moral, and metaphysical issues typical of the biblical genre and ecological ones that characterize the contemporary apocalyptic genre (Moore and Ruah-Midbar Shapiro 2018).

Epic biblical films have constituted a significant trend since the inception of cinema. However, this trend of movie spectacles had declined as of the 1970s (Reinhartz 2013). The past few years have seen the return of the biblical epic genre, after an almost half-century-long absence, and *Noah* is one of the films that took part in this resurgence.[4] While the biblical films of the 1960s aspired to present their topics as "authentically" and as true to their source as possible (Orrison 1999), this tendency later changed, so that at the start of the twenty-first century, makers of biblical films enjoyed relative freedom in their interpretation of Scripture, an option that was unacceptable before. Within this aesthetic–cultural context, the makers of *Noah* could conveniently express an ecological and religious message through their movie.

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One of the central characteristics of the Hollywood biblical epics of the early twentieth century was their use of the biblical story as an allegory for the society of the time (Reinhartz 2013). Thus, filmmakers could provide current social–political–cultural critique on issues such as social morals and corruption. However, the various appearances of the Flood in twentieth-century biblical movies never focused on any ecological messages. The existence of such a message in *Noah* teaches us about the cultural context within which the film was made. Still, the context is insinuated rather than addressed directly, and we had to rely on more than a few interviews in which the filmmakers expressed their views regarding the film's current ecological relevance.

As a biblical story about the extermination of humanity, the makers of *Noah* could also add their film to the apocalyptic movie genre, which has become very popular over the past few decades (Kaplan 2015; Lavin and Kaplan 2017). The story of Noah is the first apocalyptic story in history, according to the Bible. However, Aronofsky uses the biblical apocalypse to promote the current ecological agenda. He emphasizes that Noah's biblical tale cannot be broached without addressing its ecological aspect, as Noah invests himself in saving the animals, rather than "saving innocent babies." The vegetarian ideal expressed in *Noah* is also in keeping with environmental issues. Aronofsky states that according to Genesis, animal meat was not consumed, and animals lived in harmony—a state that did not change until after the Flood, when the aspiration was to revert things back to the way they were in Eden, vegetarian ideals included (Center for American Progress 2014). Significantly, today's visual-effects technology allowed the filmmakers to avoid all use of real animals in filming, in accordance with the "green" ideology they wished to promote (Brevet 2013; Skorin-Kapov 2015, 169).

The apocalyptic genre is based on the notion that humanity is on a downward spiral and headed into the abyss, as a consequence of its negative actions. Apocalyptic ecological films are a subgenre (Kaplan 2015) that initially appeared during the 1990s as the ecological movement thrived in the West (Taylor 1995). Studies indicate that these movies directly influence the public's ecological awareness and social activism (Hart and Leiserowitz 2009). Their theme of the forthcoming end of the world matches the ecological movement's argument, which blames humanity for damaging the environment and warns of the current, or future disasters this behavior will result in. *Noah* implies the current ecological disaster humanity faces in its criticism of humankind for causing the Flood and letting its greed exhaust the earth's natural resources.

The optimism that appears in the endings of movies of this genre for the first time in the twenty-first century (e.g., *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Ark*) is also consistent with the biblical story of the Flood: after the apocalyptic disaster, hope appears in the form of a new and better world. Although *Noah* belongs to the apocalyptic genre, it expresses a post-apocalyptic approach in keeping with the biblical tale, for the world, and humanity within it, goes on, even after the calamity. Moreover, the biblical story is even essentially anti-apocalyptic, as it ends with God's promise that he will not destroy humanity in the future. A similar message arises from the movie as well: from the hero's dilemma, to be expanded upon later; from the filmic narrative as it culminates in a new world born of the survivors of the ark; and as manifested in the final scene, in which Noah calls for humanity to procreate. However, this call by Noah seems to be in opposition to the common ecological view that human overpopulation on earth necessitates a restriction on reproduction.

