

COUNTDOWN TO BOSTON

4 DAYS



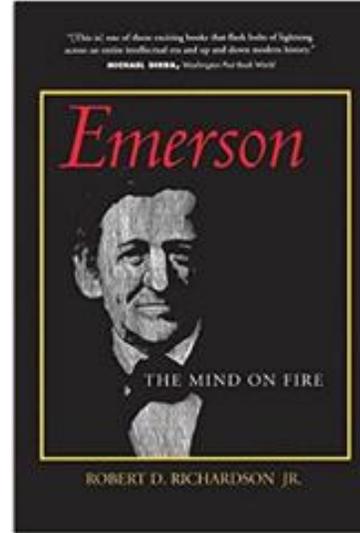
"E" is for Emerson and Effort

I had known Phil Pearl for many years, but not well, having crossed paths and held passing conversations with him when he was on the CNS Executive Committee as a Councillor for the Northeast, and prior to that when he was President of the PCN and Chair of the CNS Awards Committee, although I didn't directly liaise with either at the time. I remember being taken by both his *CNS Connections* profile and later his introduction of Rob Rust in 2015 when Rob was presented the Blue Bird Circle Training Program Director Award at the CNS Annual Meeting. But it wasn't really until December of 2018, at a reception Ann Tilton hosted at her house for child neurologists attending the AES Annual Meeting in New Orleans, that I got my first glimmer of who he was and why, I felt sure, we might "click" when and if we ever had the chance to work together closely as, indeed, we have the past two years during his CNS presidency.



Phil was playing holiday tunes at the grand piano when I rounded the corner into the room and he looked up, flashing a smile and a look of such total delight that it prompted me to recall a line from Ralph Waldo Emerson about someone "carrying the look of holiday in his eye." I didn't mention that to him then, or ever, that I can recall, so you can imagine my surprise the following summer when I flew to Boston to meet with Phil in his office to go over what he hoped to accomplish during his two-year term that would begin on the final day of the Charlotte meeting in October. Immediately as I walked in, right in the middle of his office bookshelf at eye level, my eyes fixed upon the title of a familiar and much prized book, Robert D. Richardson's magisterial biography, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*. Pure coincidence? Sure. A harbinger of good things to come? I thought so, even though he hadn't yet read it, as it turns out (he did, however, this past summer).

I'm not suggesting some crude or clumsy congruence between Phil and the Sage of Concord, but there are Emersonian parallels and approximations to be found in Phil that, I think, carried him and the CNS through the past two years of rigor and trial. They certainly carried me through. For starters, consider the book's epigraph, taken from William James, whom Emerson first met when James was a baby in his crib being shown off proudly by William Sr at the house overlooking Washington Square in New York: "We measure ourselves by many standards. Our strength and intelligence, our wealth and even our good luck, are things which warm our heart and make us feel ourselves a match for life. But deeper than all such things and able to suffice unto itself without them is the sense of the amount of effort we can put forth...He who can make none is but a shadow, he who can make much is a hero."

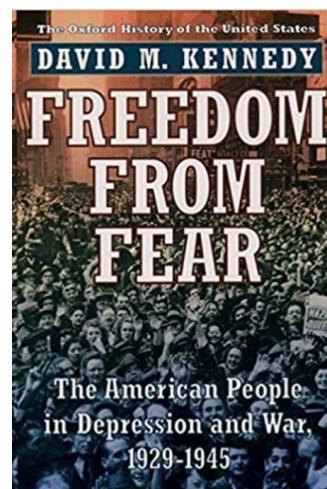


I've used that quote each of the last two years when announcing the candidates for CNS members to consider in choosing who should represent them on the Executive Committee, charting a course forward for the Society and the field. If, as most agree, Emerson was the first apostle of American social and intellectual democracy, affirming his commitment to constructing democratic communities founded on faith in the inherent dignity of each individual, James was his most forceful interpreter in the succeeding generation; his American pragmatism focused on questions like "How can one be of practical use in the world?" or "What shape might the fulfillment of individual purpose take that will make a difference?" Those are both lofty questions of calling and vocation, and more quotidian considerations child neurologists confront daily in individual practice settings, and institutionally through professional associations like the Child Neurology Society. Phil's announcement earlier this week of election results amplified that point, as he thanked and congratulated "all those who put themselves out there and ran in a national election held by a professional society...expressing an interest in serving," then adding, "We are proud of this process and appreciate everyone's commitment."

(Photo of "old" and "new" 2018-20 boards below, taken in Charlotte in October 2019)



The shift from Emerson's transcendentalism and James' pragmatism in the direction of politics is worth nothing. In a very real sense, Franklin Roosevelt's approach to the New Deal built on both philosophies, reflecting throughout the two philosophers' notably blithe lack of concern for logical consistency. Roosevelt kept coming up with new ideas and programs, searching for solutions to the Great Depression. It was telling, I thought, when early in his CNS presidency, coincident with the early days of the pandemic, Phil quoted from Roosevelt's first inaugural address delivered in 1932, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," then proceeded with FDR-like energy and resolve to stoke fires and prod efforts within the CNS to respond to both the moral and practical needs of the moment. Although Phil, like Roosevelt, is not himself a founder, his time in office was, like Roosevelt's, a second founding of sorts, a highly consequential reinterpretation and revitalization of the founders' original spirit and accomplishments.



I will not steal thunder from Phil's "State of the Union" presentation to be delivered on Thursday morning as part of the Presidential Symposium, but as he reviews the actions taken during his two-year term, listen for the echoes in this 21st century Harvard faculty member's address of the three Harvard alumni from the 19th and 20th centuries: Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And watch closely as, more than once while speaking at the podium, and several times more later in the week while seated at a keyboard, he carries in true Emersonian style "the look of holiday in his eye." He takes joy in expending effort and being useful. It was a true joy watching him work, and an even greater joy and honor to be a part of that work.

Until tomorrow (the letter "D is for Denckla")
Roger

On-line Registration is Open!

Registration is now open for the long awaited 50th Golden Anniversary Meeting of the Child Neurology Society in Boston. Registrants attending this milestone meeting live and in-person in Boston will want to register early (some sessions are limited and reservation-only). You may also use this link to modify your registration as needed, including switching from live in-person to Virtual, or vice versa.

2021 CNS 50th Annual Meeting

For more information, click button below.

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