"To the Limit of Our Integrity": Reflections on Archival Being

Scott Cline

Abstract

Archivists toil in a professional world of power and power relationships. To mediate the power of archives and use it for the greater public good, archivists must engage their work with a deep understanding of what it means to be archivists, subscribe to a set of values that informs how they do their work, and embrace *archival being*. Four values are key to *archival being:* faith, radical self-understanding, intention, and integrity. By internalizing these values, as individuals and as a profession, archivists can better conduct their work in a moral, ethical manner for the benefit of society.

Introduction

One of the great, compelling moments in modern American literature occurs at the end of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Ken Kesey's tale of inmates in a psychiatric institution. This is the story of Randle McMurphy, a charismatic free spirit, who is committed to a ward tyrannized by the sadistic Nurse Mildred Ratched. McMurphy challenges her authority and leads a patient rebellion of sorts against the hospital's bureaucracy. Nurse Ratched ultimately employs the power of the institution to perform a lobotomy on McMurphy. As the novel concludes, one of the inmates, the hulking, introspective Chief Bromden, commits an act of heroic fratricide, smothering the nearly comatose McMurphy.[1] Through the manifestation of force, the Chief sustains a potent mythology. For the inmates, this mythology is the enduring truth of McMurphy's rebellious and

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

© Scott Cline.

[1] Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: The Viking Press, 1962).

liberating character. The Chief's actions give physical expression to Michel Foucault's definition of power: "the deployment of force and the establishment of truth."[2]

Truth, secondary to power in Foucault's equation, is a challenging idea; its definition is elusive, its usage almost always imprecise. I must confess that at times I want to believe in Hilary Jenkinson's fustian claim that "of all the persons who pay service to the cause of Truth the good Archivist is the most absolute, the most complete, the most selfless devotee."[3] But Jenkinson ascribes to us more than we are, and his employment of the term "absolute" with all of its frightening certitude, makes me uncomfortable. His Truth is always capitalized and amplified.[4]

Truth, as an objective concept, is no longer popular in archival literature. But Foucault's dominant term, "power," has received significant play in recent years, particularly following publication of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever.* For Derrida, the "archive," the source of public memory, is a site of cultural and political power. What we might call the act of archives, of storing and using memory, shapes our world, and according to Derrida, that is the ultimate act of power.[5] Bruno Latour argues that committing information to paper and then managing (or shuffling) the paper in a bureaucracy "is the source of an essential power."[6] One is reminded of Terry Gilliam's dystopian film, *Brazil,* in which bureaucratic paperwork literally rules the lives and crushes the spirits of everyone in an impersonal and comically brutish retro-future.[7]

[2] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 184. Penquin Books published the first English edition in 1977. Foucault used this definition in describing the institutional power inherent in examinations.

[3] Hilary Jenkinson, "Reflections of an Archivist," in *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice,* ed. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1984), 21. Originally published in *Contemporary Review* 165 (June 1944): 355–61.

[4] A second example is, "Archives, if conserved with fidelity and used with intelligence, give us the best chance of arriving at the facts, at undiluted Truth," Hilary Jenkinson, "The Expert Care of Archives," in *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson,* ed. Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne (London: British Society of Archivists, 1980; Society of American Archivists reissue, 2003), 195.

[5] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1–23. For particularly good summaries and analyses of specific portions of this very difficult work, see Steven Lubar, "Information Culture and the Archival Record," *American Archivist* 62 (Spring 1999), especially 12–15; and Carolyn Steedman, "Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust (Or, in the Archives with Michelet and Derrida)," in *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory,* ed. Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 4–19. The most trenchant integration of Derrida's philosophy into archival thinking can be found in several essays in Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007). Richard Cox argues that several recent works outside the archives field might be making the notion of truth popular again. See chapter 7 in *Ethics, Accountability, and Recordkeeping in a Dangerous World* (London: Facet Publishing, 2006).

[6] Bruno Latour, "Drawing Things Together," in *Representation in Scientific Practice,* ed. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990). Quoted in Lubar, "Information Culture and the Archival Record," 15–16.

[7] *Brazil,* directed by Terry Gilliam, produced by Arnon Milchan and Joseph P. Chase, distributed by 20th Century Fox and Universal Pictures, 1985.