This diversion by the filmmakers from the conventional view of the ecological genre is accompanied by yet another alteration: the ecological disaster in the film—the Flood—is not the result of natural forces reacting to environmental imbalance due to humanity's disruption of the natural harmony. Rather, it is an explicit divine punishment. Though the film does stress humanity's responsibility for the damage to the environment, that is, the exploitation of nature's resources and harm to animal life, this criticism is interwoven with a critique of their

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moral–social–religious sins. The film's context within the biblical genre thus enables this interesting and intricate novelty within the ecological genre.

Sources of Inspiration from Different Religious Traditions

The filmmakers declare that they continue the Jewish tradition of midrash,[5] which, on one hand, clings to the biblical sources, and on the other, recreate the story by giving it a new interpretation (Center for American Progress 2014). However, in the design of its fantastical world, *Noah* draws inspiration (Skorin-Kapov 2015) not just from the biblical story of Noah, but from different religious and cultural sources as well. The film clearly relies first and foremost on the biblical tradition, as well as its Jewish (and Christian) variations, while also making syncretistic additions from a variety of cultures and religions.

Religious Syncretism

The many traditions and cultures the filmmakers hint at and draw inspiration from in their filmic narrative and design testify to a universalistic perspective, as characteristic of liberal Western movements in contemporary spirituality. The perennial belief is prevalent in such views, and claims that all religions share an ancient grain of truth. This perspective calls for the opportunity to merge different religious traditions and the eclectic creation of individualistic religiosity adapted to every individual's taste (Hanegraaff 2002). The cultures and religions hinted at in the movie are taken from the favorite spheres of Western contemporary liberal spirituality, such as Hinduism, Zen -Buddhism, and American shamanism. Methuselah, for example, is depicted as a sort of shaman in the film.

Furthermore, the syncretic elements in the plot and the film's creative design within the context of the epic–mythic genre express the notion that the story of the Flood appears in myths spanning dozens of ancient cultures from around the world (Dundes 1988). It is sometimes difficult to determine the exact source of inspiration, as we identify other thematic sources alongside the biblical myth, such as the tree of life, the garden of the gods, prophetic drink, the sage healer, a rite of passage in a cave, and so forth.

Biblical and Midrash Traditions

As said, the film mainly corresponds to traditions of Jewish midrash literature, which has always combined adherence of the biblical text with creativity and innovation, sometimes making bold changes that contradict not only other midrashim, but the biblical text as well (Neusner 1990). Handel clearly states that "We set out very purposefully to upset expectations and change whatever assumptions people had about this story" (Huckabee 2014), and Aronofsky, too, stresses that this is not "your grandmother's bible," suggesting a departure from conventional biblical reading (Collins 2014; Ruah-Midbar Shapiro and Moore 2019). Indeed, the film conveys the continuance of this creative line of thought, in borrowing from some midrashim and adding innovations of its own. We shall provide examples of this, while addressing the filmmakers' ideological message, which determined the plot's development, choice of imagery, and design.

Like the biblical story (Gen. 7:9), the film also has animals come to the Ark in pairs. However, another biblical tradition (Gen. 7:2), in which Noah collected seven of each clean animal, and sacrificed them as an offering to God after the flood, has no mention in the film. The Bible presents a divine decree of vegetarianism (Gen. 1:29) alongside descriptions of animal sacrifice, and even waives this decree following the flood (Gen. 9:3). However, in the film, vegetarianism is perceived as an ongoing moral–religious decree, and therefore it does not make

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mention of the sacrifices nor the annulment of vegetarianism as a divine edict. Thus, the film depicts a contemporary vegetarian–ecological midrash partially leaning upon biblical and midrashic traditions.

Moreover, the film engages with the notion of humanity's religious–moral corruption, yet reinterprets traditions in a way that emphasizes human violence and cruelty—towards each other, as well as towards nature, animals, and the earth—which are accompanied by indifference to or defiance of heaven. Thus, the film makes a connection between contemporary religious, environmental, and political–military issues.[6] A central plot point in the film is Noah's understanding that God seeks the ultimate destruction of humanity. He expects that his family will die off with no offspring, and even uses cruelty throughout the film in order to attain this goal. We see here another adoption of notions that come from midrash, where Noah avoided procreation during and before the flood until God instructed him to procreate, or forbade the inhabitants of the Ark from practicing intercourse during the flood (see Ginzberg 1969, 144, 150–51). Noah's insistence and the cruelty he develops in this matter as the film progresses represent contemporary ecological and religious–fundamentalist perceptions (see *The Intricate Message of the Hero's Journey: Noah and Present-Day Humanity*); however, the film ends with Noah's call for the continued existence of humanity—a call attributed to God himself in the biblical–midrash tradition.

