

Exercising contemplative power with some interesting partners



by [Nancy Sylvester](#)

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I was so excited to read an [interview](#) in the spring issue of [YES!](#) magazine between Ralph Nader and Daniel McCarthy by Sarah van Gelder. When I finished I felt this is an example of [exercising contemplative power](#).

Many of you know Ralph Nader from his dedicated work over the years on numerous issues, including: consumer protection, responsible government, anti-nuclear issues, environmental and ecological concerns and the convergence of corporate and governmental power. He was a candidate for president five times as a write-in for a Democratic primary, as the candidate for the Green Party and as an independent candidate. He is the icon for political activism on the left.

Sarah van Gelder is the co-founder and executive editor of [YES!](#) magazine whose mission is to support the building of a just and sustainable world. Each of the issues focuses on a theme and then uses the multiple lenses of new visions, world and community, the power of one, and breaking open to develop it.

In this interview they are exploring the possibility of a new left-right alliance against corporate rule, which is the subject of Ralph Nader's newest book, [Unstoppable: The Emerging Left-Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State](#). Nader makes the case that our definitions and understandings of both liberalism and conservatism have been "hijacked" by corporatism, and that if we get back to their original meanings, there is a convergence on a lot of major issues.

There is an honesty as they discuss climate change when Nader wonders what it will take to persuade conservatives that this isn't a hoax. McCarthy acknowledges the role of the business community in wanting to keep it that way but then speaks to this being a cultural divide impacted by education and geography. He states that too many people on the left have a dismissive attitude toward evangelicals and anyone who doesn't agree with them. He believes we all need to communicate with each other and that perhaps that is where we have fallen down.

McCarthy goes on to discuss how this too-easily dismissive attitude toward the other has grown over the years. For some the shifts in our country during the 1960s signaled that something had gone culturally wrong. They did not understand what was happening and so felt alarmed. It was easy to grab onto "God, gays and guns" or the hot-button issues rather than address the structural issues of reforming the economy, self-government or foreign policy. Jumping onto the cultural war has deepened the divide and ignored these very emotionally complex responses. Now we need to stop stereotyping each other and listen carefully to what we are saying.

They learned from their experiences, which led to envisioning a place to begin – at the local level respecting the goodwill in each person regardless of political position where the clouds of misinformation and manipulation can be addressed. Key is not being afraid of the other side. We

need to talk with each other knowing we may disagree but acknowledging that we are all people of goodwill who are capable of being reasoned with.

I knew Ralph Nader when I worked in Washington, D.C., and for many of us activists at that time reaching out to the other side was not very valued. To read his approach today I found myself smiling and saying ‘Yes’ this is what is happening all over the place. And this is the transformation which we contribute to as we engage in contemplative practice.

I’m sure the skeptic that lives within us is saying, “Oh, come on now. This isn’t really going to work.”

So I want to end quoting McCarthy’s last response as it says so well what I believe:

Politics has become fighting for the sake of fighting for at least 30 years, and I think the results speak for themselves. Whether it’s foreign policy, whether it’s the economy – the country is in bad shape and it could get a lot worse. Both left and right are failing to achieve their own objectives with a strategy of conflict.

If that’s the case, then why are we continuing with this whole kabuki act? Why are we still having the same conflicts, using the same ritual language to denounce the other side, restating our own terms and our own principles in absolute terms that people who don’t buy into them can’t possibly work with? We have to look at a new kind of strategy. Ralph’s convergence idea is at least a starting point.

And so is **exercising contemplative power!**

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