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

This concept of power is awesome and terrifying. Recent archival literature is replete with essays illustrating the power of records to shape cultural mythology, promote political hegemony, bolster democracy and democratic institutions, construct social memory, and legitimize bureaucracy. Archives have been used as tools of oppression and, as Eric Ketelaar notes, as "instruments of empowerment and liberation, salvation and freedom." This literature also illuminates the power of the archivist in employing the profession's core functions, especially in appraisal decision-making and managing access to collections.[8] In his 2005 SAA presidential address, Rand Jimerson challenged archivists to embrace the power of archives as a solemn obligation and to use it to protect the public interest.[9] Underlying the arguments in this article are the essential questions of how we embrace this power and how we mediate the complex power relationships between the record, the user, and the archivist on the stage of our daily work. To accomplish these things with equanimity, we must engage our work with a deep understanding of what it means to be archivists and the personal and professional values to which we subscribe.

This article is not about what has been termed the archival perspective, nor the knowledge and skills that archivists must possess to preserve the historical record and support the democratic process; nor is it about the characteristics of modern management and leadership theory. Rather, it explores four core values in forming what I call *archival being*. By archival being, I mean the manner in which we are engaged in the world, both individually and collectively, as archivists and as a profession. At the heart of archival being is the concept of authenticity. *Authenticity* is defined as the intersection of how we think about our lives and our commitments to certain courses of action. Sartre argues that we each choose the type of person we want to be and that this commitment is the key or basis for discovering an authentically meaningful existence.[10] This authenticity does not automatically ensure that we are good archivists, but it inevitably

[8] On power in the archives see, for example: Patricia Galloway, "Archives, Power, and History: Dunbar Rowland and the Beginning of the State Archives of Mississippi (1902–1936)," *American Archivist* 69 (Spring/Summer, 2006): 79–116; Kyong Rae Lee, "Political Democracy and Archival Development in the Management of Presidential Records in the Republic of Korea," *American Archivist* 69 (Spring/Summer, 2006): 117–38; Eric Ketelaar, "Archives of the People, by the People, for the People," in *The Archival Image: Collected Essays by Eric Ketelaar,* ed. Yvonne Bosrops (Hilversum, Neth.: Verloren, 1997), 15–26; Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1–2, 3–4. Many more works treat the subject of power. Of particular interest, nearly all of the essays in Blouin and Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory* deal with archival power on some level. Ketelaar's quote is from "The Panoptical Archive" in Blouin and Rosenberg.

[9] A longer version of his presidential address is Randall C. Jimerson, "Embracing the Power of Archives," *American Archivist* 69 (Spring/Summer, 2006): 19–32. The essays by Patricia Galloway and Kyong Rae Lee, cited above, appear in the same issue and complement Jimerson's article.

[10] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992). Originally published in 1943.

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

compels us to embrace being archivists as our unequivocal concern. The balance of this article will consider the values that I believe inform our *being* as archivists and as a profession, and that permit us to engage our work in an authentic manner. These values are faith, radical self-understanding, intention, and integrity.

Faith

In 1944, Jenkinson, reflecting on thirty-eight years in archives, asked whether the corps of archivists was large enough to be taken seriously as a profession and whether there was anything in their work that gave special significance to the archival point of view. He wrote "My answer to the . . . questions is Yes: that is why I am writing this article: it is a profession of faith."[11] I suspect that Jenkinson's faith was in the future growth of the profession and its role in society. But noting his later use in the same article of terms such as "sanctity" and "creed," I also can imagine a more complex belief system at the heart of the phrase: "a profession of faith."

I believe that archives is a faith-based profession, not in the sense of religious faith, but rather as an organic, universal faith in the future of the species. At its deepest, most fundamental level, archives assumes a genuine faith in humanity, a faith that there will be a future and generations to which archives will matter. If we do what we do because the records we tend are to be used, do we not assume a future, whether a thousand days, a thousand years, or a thousand centuries? This *archival faith* is integral to our work; it is embedded in our professional being.

For those of us born in the long shadow of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Auschwitz, and who grew up under *Sputnik* skies and unfettered nuclear proliferation during the Cold War, any commitment to a long-term view of our existence, that is, a faith in our future, is a tenuous, if not illogical, proposition. Kierkegaard said that we can live in this world only on the strength of the absurd, which, he argued, man "grasps by faith."[12] In embracing the "absurd," archivists toil in the preservation of the past for the benefit of the present and "an indefinite future."[13]

This indefinite future lies at the heart of Kenneth Foote's discussion of collective memory and the identification of nuclear waste sites as a warning to

[11] Jenkinson, "Reflections of an Archivist," 15.