Three Contemporary Cultural–Religious–Ecological Worldviews

As we have explicated, the filmmakers take the midrash approach, flavored with syncretism in the style of contemporary Western liberal spirituality, in their aim to answer actual questions with a moral message and so express their viewpoint while rejecting other current cultural views. Arguably, the film serves as an ideological manifesto, creatively representing three stances, or opposing groups in contemporary Western culture, represented in the film through various characters and groupings, each with its own different religious and ecological view.

The filmmakers explain that the film focuses on the process of achieving a balance between justice and mercy, which is the development Noah undergoes throughout the movie. By achieving this balance during his quest, Noah becomes a *Tzadik*, that is, a righteous man (Huckabee 2014; ScreenSlam 2014). It appears that this process is mirrored by the change in Noah's stance: in the film, most of humankind is identified with the first worldview, as we shall present, while Noah gradually adopts the second, opposing worldview; later, he gradually moves towards the third worldview, which is the one favored by the filmmakers.

The Hedonistic Worldview—The Worst of Humanity

> Damned if I don't take what I want.
>
> —Tubal-Cain, *Noah*

This worldview, which we shall refer to as "hedonistic,"[7] is represented in the film by Cain's bloodline, which comprises most of humanity, apart from Noah's family and the people depicted as the victims of human violence. In the film, the hedonistic worldview expresses the evil of humanity described in the Bible, and those who hold it use brutality and are vicious and violent. They harm others physically and kill out of greed and without hesitation, they kill animals for their meat (to the point of extinction), they deface nature in their greedy pursuit of the earth's resources, and they use profanities, traffic in women, and celebrate momentary pleasures with no thought of the future. The link between women and animals as victims of

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the hedonistic worldview's greed and cruelty stands out in this group's scene of nighttime festivity. Furthermore, it recalls ecological and ecofeminist criticism that views nature and women both as the victims of patriarchal culture (Malamud 2012).

The leader of this group is Tubal-Cain, who, on one hand, holds the celebrations, while preparing for war[8] on the other—his scenes are bathed in the blood he has spilled in both contexts. The film implies that the evil of humanity also clung to Noah just by his association with Cain's line. Thus, for example, Noah vanquishes the hunters he comes across—maybe even kills them—out of anger for killing an animal for its meat. He explains that his actions stem from his pursuit of "justice." One night, he journeys in search of his son, who went looking for a partner outside of the family, and sees his own likeness in the nighttime party, taking part in the carnal crowd's lewd behavior. Upon returning to his wife, he tells her, "I saw it. The wickedness is not just in them. It's in all of us."

The film has Noah tell a short story from creation to the flood, and depict the sins of humanity as centered on violence:

> Since Adam, sin has walked within us. Brother against brother. Nation against nation. Man against Creation. We murdered each other. We broke the world. We did this. Man did this. Everything that was beautiful, everything that was good, we shattered.

There's no doubt that the filmmakers meant to show that violence is still a part of humanity, and is the root of all evil, as Aronofsky stresses that war is wrong due to both the violence people experience and the resulting ecological damage (Center for American Progress 2014).

This group's vicious perception is intertwined with defiance of God. For example, Tubal-Cain says, "A man isn't ruled by the heavens. A man is ruled by his will . . . Are you a man? . . . Because if you're a man, you can kill." Moreover, during his encounters with Noah, Tubal-Cain refers to the difficulty of human life, all the while defiantly stating that God is responsible for human suffering and indifferent to man's pleas. In his claim that God is cruel, he justifies his own cruelty and desire to go against God and his actions:

> The Creator does not care what happens in this world. Nobody has heard from Him since He marked Cain. We are alone. Orphaned children, cursed to struggle by the sweat of our brow to survive. Damned if I don't do everything it takes to do just that. Damned if I don't take what I want.
>
> Miracles? A deluge, you claim? . . . Perhaps casting us out of Paradise was not enough. Perhaps He returns to finish us off. Well, if He does, I will ride the storm in that ship of yours. I'm not afraid of miracles!

