

Scott Cline, *Archival virtue. Relationship, obligation, and the just archives*, ISBN 978-1-945246-73-9, Society of American Archivists, Chicago 2021, pp. 212

In his thought-provoking book *Archival virtue. Relationship, obligation, and the just archives*, Scott Cline challenges the profession to seriously examine what it means to be an archivist? In answering this question, he calls on archivists and the archival community to move beyond such quotidian concerns as educational requirements and the mundane description of archival tasks. Instead, S. Cline invites the reader to explore whether there are essential qualities of being an archivist (p. 19). By dividing his book into three parts, each with a specific focus, and eight chapters, he aids archivists in launching their analysis (p. 12).

In part one: *Archival Being*, S. Cline begins with a tale that speaks to the virtue and authenticity of one's occupation. This parable from the Chassidim, an 18th-century eastern European mystical revival movement in Judaism, recounts a follower of Shmelke of Nikolsburg, who requested his rabbi demonstrate to him the mystery of serving God. His teacher told him to go to Rabbi Abraham Hayyim, who was also an innkeeper. After several weeks, the student observed that Rabbi A. Hayyim seemed only to attend to business and did not exhibit any holiness (p. 19). In frustration, the pupil asked the owner what he did all day. "My most important job – A. Hayyim asserted – is to make sure the dishes are cleaned properly" (p. 20). Upon returning home, he reported back to his rebbe, who replied that now you know everything you need to know.

S. Cline asserts that this account is relevant to archivists, because it provides an applicable example for professional archival behavior. As A. Hayyim the proprietor, archivists must possess a sense of obligation and be authentically present in all their work (p. 20). He defines the interworking of these preceding characteristics as archival being. S. Cline claims that archival being is typified by authenticity, which requires archivists to embrace their archival labor as a central distinguishing element in their lives (p. 21). In addition to authenticity, archival

being also necessitates the adoption of archival faith, which recognizes the “equal and incalculable” value of every human being and the acceptance of the “other” (p. 24). Through following the virtues of radical self-understanding, intention, and integrity, he states that archivists will be able to perform their vocation in an authentic manner (p. 25). And in embodying these qualities, archivists will join in an archival covenant based on genuine encounter, sacred obligation and piety of service to their communities.

In the second section, S. Cline further expands his idea of the archival covenant through a cogent discussion of his philosophical model of “archival citizenship” (p. 61). Archival citizenship embodies a state of being, which is guided by an inherent sense of the common good and directed both individually and collectively through a belief in the sacred duty to our polity. This community, in turn, is both broad and deep, because it encompasses all archival approaches and institutions (p. 61). He also asks archivists to demonstrate archival citizenship to their diverse publics by adopting four related responsibilities: trustworthiness, professionalism, difference, and care (p. 62). In theory, these commitments seem simple to implement. In practice, however, real world application proves difficult. Regarding the obligation of difference, for example, S. Cline cites the American academic Michelle Caswell, who warns: “difference is messy; working through difference is even messier” (p. 67). Our mission, he contends, is not to simplify this duty, but instead recognize its inherent complexities. Drawing on the ethics of care approach or feminist ethics developed by such archivists as M. Caswell, Marika Cifor and Hillel Arnold, S. Cline challenges the profession to think of archival labor as care work, where our relationships to each other, our community and their stories take precedence (p. 70). He states further that this structure of care is intricately supported by the concepts of “memory as justice” and “archival validity”.

S. Cline claims that archives and memory are not the same, but share important connections (p. 76). To illustrate, both concepts are critical to creating and nurturing social and cultural identity, but both furnish incomplete, imperfect and fragmentary understandings of our world. These ideas, he argues, remain fundamentally flawed as sources of the truth (p. 76). Therefore, S. Cline maintains it is important to show how archives and memory are intricately interrelated to the archival endeavor and justice (p. 77). He asserts that this interrelationship is especially important when it comes to the battles over contested narratives and

historical accountability. S. Cline insists that the archivist's role in this struggle is to act with care, obligation, and honesty. He supports his argument by turning to American archivist Jessica Tei, who stresses that archivists have a responsibility to help fill the silences within their institutional collections. She emphasizes further that the profession has a principal obligation to portray the silenced in a way that not only honors them, but also acknowledges their historical and cultural contributions (p. 85).

S. Cline contends that archivists in their daily work serve as mediators of the record, walking a delicate middle path by making choices about whose voices will be heeded, what will be remembered and what will be forgotten (p. 86). His analysis places great importance on archival appraisal as the proper evaluative tool to preserve society's most important functions, processes, and events (p. 86). In combination with a total archives approach appraisal will achieve what S. Cline defines as archival validity. Archival validity, he maintains, encourages archivists to employ practical and moral wisdom in order to achieve truth, beauty, and justice (p. 13). Respectfully, S. Cline's line of reasoning, however, is missing one key element: archival processing. In this writer's professional experience processing human rights collections, it is in the hard labor of processing that the silenced are heard, the forsaken are memorialized, and the persecuted are liberated. In my estimation, it is archival processing that provides the bedrock for the achievement of true justice and the establishment of the just archive.

In the third part: *Archival Spirituality*, S. Cline investigates the intersection of archival being with our practical role in the world, by viewing the profession through a spiritual lens (p. 13). He strongly believes that there is self-transcendence in the daily toil of archivists (p. 122). S. Cline asserts that this transcendence plays out in our experience of history and culture (p. 135). He posits that archivists are time travelers, who live in the past, yet talk in the future tense. S. Cline declares further that archivists visit the lives of institutions and individuals, who have come before us with the hope of understanding some portion of their lives and dreams. Archivists, in turn, commit themselves to transmitting that obtained knowledge, in some ordered way, to the future (p. 136). In the concluding chapter, he proposes that the concepts expressed throughout the book be directed toward the search for moral order in the archival world. S. Cline asks archivists to become more comfortable with engaging in discourse and actions that incorporate the language of justice, truth, and faith in the archives (p. 13).

Returning to another story of a wise innkeeper, the great American hotelier Conrad Hilton revealed the secret to his success: “Live with enthusiasm”¹. C. Hilton exhorted his readers to never give up their goals in the face of hardship². Although he faced some obstacles along the way, S. Cline took up his task with great intellectual rigor and joy (pp. xv–xvi). Through a diversity of voices from a multiplicity of disciplines, he has been successful in challenging archivists to seriously examine what it means to be an archivist. For these reasons, his book should be read by all archivists everywhere, because it will remind you why we do what we do and will restore your passion for our beautiful profession. S. Cline has truly written a book that is destined to become a classic in the archival literature.

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¹ C.N. Hilton, *Be My Guest*, 3rd print., Prentice-Hall, Hoboken, New Jersey 1962, p. 349.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 349–350.