[12] Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Books USA, 2006, 1985), 52–53. Originally published in 1843 as *Frygt og Boeven* under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio.

[13] The full quote is "The wide diffusion of literacy throughout human culture has meant that an ever-widening circle of people creates records and continues into an indefinite future to make use of the information these contain." James M. O'Toole and Richard J. Cox, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006), xiii.

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

future generations. He suggests "the possibility of archives being used to help communicate across spans of time greater than any single civilization has ever endured," perhaps as long as ten millenia.[14] If we trust in the existence of those future generations, and if our goal is to preserve records into a distant, indefinite future, then we knowingly commit acts of archival faith.

The Christian theologian Schubert Ogden argues that all human beings live by an act of existential faith, which he describes as a basic confidence or assurance that life is worth living. This basic faith, he posits, grows from our trust that existence is generally somehow justified and made meaningful through our connections in the human community. We exist as social beings in relation to those around us and "temporally in relation to ancestors and descendants." Faith, whether religious or secular (or archival), is a matter of lived experience and individual or collective existence.[15] Archivists renew that faith each day through the activities we employ in speaking to the future. Hugh Taylor, contemplating the possible "gleaming technoculture of the future," argues for a holistic, spiritual, even mystical approach to an age of information ecology in which "we strive to live in the shadow of our ancestors and their fellow creatures as parts of a whole." He maintains that our success in this endeavor will depend, in part, on contemplation and the ability to "envision generations beyond our own. . . . "[16]

Archival faith is a metavalue that informs the body of our work. It also forms the bedrock for the other values discussed in this article: radical self-understanding, intention, and integrity. Martin Buber relates a story from the literature of the Chassidic Masters that speaks to these values and presents an authentic model for archival behavior.

> The story is told that a disciple of Shmelke of Nikolsburg asked his *rebbe* to teach him the mystery of serving God. The *tsaddik* told him to go to Rabbi Abraham Hayyim, who in those days was still an innkeeper. The student did as he was instructed and took up residence in the inn for several weeks. During all this time he failed to observe any special indication of holiness in the man. He seemed only to attend to his business. Finally, in desperation, the disciple went up to the innkeeper and asked what he did all day.
>
> "My most important job," said Rabbi [Hayyim], "is to make sure the dishes are cleaned properly. I do my best to make sure that no trace of food remains on the dishes. I also clean and dry the pots and pans carefully so that they do not rust."

[14] Kenneth E. Foote, "To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture," *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990): 380.

[15] Philip E. Devenish and George L. Goodwin, eds., *Witness and Existence: Essays in Honor of Schubert M. Ogden* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 12–20.

[16] Hugh A. Taylor, "Recycling the Past: The Archivist in the Age of Ecology," in *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh Taylor,* ed. Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 206–7.

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

"That's it?" asked the student incredulously.

"That's it," replied the innkeeper.

Whereupon the disciple returned home and reported what he had seen and heard to his master.

"Now you know everything you need to know," Rabbi Shmelke said.[17]

I am neither so naive nor so foolish as to perfectly equate the quest for holiness with the secular and profane world. But I do want to suggest that for archivists this story is more than a homily on piety; it is, I think, the key to *archival being*.

Radical Self-Understanding

According to twentieth-century Jewish philosopher-theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel, there are two ways of thinking: conceptual and situational. The former entails the act of reasoning to enhance our knowledge of our role in the world; detachment or what might be called objectivity characterizes it. Situational thinking involves an inner experience and strives to understand issues of personal existence. It is not about analyzing concepts, but rather is concerned with the personal encounter and exploration of situations and our need to understand that encounter. By engaging in this type of thinking and applying it to our endeavors, we make the leap toward *self-clarification* and *self-examination*. To Heschel, self-clarification is reminding ourselves "of what we stand for" and then analyzing how that affects our experiences, informs our insights, and shapes our attitudes and fundamental principles. In the archivist's circumstance, self-clarification is uncovering the meaning of our profession and distinguishing its inherent values. Self-examination is the "effort to scrutinize the authenticity of our position" and test the limits of our deep convictions about our values and principles.[18]

[17] Lawrence Kushner, *God Was in This Place and I, i Did Not Know: Finding Self, Spirituality and Ultimate Meaning* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991), 86. I have used Kushner's version of Buber's tale because it is more poetic. Martin Buber's version is in *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters,* trans. Olga Marx (New York: Schocken, 1947), 191–92.