This quote displays a combination of hedonistic claims alongside a defiance of God, which in turn leads to greedy, cruel behavior that stems from despair and pessimism. The quotation that opens this section, "Damned if I don't take what I want," concisely expresses the hedonistic viewpoint.

This is merely a distilled expression of what Aronofsky described as a story that deals with "the evil that men do" (ScreenSlam 2014). By depicting this worldview in the film, the filmmakers hint at several groups and ideologies in contemporary Western reality and combine them into a unified stance: those with a tendency towards hedonistic celebrations or a covetous exploitation of weaker groups or natural resources, as greatly manifested in consumer society (Featherstone 2007), the warmongers and weapon advocates, the heathens, and so forth. In the film, these groups are melded into one viewpoint that holds no moral values, is focused on the present and personal gratification at the expense of the environment, and

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doesn't take the future ramifications of its deeds into account. Accordingly, the hedonistic viewpoint in the film is portrayed as one that exhausts the world's resources and injures the future of life on earth. The film implies that from a divine point of view, this group has no right to continue its existence on the face of the earth. The moral message implied directs viewers to the current arena of public agenda issues.

The Conservative and Fundamentalist Worldview—Anti-Humanity

> The time for mercy has passed. Now our punishment begins.
>
> Now it begins again. Air, water, earth, plant, fish, bird and beast. Paradise returns. But this time . . . this time there will be no men.
>
> —Noah, *Noah*

Noah's identification with God's will leads him to develop a worldview that consists of a growing hatred of humanity. The more he persists with the preparations for the Flood, the more Noah becomes convinced that humanity's existence has no justification, and that it deserves to be annihilated—as he believes God's desires to do. The conservative worldview awakens progressively within Noah throughout the film the more he becomes aware of the intent of the Creator. This worldview starts with distancing himself from the violence and cruelty of humanity and living a remote alternative existence. Noah educates his children using a contrarian approach to counter the indifference to suffering (of children, of animals) and harm done to nature in general. He also becomes indifferent to the victims of human violence; therefore, unlike the girl he adopted at the start of the film after she survived her family's attack, he refuses to take in another girl as the Flood approaches even though his son Ham wants a partner. Beyond turning a blind eye to the girl's suffering, as she is to be killed violently, he turns from a compassionate man to a cruel parent who accepts the decree that states his sons should die childless and alone in the world. His cruelty reaches its peak as he threatens to murder his adopted daughter and his son Shem's newborn twins (Runions 2015).

Noah's identification with the conservative, or even fundamentalist, worldview, echoes two trends in contemporary Western culture. One is that of conservative religious scholars, such as in Abrahamic traditions, who see themselves as the mouthpieces of God's protestations against the sins of man, as they warn of the apocalypse and even justify its coming and the cruel blows it is expected to land on sinners and heathens (Ruthven 2007). The more radical versions of fundamentalism go further and carry out this perception of God's punishment upon the heathens by exacting extreme violence in God's name.[9] Accordingly, violence is often depicted in biblical films (Avalos 2009; Stone 1999), and in most cases, it is far more acute than in the film under discussion (Kosior 2016, 17; McGeough 2016, 9, 31). Of course, in a movie about the Flood, the audience naturally expects some on-screen violence (McGeough 2016, 9, 31). The second approach represented by the conservative worldview is that of extreme trends in the ecological movement—including vegan discourse—which place an emphasis on the environmental damage caused by man and his cruelty, whilst describing a utopian magical state of harmonious nature—after humanity has been eradicated from the face of the earth. This ideology has been criticized as anti-human (Bookchin 1987).

