

## Pro-life, eco-feminists work for consist ethic of life

Patrick O'Neill | Jan. 22, 2009



Mary Krane Derr with Gemma, one of the guinea pigs she adopted from a no-kill shelter. (Photo by Jonathan Derr)

Most *NCR* readers have probably never heard of a "pro-life, eco-feminist," but there are pro-lifers who take a view of abortion that transcends politics and single-issue voting in favor of a more "consistent ethic of life" coupled with a sense of stewardship for creation.

Today, the 36th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion, is a good time to listen the pro-life, eco-feminist view point.

While most eco-feminists hold pro-choice views on abortion, intellectual activists such as Canadian Grey Nun of the Sacred Heart, Sr. Rosalie Bertell, and Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai are self-proclaimed eco-feminists who are also pro-life.

In the United States, one of the most prominent pro-life, eco-feminists is author Mary Krane Derr, editor of Nonviolent Choice Directory ([www.nonviolentchoice.blogspot.com](http://www.nonviolentchoice.blogspot.com)). She described herself to *NCR* as an "eco-advocate, vegetarian, inner-city organic community gardener and caretaker of adopted guinea pigs."

Derr agreed to answer some questions posed to her via email on the topic of pro-life, eco-feminism. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**NCR: Can you simply define eco-feminism?**

**Derr:** "Eco-feminism recognizes that the oppression of women and the destruction of the natural world are interconnected forms of domination and destruction."

**NCR: What is your eco-feminist critique of abortion?**

**Derr:** "Since the time of the early women's rights advocates, who were often vegetarians and conservationists, eco-feminism has made visible the many interconnections between the oppression of women and the destruction of other-than-human creatures and whole ecosystems.

"Like animals, like anyone or anything looked upon as 'nature,' women are treated as less-than-sentient, as not having innate value or rights of any kind. So are children, whether born or unborn. Sometimes it has been said that they 'have no souls.'

"So our culture massively fails all these sentient, inherently valuable, rights-bearing beings. One tragic and wholly unnecessary result is that millions of pregnant women are backed into corners where abortion appears the only or the least bad choice. Yet both sides of the abortion debate speak in individualistic terms only. This obscures the underlying causes of abortion and hinders the quest for solutions.

"If we had more of an ecological consciousness about how our failures of collective responsibility cause abortion, we would be doing our damndest to ensure that women always and everywhere have decent choices in pregnancy prevention, and if that does not work, the utmost support before, during, and ever after birth.

"Some women do have abortions in despair over bringing children into such a polluted and wrecked world. We owe such women and their children nothing less than restoring the global environment to a state of health and safety for everyone."

**NCR: Are there many people who call themselves pro-life, eco-feminists?**

**Derr:** "I don't know if anyone has bother to count us, but we do exist. We just need to get better organized and more audible and visible. It does seem as if most who identify as eco-feminist are pro-choice on abortion.

"Among those I personally know who identify as pro-life and feminist, there are a high proportion of people, even if they don't name themselves eco-feminists, who see all forms of domination and oppression as interconnected. And out of this consciousness, they practice vegetarianism, otherwise protect animals, follow lives of minimal consumption, challenge environmental pollution, and so forth."

**NCR: It appears that a pro-life, eco-feminist is also a pacifist, a vegetarian and a socialist -- or at least anti-capitalist. Is that true?**

**Derr:** "Well, that sure makes sense to me. It makes sense in terms of an overall ahimsa/consistent life ethic. But eco-feminists do not all agree on these matters. For example, some believe the whole thing does not make sense if you eat animals and take their skin and fur, and others do eat meat and use leather."

**NCR: Can someone be a pro-choice, eco-feminist or does their stance on abortion invalidate the integrity of their position?**

**Derr:** "Well, having been told for decades that I am not a feminist but an 'anti-choice misogynist,' not to mention told I am incapable of eco responsibility, I am loathe to turn around and disqualify someone else as an eco-feminist because they have a different position from mine on abortion.

"Now, I myself believe that eco-feminism is the most complete, the best it can be, if it includes a genuinely pro-life approach to abortion. Otherwise I wouldn't risk the drubbing that sometimes follows when one expresses such a thing.

"At the same time, I realize that eco-feminists who identify as pro-choice are not the selfish, evil people that some anti-abortionists take them for. They too are struggling to find a way to make peace among men, women, and the Earth, and they too are concerned about the suffering of women and children.

"Some have had abortions themselves or helped loved ones get abortions, and they seek to make sense of and peace with these often difficult experiences through being pro-choice.

"If ecological consciousness is about anything, it's about empathy. And that means empathy for people on the other side of the abortion divide."

(Patrick O'Neill is a regular contributor to NCR.)

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