[18] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1987; first published by the Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 5–9. Mark Greene addressed the discussion of values for the archival profession in his 2008 SAA presidential message, arguing that "Values are the embodiment of what an organization stands for, and should be the basis for the behavior of its members." He suggested that in defining core values, it is necessary to identify them in relation to archival power. He called for SAA to formally define the "core values" of the archival profession. Our respective foci are different but complimentary. He posits a set of formal professional values, an external manifestation of those values that define the profession; I am suggesting a set of personal values that are fundamental to forming archival being or what might even be called the archival soul. Mark A. Greene, "The Power of Archives: Archivists' Values and Values in the Post-Modern Age," Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, San Francisco, Calif., 29 August 2008. See his address at http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/GreeneAddressAug08.pdf, accessed 8 June 2009, and in *American Archivist* 72 (Spring/Summer 2009): 13–41.

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

Employing self-clarification and self-examination, if done successfully, leads to *radical self-understanding,* or what Kuno Fisher calls the "self-cognition of the human spirit."[19] Radical self-understanding, according to Heschel, is a process not a product; it is "thinking about thinking . . . a process of analyzing the act of thinking, as a process of introspection, of watching the intellectual self in action."[20] Heschel employs the term "radical" in its literal meaning of root or relating to the origin of something. In this sense, radical self-understanding can be understood as a product of deep reflection on the nature of one's task or work to obtain a critical appreciation, not only of the doing, but also of the reason for doing. He thus notes that "Radical self-understanding must embrace not only fruits of thinking . . . , but also the root of thinking, the depth of insight, the moments of immediacy in the communion of the self with reality."[21] It is a genuine and deep exploration of the why and what questions: why do we engage in this work and what does it mean? The archival concern then is uncovering the *depth-meaning* of archives and distinguishing its principles.

Heschel draws this philosophy of self-cognition in part from the earlier work of Edmund Husserl, who argued that philosophers cannot possibly engage in authentic philosophical explorations without genuine historical and critical self-reflection. Using the term "radical self-understanding" in his exposition on phenomenology, Husserl argued that philosophers can truly comprehend their work "only through a critical understanding of the total unity of history—our history."[22] Following this argument, archivists can engage their work authentically and discern its very nature only through a deep understanding of self and of the social, cultural, political, intellectual, and historical processes that have shaped our profession. These efforts, Heschel argues, lead us to examine whether we believe in a universal reality or merely in our own personal interests. This ongoing examination of our existence and our actions, then, is a task integral to the faithful pursuit of radical self-understanding.[23]

Radical self-understanding is not solely an individual path. It is also a collective process; the recognition that communities, whether religious, social, or professional, have a collective responsibility to strive for self-cognition. In this sense, engaging in deep contemplation and reflection collectively and as individuals is a professional virtue. As archivists, we create opportunities to achieve radical self-understanding through our interactions at national and regional

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

[19] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 5–9. Kuno Fisher, *Geschichte der Neuren Philosophie,* vol.1 (Heidelberg: Verslagbuchhandlung von Freidrich Bafferman, 1872), 11. Fisher is quoted in Heschel, 23 n. 2.

[20] Heschel, *God in Search of Man,* 5–6.

[21] Heschel, *God in Search of Man,* 8.

[22] David Carr, *Interpreting Husserl: Critical and Comparative Studies* (New York: Springer, 1987), 73; Lucius Outlaw, "Critical Theory in a Period of Radical Transformation," *Praxis International* 2 (1983): 145.

[23] Heschel, *God in Search of Man,* 6–9.

meetings, our publications, and participation in other professional forums. We can succeed in this cognitive effort when we engage this task in our daily work and professional relationships—but only when we perform the task continually as an enduring process.