The conservative worldview Noah develops throughout the plot is, to him, a divine criticism. Both religious fundamentalists and environmentalists, including vegan extremists, view their own critique as the expression of a moral and even divine criticism that justifies their loathing of humanity or a substantial part of it. Both approaches view humanity as doomed, and

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members of such groups even prophesy the coming of the end of the world and willingly identify with this prophecy. Thus, the film draws a creative connection between a conservative–fundamentalist religious stance and a radical ecological–vegan worldview, with the filmmakers viewing Noah as what they have in common—the hatred of humanity as a whole and a claim that justifies putting an end to most of the humans that live on earth. This daring interpretation, which places Noah in a position that combines the environmentalist with the man of faith, is further reinforced through the words of Ari Handel, about the common denominator between "'a man of faith' and 'an enthusiastic environmentalist,' regarding what is holy . . . and what is in need of protection and esteem." Handel even stresses that Noah's tale in fact insinuates that we were given a second chance at life, following the near annihilation of humanity, and therefore must respect this chance (Center for American Progress 2014). Notably, the film lacks the divine biblical promise that there will be no second flood. This may be viewed as the filmmakers hinting at the current ecological–moral challenge as imminent.

The Merciful Maternal Worldview—Pro-humanity

> They are children!
> They are our children, Noah!
> Have you no mercy?
>
> —Naameh, *Noah*

The merciful worldview is clearly represented in the film by its female protagonists, and conveys a feminine–maternal perception channeled towards life, which is, in fact, an expression of pro-humanity. It is no wonder women are the representatives of this worldview, for ecofeminism identifies femininity with nature and views patriarchal culture as a tool that oppresses both (Warren 2000). Accordingly, combative, establishment–hierarchical, nationalist, misogynous, and nature-harming attitudes are equally criticized by ecofeminism.

While this perception does not receive an eloquent textual expression in the film (Kosior 2016, 14), it is nonetheless represented through the actions of Naameh and Ila, as well as Shem. Naameh is a woman of few words, but her actions speak of unconditional love. The avoidance of verbalizing this worldview is possibly meant to express a feminine–spiritual view that puts actions and a physical–materialistic embodiment over ideology and theoretic abstractions, a perception often referred to as "embodied self" (see Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury 1997). This feminine–spiritual perception is also typical of trends of alternative spirituality and the New Age (Bednarowski 1992) that emphasize the holistic agency of body, soul, and environment at the core of life, and are therefore called "spiritualities of life" (Heelas 2009).

The filmmakers present this position that Noah gradually adopts as an embodiment of the correct balance between justice and mercy. It is presented as the only way to maintain the appropriate values—spiritual, ecological, social, familial, and interpersonal—while at the same time ensuring the continuance of human existence. Therefore, human survival relies on proper values, but also on people who express interpersonal love and compassion. In this perspective, human actions and choices personify God's will in practice, an idea that fits well into the immanent theological view that says the divine is contained within the world, as opposed to the transcendental view that says the divine is exalted above and beyond our world—as befitting ecofeminist spirituality.

That very love that might be seen as inferior, as discriminating between one life and the other out of a subjective maternal point of view, is the love that the film eventually depicts as

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the hope of humankind. This moral maternal perception expresses the maternal–feminist approach, in which women possess unique qualities that stem from their roles as mothers in practice or by force (Gilligan 1993). In the "maternal" feminist perspective, also called "cultural feminism," motherhood is an expression of the essence of femininity and is a merit unique to women, which society must cherish and preserve (Mayseless et al. 2010). This perception has also made its way to a New Age style of feminine spirituality (Bednarowski 1992). The preoccupation with the concern for future generations from a maternal–feminist perspective expresses the matriarchal notions common in alternative spiritual discourse (Eller 2000); therefore, it's no wonder that the heroines of this approach are Ila and Naameh, the film's two mothers, who sometimes stand in contrast to Noah, the father figure or patriarch.

In an argument between Noah and Naameh in the film, Noah claims that each of his sons has "wickedness" in him—the first is "covetous," the second "blinded by desire," and the last "lives only to please"—and finds evil in himself and in his wife as well. Unlike him, Naameh emphasizes the "good" in their sons—"loyalty," "kindness," and "integrity"—and predicts that they will make good fathers. Her statement reflects a maternal feminist view; hence, good fatherhood embodies the human ideal. Noah challenges Naameh further: "Is there anything you would not do, good or bad, for those three boys? We would both choose to kill in order to protect our children." Noah sees this as proof that all human beings are weak and selfish and that his family is no different than the rest of doomed humankind. Therefore, he concludes that humanity has no future. In contrast, Naameh answers by redirecting the challenge at Noah: "They are our children, Noah! Have you no mercy?" Noah replies from a viewpoint that he perceives as divine, which is a clearly transcendental viewpoint: "The time for mercy has passed. Now our punishment begins." At this point he is of course identified with the worldview described in the previous section.

