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## Review of Archival Virtue: Relationship, Obligation, and the Just Archives

J. Gordon Daines III

Brigham Young University - Utah, gordon\_daines@byu.edu

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## Review of *Archival Virtue: Relationship, Obligation, and the Just Archives*

By Scott Cline. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2021. 212 pp.  
Softcover. \$55.00. ISBN: 978-1-945246-71-5

Scott Cline's remarkable book *Archival Virtue: Relationship, Obligation, and the Just Archives* attempts to provide a coherent and meaningful answer to the question "What does it mean to be an archivist?" He draws on ideas from religion, literature, nursing, philosophy, and history to begin weaving a framework for understanding what it means to be an archivist. His book opens an important conversation and asks individual archivists to "engage in the difficult work of self-examination and values clarification" (15). This book will make archivists think about the work that they do and what motivates them to do that work. It will also help them better understand the important role that social justice can and should play in the archival field.

Scott Cline is a Distinguished Fellow of the Society of American Archivists (SAA). He is a former member of the SAA Council and a past president of the Academy of Certified Archivists and the Northwest Archivists. He was the founding archivist and director of the Seattle Municipal Archives and has been a lecturer in the University of Washington's Information School. More importantly, Cline has thought deeply about virtue theory, ethics and morality, and relationships in an archival setting. *Archival Virtue* is the result of a career spent thinking about archives and archivists and what it is that drives them.

*Archival Virtue* is an extremely readable book that is organized into three parts and eight chapters. While the book can be read from cover to cover, its design also allows it to become a reference style book that individual archivists can dip into for a refresher on different aspects of what it means to be an archivist. I would strongly recommend that you read the book in its entirety; however, there is so much rich content that you are going to have to go back and re-read sections to get a deeper understanding of the concepts explained in them. This is a book that you will need to wrestle with and that will challenge you to develop your own understanding of what it means to be an archivist. That may be the most important work that this book does. It opens a conversation within individual archivists, and it is sure to spark a conversation within the wider archival field.

The design of the book is one of its strengths. I really liked how each part of the book is self-contained but relates to the other parts of the book. Part one, *Archival Being*, describes the "existential posture that archivists assume in the world" (12). The major goal of this part of the book is to provide a framework for thinking about what it means to be an archivist in a 21st century world. Chapter one examines the concept

of archival being or, in other words, the way archivists engage in the world. Chapter two focuses on the importance of forming reciprocal and genuine relationships with those around us. In many ways, relationships are at the core of what archivists do. Part two, *Archival Citizenship*, deals with “how we engage with our professional world from the position of understanding and living our archival being” (12). Chapter three examines what it means to be an archival citizen and outlines a series of virtues including trustworthiness, professionalism, difference, and care that facilitate archival citizenship. Chapter four examines the role that archivists play in preserving the records that facilitate memory creation and that enable people to pursue justice. Chapter five discusses how archivists can explain the value of archival work to society. It focuses on the stories we tell and how to frame those stories. At the heart of part two is the importance of relationships and how those relationships form a community that enables archivists to foster the common good. Those relationships are between archivists as well as between archivists and the communities that they serve. Part three, *Archival Spirituality*, uses the concept of spirituality to frame how archivists interact with the profession and themselves. Chapter six reminds us that the “archival endeavor is about freedom and responsibility, dignity and human creativity, character and conduct, caring and doing” (124). It points to the transcendence in our work. Chapter seven challenges archivists to include spirituality as part of their encounter and relationship with others. Cline defines spirituality as “our inexorable desire and search for meaning and purpose in life, our pursuit of authenticity and genuineness, and an openness to encounter with the other that is characterized by empathy, compassion, and love” (145). Tapping into our spirituality, however that applies to individual archivists, facilitates our ability to form meaningful relationships with others and those relationships form the core of archival being. Chapter eight invites archivists to embrace the language of justice, truth, and faith in the archives.

I have long been interested in issues of professional identity. This book has made me think deeply about what it means to be archivist. It has provided me with a conceptual framework to begin to interrogate why I care so deeply about the work that I do. Archives are powerful sources of memory making and, as an archivist, I care about helping others connect with their communities and with their families. I also value relationships and the power that comes from those relationships. The work that we do as archivists provides the groundwork for how communities remember, and reconcile with, the past.

Another aspect of Cline’s book that really resonated with me was his willingness to bring spirituality into his work. Cline draws extensively on concepts from Judaism to help frame his ideas about archival being and archival spirituality. He brings his whole self to the conversation, and this adds power to his writing. Humans are spiritual beings at their core and they long for meaning and purpose in their lives. This meaning and purpose can be found in different ways, but it is vitally important that this spirituality (as Cline defines it) be part of every aspect of our lives. I am a lifelong member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and my faith deeply impacts how I derive meaning and purpose in my life. It also impacts how I

view what it means to be an archivist and why I find archival work so powerful. Scripture in the Latter-day Saint tradition strongly advocates for recordkeeping because those records allow us to remember the goodness of God and the transcendent fact that God loves us—His children. Records and recordkeeping provide important evidence of connection with the divine. My faith tradition values the importance of connection and community. I believe, with Cline, that “a spiritual orientation fosters the ability to consider situations from beyond one’s perspective” (148).

*Archival Virtue* is the beginning of an important conversation in the archival profession. It begins to elucidate a framework for thinking about what it means to be an archivist and why we should engage with the world in particular ways. It also begins to provide a rationale for archival engagement in social justice and the building of a moral order. This book should be required reading for all archivists.

J. Gordon Daines III  
*Curator of Research and Instruction  
Services  
L. Tom Perry Special Collections  
Brigham Young University  
Provo, Utah*