Intention

To channel archival faith profitably for the benefit of the future and strive for radical self-understanding, we must convert beliefs into meaningful action. This entails constituting our work lives in such a way that our actions are consequential at all times. The point of the innkeeper's story is particularly illustrative in this respect. Important activity is not always recognized as such. The smallest action—reboxing an accession or tallying data from a reference slip, for example—is often taken for granted and treated as routine. Yet, each of these activities can be engaged in as if it is the critical point on the holistic continuum of the archival endeavor. This, admittedly, is not an easy task. Modern society, including our own profession, moves at such a rapid pace and consuming intensity that, as David Levy suggests, we have "no time to think" and even less for deep contemplation.[24] Richard Cox frames this in a way that illustrates a danger for our profession. He suggests that "Archivists and records managers often portray themselves (not necessarily on purpose) as too busy to read, to think, or to stay current with their field."[25]

This could have been Rabbi Hayyim's fate. The job of the innkeeper was intense and full, involving work around the clock, bombardment from all sides by multiple customer demands, food preparation and clean up, waiting tables, cleaning rooms, washing linens, dealing with suppliers, keeping the books—not dissimilar in breadth and complexity to the daily tasks of the archivist. Yet, we learn from the innkeeper's example that one can maintain a clear focus through the intention of one's thoughts directed toward one's actions. In the philosophy of Judaism, this is the concept of *kavannah*.

Kavannah is a Hebrew word that originally meant "to straighten or to direct" and later, in a religious context, came to mean "to direct the mind, to do a thing with intention, meaning, or purpose." While Buber defines it as "the

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

[24] David Levy, "No Time to Think," *Google Tech Talks*, 5 March 2008, available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHGcvj3JiGA, accessed 8 June 2009; David M. Levy, "No Time to Think: Reflections on Information Technology and Contemplative Scholarship," *Ethics and Information Technology* 9 (December 2007): 237–49. Levy organized a symposium on 16–17 June 2008 at the University of Washington which included over a hundred participants from a wide range of occupations and disciplines to discuss the issue of our accelerated pace of life and the need for time and space to engage in reflection and deep contemplation.

[25] Richard J. Cox, *Archives and Archivists in the Information Age* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 2004), 121.

mystery of a soul directed toward a goal,"[26] Heschel describes *kavannah* in a manner that more easily conforms to our thinking and work as archivists. He suggests that it is "the direction of the mind toward the accomplishment of a particular act, the state of being aware of what we are doing, of the task we are engaged in." But *kavannah* is more than merely a state of mind. An act may be performed in full participation of the mind and yet be discharged as little more than a perfunctory duty. Heschel emphasizes that to commit an act is one thing, "To partake of its inspiration another. . . . Those who dwell exclusively on the technicalities of performance fail to be sensitive to the essence of the task."[27] Thus, the archival analog is to recognize the implication of each thing we do, no matter how insignificant or mundane or how crucial or essential it may seem, and to engage our work with purposeful intention.

This application of intention is often described as a personal, inward approach to centering or focusing one's thoughts and actions. However, true, authentic intention is a process that reaches beyond the self and seeks to benefit others; it is outward focused, even universal, in nature. The innkeeper's actions, the model of intention, were certainly directed to others. For us, as archivists, to truly be involved in the essence of our tasks, recognition of the outward, future-directed nature of our work is essential if we are to embrace the responsibility of ensuring that what we produce has value for society. And to produce value, we must act with value.

Integrity

Hugh Taylor, whose writings often incorporate religious or spiritual language and whose most important work strikes me as a quest for radical self-understanding, penned the phrase that informs the title of this article. In pondering the knowledge, attitudes, and skills archivists need to make our way in the rapid currents of the information age, Taylor notes that "Only by exploring and extending our professional reach to the limit of our integrity, as I have tried to do, will we escape that backwater which, though apparently calm and comfortable, may also be stagnant with the signs of approaching irrelevance."[28] Taylor does not go on to define what he means by "integrity."

In practical usage and in philosophical thinking, *integrity* has different but related meanings. As a value term, it relates to the quality or content of a

[26] Martin Buber, *The Legend of the Baal-Shem* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 33.

[27] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 314–16. In another work, he notes that "all deeds . . . have to be performed not mechanically but while meditating upon their mystic significance." See Heschel, "The Mystical Element in Judaism," in *The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Religion,* ed. Louis Finkelstein (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1949), 617.

[28] Taylor, "A Life in Archives: Retrospect and Prospect," in *Imagining Archives*, 220.

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

person's character. Philosopher Cheshire Calhoun argues that integrity, as a social virtue, requires that the individual stand for something, act consistently based on that stance, and operate within a framework of respect for the judgment of others. In this sense, the individual deliberates within a community of people to discover what in life is worth doing. Others suggest integrity is the pursuit of moral purpose within the context of social norms and that it is a personal virtue with social strings attached.[29] Professional integrity, then, is governed by established standards of behavior and adherence to professional principles in conjunction with the moral and ethical beliefs of the individual; in other words, acting with personal integrity in the work environment.