Noah tries to avoid this "inferior" subjective love, out of identification with the objective transcendental God, and a belief in his obligation to rise above his paternal–human emotions. However, in the final act of the film, Noah recognizes his mistake in getting carried away by a misanthropic and cruel worldview in the name of God. He realizes that he was wrong, and makes his way back to the merciful worldview, repenting all the while. He gets drunk, and near the end of the film, it becomes evident that he has difficulty processing the fact that God did not necessarily intend to wipe humanity off the face of the earth. This realization demonstrates a theology typical of the field of alternative spirituality (Hanegraaff 2002; Heelas 2009): first, God is perceived as contained in the world, immanently, through people's perceptions, views, beliefs, faiths, and choices. Second, there is a clear theodicy that seeks to circumvent the attribution of cruel punishments to God and wishes to present divinity as positive and benevolent. The film's plot indeed hints at a divine will for the continued existence of humanity, as the family survived, and their ability to procreate further was maintained, as Ila was healed of her infertility, and even gave birth to two girls who could be partners to the two single brothers.

In the next to last scene, Ham turns to Ila, the distinct representative of the merciful, maternal worldview, and expresses hope for the future of humanity as embodied by her character: "I'm glad it begins again with you. Maybe we'll learn to be kind." Later, Ila turns to Noah and highlights his position as the chosen one who can decide the future of humanity in the name of God through love and compassion:

> He chose you for a reason, Noah. He showed you the wickedness of man and knew you would not look away. But then you saw goodness, too. The choice was put in your hands because He put it there. He asked you to decide if we were worth saving. And you chose mercy. You chose love.

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The chance that Noah was given, the opportunity to become the best family man he could be—father and grandfather —expresses the desired, merciful human behavior and once again extols the feminist principle that "the personal is political." More specifically, Ila gives an expression to the way of maternal feminism, which will reform world order through interpersonal relationships: "He has given us a second chance. Be a father. Be a grandfather. Help us to do better this time. Help us start again." Though she tries to recruit just one man, Noah, her call in the film has a universal tone; hence the result should have implications for humanity and the world in general. It seems that Ila's words are directed at contemporary humanity, calling each of us to adopt a merciful, maternal worldview. Ila represents those voices in current cultural reality—including individuals, such as mothers and social activists, groups in alternative culture, liberal spirituality, members of women's movements—who act out of compassion and a will to ensure the future of humanity, or at least that of their own children.

Noah—Between Hedonism, Fundamentalism, and Ecofeminism

Noah undergoes a process during which he finds himself carried away with the conservative worldview, out of his contact with and resistance to the hedonistic worldview—going from one kind of violence and cruelty to another. As the plot progresses, Noah gradually comes to accept the merciful worldview, as he realizes the need for balance.

While the first worldview is focused on the present alone, in the spirit of hedonism, the second worldview stresses movement backwards to the past, in the spirit of conservativism. In contrast, the third worldview emphasizes the progression into the future, as it is based on contemporary spiritualities and feminist ecological ideologies. The injustice and uninterest in any kind of ethics is especially prominent in the first worldview; thus it lacks compassion and does not express the values of faith and loyalty to the Creator. The second worldview places much emphasis on values, sometime religious values as well, but lacks mercy of any kind. The third worldview embodies the correct balance between justice and mercy that the filmmakers aspire to create and promote. The film presents this stance as devoid of evil and violence and as a worldview for which human life continues and is also legitimized. While the second worldview personifies the perceptions of the fundamentalist religious establishment (Ruthven 2007), the third worldview is identified with alternative spirituality, sometimes described as "spiritual, but not religious," which also holds a great deal of criticism regarding the religious establishment (Heelas 2009).

The Intricate Message of the Hero's Journey: Noah and Present-Day Humanity

The film *Noah* presents an intricate perception that puts together different worldviews prevalent in contemporary culture. This complexity, as well as the movie's current contexts, probably underlies the discomfort experienced by the film's many critics (e.g., Mattson 2014; Stetzer 2014).[10] The intricacy of the filmmakers' message is also manifested in the religious and spiritual narrative and design of the deluge in the film (see also Ruah-Midbar Shapiro and Moore 2019). The film sides with its portrayal of the divine viewpoint that expects humanity to behave morally, mercifully, lovingly, socially, and ecologically, while portraying the cruelty entrenched in cleaving to the religious–conservative, and in particular the religious–fundamentalist outlook, which seeks to punish humanity and prevent it from continuing its misdeeds. This divide between a religious–establishment worldview that justifies divine punishment and an alternative–spiritual worldview is not a new one, and has been widely discussed in the research literature dealing with "spiritual, but not religious" identities (Heelas 2009) and the worldview that

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differentiates between fundamentalist spirituality and liberal spirituality (Doktòr 2003). Alongside its spiritual–religious complexity, the film showcases yet another trend in Hollywood films that engage with ecological matters—the distinction between different types of ecological worldviews. Undoubtedly the damage to the environment is presented as one of humanity's gravest sins, yet the film rejects the radical environmentalist approach that leads to misanthropy and presents the radicalization of ecological discourse as a major problem.

We have seen how the filmmakers' message arises in the film on the basis of the choices they have made in their interpretation of biblical and midrash traditions, whilst drawing inspiration from the alternative–liberal and ecofeminist aspects of Western spiritual trends. In addition, we have identified the importation of intense topics from the agenda of contemporary Western society into the story of the Flood, as it dove into themes of violence, greed, ecology, feminism, religious belief, personal relationships, and human social structure. Clearly, the film criticizes contemporary Western society, its abuse of natural resources, the damage it causes animal life and plant life, its trafficking of women, production of lethal weapons, warmongering, so on and so forth.

The filmmakers' message is therefore, a complex one, and the film does not deliver it plainly, but subtly depicts it through the characters' behavior and the central dilemma that challenges the protagonists throughout his hero's journey (Campbell 2004). According to Skorin-Kapov (2015, 126–27), Noah undergoes the hero's journey through the mythic narrative structure of the film. Utilizing the hero's journey's monomyth terminology (Campbell 2004, 1–37), Noah hears the "call to adventure" through dreams and visionary occurrences, and is guided by the wise old man in the cave, Methuselah, to "cross the threshold" by building the ark and embarking on the dangerous waters and "abyss" of the deluge. Yet Noah's "ordeal" seems to involve navigation in the cultural landscape of three opposing and even hostile worldviews.

Furthermore, Noah's mythic journey assumes cosmic and planetary perspectives. He engages his family with the story of creation, humanity's origins, and the evolution of life on earth as they close the doors of the ark to the external world that is submerged in the waters of the Flood and begin their descent to the abyss. For this purpose, Aronofsky utilized advanced special effects to produce a segment of striking imagery that explored 14 billion years of evolution that in stages led to the emergence of conscious human beings. Man's violence, however, which begins with the killing of Abel by Cain, characterizes the activity of our species and is described by Noah as perpetually destroying all that has evolved on our planet. Hence, aesthetically and thematically, Noah is contextualized in a contemporary-inspired story of the universe that bears ecological ramifications (compare Ruah-Midbar Shapiro and Moore 2019). Moreover, the story of Noah in the film begins with an image of Earth from space that is followed by mythic imagery of the snake and the apple in the Garden of Eden. The image of the planet as seen from space offers a contemporary sensibility to the mythic tale, while standing in sharp contrast to the archaic world of *Noah*. Yet this contradiction denotes the current relevance of Noah's myth and its close association with a larger universal story involving the mutual journey and destiny of the universe, the planet Earth, and humanity (Swimme 1984; Swimme and Tucker 2011).

While Noah is initially identified with the objective transcendental God as he rises above his human–paternal emotions, Naameh is an expression of the immanent divinity embodied in day-to-day life, through human actions and choices, which views good fathers and mothers as the hope of mankind. It is evident that, with time and through his ordeal, Noah learns to appreciate the position of his wife Naameh, a secondary protagonist who doesn't say much, and yet still expresses deep kindness and unconditional love. It seems the filmmakers imply that maternal–cultural feminism—which centers on compassion and love, nourishment and

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care, personal relationships, and small everyday deeds—is the manifestation of the balanced behavior, between justice and mercy, that is vital to humanity's continued existence, without a need for any grandstanding abstract ideological declarations, which is a prevalent claim in this type of feminism. This spiritual, New Age type of emphasis placed on the agency of life in this world is therefore sometimes referred to as "a spirituality that is 'for life'" (Heelas 2009). Naameh's stance reflects an ecofeminist perspective that equates femininity with nature and views patriarchal culture as a tool that oppresses both (Warren 2000). Accordingly, it criticizes patriarchal ideology as one of the more combative, establishment–hierarchical, nationalistic, misogynous, and nature-damaging approaches. Therefore, human survival depends on higher values, but especially on people who express interpersonal love and compassion to people, animals, plants, and all that is part of life on earth. Although Noah's journey as a mythic hero does not involve an actual transformative encounter with a goddess, queen, or princess, his comprehension of the feminine–maternal view transpires as he slowly becomes convinced that the merciful approach is the appropriate approach, and the central drama in the final act of the film centers upon his inner struggle and journey toward accepting this worldview. Thus, the filmmakers voice a clear theological stance on worthy behavior and on humanity's place, by using the opposing ideologies of contemporary Western culture.

The hero's journey that Noah undergoes is our journey—and takes place in our current cultural context. The biblical story of the Flood is presented in the film as the story of us, the tale of three cultural worldviews: hedonism as an expression of evil, greed, and cruelty; conservative fundamentalism, with its extremist ideology, which leads to a stance that supports the end of time, whether for religious–conservative–establishment reasons or for vegan–ecological reasons; and feminine alternative spirituality with its New Age nuances, which focuses on life in this world, deals in personal relationships and the embodiment of body and actions, speaks an immanent theological language, and calls for compassion and optimism. The film favors the third worldview, calling for mercy and optimism regarding the future of humankind, while subtly enlisting God in this cause.

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Notes

1. All quotations are taken from the script: Aronofsky and Handel (2014).
2. In another article, we elaborate on the various religious–cultural traditions, especially those of Jewish midrash literature, that the film's narrative draws on, in order to claim that *Noah* constitutes a cinematic midrash, which expresses the filmmakers' contemporary interpretation of the biblical tale of the flood. See Moore and Ruah-Midbar Shapiro (2018).
3. In an interview, Darren Aronofsky stressed that he's "not religious at all" (Center for American Progress 2014).
4. Other examples include *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014), and *Ben-Hur* (2016).
5. The midrash was created as a Jewish genre during the first centuries CE, in which rabbis creatively interpreted biblical texts. Some midrashim take the form of aggadah and others of halacha. The term *midrash* is also borrowed and used in other cultural–historic contexts, as well as in especially creative interpretations or variations. In another article (Moore and Ruah-Midbar Shapiro 2018), it is even borrowed in a cinematic context, with the claim that *Noah* is a midrash in its own right, as it makes use of the rich midrash tradition and adds to it.

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6. Aronofsky makes the connection between ecology and peace by stressing that war is wrong due both to the violence towards people and the ecological damage that war wreaks on the environment and to the resulting ecological damage (Center for American Progress 2014).
7. We named this worldview "hedonistic" for the sake of keeping things short and convenient. It is clearly complex and involves violent and greedy behavior, among other traits we shall later elaborate on. We do not intend to claim that hedonism equals violence and greed, as described in the rest of this section, but rather to use the word in characterizing the worldview presented in the film. (For more on hedonism and consumer culture, see Fetherstone 2007).
8. In the movie, he refines weapons of war, in accordance with biblical tradition (Gen. 4:22), which says he forged metal.
9. As "fundamentalism" may be used in various ways, it should be noted that we follow Doktòr (2003) and Ruthven (2007), as detailed in this section.
10. There have even been reports (Roach 2014) that Paramount Studios asked Aronofsky to reedit the film to please evangelistic criticism.

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