Many have written in one fashion or another about archival values. But the sense of value or values that concerns me has more to do with those aspects of personal experience that are, as Sartre suggests, demands upon us. What these demands are, and how I respond, are based on what he claims is my choice of myself or the person I have chosen to be. Sartre further argues that values appear or come into play only when the individual is at some level engaged. The more one pulls out of engagement and withdraws toward reflection on and questioning of personal situations, the more one is threatened by ethical anguish.[30] Thus, reflection, meditation, and inwardness alone are not paths to the ethical; they are values only if they lead to better engagement; or, expressed another way, to action. This, in a sense, parallels the argument that intention is an outward-looking construct.

If we are to engage our work with full intention and awareness, to make a choice about who we are to be, and to act with integrity, we are ultimately compelled to ask the central question of moral philosophy posed by Kant, "What ought I to do?"[31] We tend to think of these kinds of questions as the large, overarching, even abstract questions of life. But this question, "What ought I to do?" is the most fundamental question we should ask at every turn. Rabbi Hayyim's answer was to clean the dishes so no food was present and the pots and pans did

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

[29] Cheshire Calhoun, "Standing for Something," *Journal of Philosophy* 42 (1995): 235–60. See also, Mark Halfon, *Integrity: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), and Lynne McFall, "Integrity," *Ethics* 98 (1987): 5–20. For a clear and comprehensive discussion of the various philosophical approaches to the concept of *integrity,* see Damian Cox, Marguerite La Caze, and Michael Levine, "Integrity," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2008), at http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/integrity/, accessed 8 June 2009.

[30] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* 76–77. See also, Steven Crowell, "Existentialism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/#3.2, accessed 8 June 2009.

[31] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929), B832–33. Originally published as *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in 1781. In Ken Kesey's morality tale that opened this essay, Chief Bromden's journey toward radical self-understanding leads him to ask Kant's essential question. As metaphor, his ultimate action is a redemptive act born of self-cognition, a fully constructed decision procedure, an unselfconscious concern for the other, and a fearless confrontation with the labyrinth of bureaucratic power.

not rust. My answer might be to write out an agency's full, direct name on a folder, rather than use an acronym, so as not to confuse a researcher; or to treat a homeless researcher with the same dignity and attention as a well-known architect or attorney. Every action requires a decision procedure, a mode of determining the correct action to take. To reach that decision, one must be engaged with everything one does and continually ask that fundamental question.

Kierkegaard wrote in *Fear and Trembling*, "The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which can be put from another point of view by saying that it applies at every moment."[32] On this point, the insights of Heschel, Kierkegaard, Taylor, and others convey the idea that an outward-focused engagement with the world is an obligation, and that our individual and collective work in self-cognition, awareness, and the ethical must be focused toward the other "at every moment."[33] When we do this, we operate within a moral and ethical imperative that ultimately associates archival practice and what Verne Harris terms "the call of justice."[34]

Conclusion

James O'Toole and Richard Cox point to broad knowledge "as the foundation for the archivist's perspective." Their catalog includes knowledge of creators and the context of records creation; of the records themselves and their life cycle; how recorded information might be used; and of archival principles and techniques. And they add to this a powerful ethical stance in forming the archival perspective.[35] As this article has argued, we need to go even further in our thinking to develop a sense of archival being. In his 1990 SAA presidential address, John Fleckner helped move us on that trajectory. He

[32] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 62.

[33] Much of the work of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas addresses our responsibility to "the other." See, for example, *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 6, in which he writes "addressing the other is inseparable from understanding the other."

[34] Harris, *Archives and Justice*. See especially chapter 14, "The Archive Is Politics," 239–52, for use of the quoted phrase. Much of Harris's work incorporates a consistent call for archivists to embrace social justice as a value. On social justice as an archival concern see, among other works, Rand Jimerson's two recent articles, "Embracing the Power of Archives" and "Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice," *American Archivist* 70 (Fall/Winter 2007): 252–81; Margaret Procter, Michael Cook, and Caroline Williams, eds., *Political Pressure and the Archival Record* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005); Richard J. Cox and David A. Wallace, eds., *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society* (Westport, Conn.: Quorum Books, 2002); and James O'Toole, "Archives and Historical Accountability: Toward a Moral Theology of Archives," *Archivaria* 58 (Fall 2004): 1–19. O'Toole presents a useful model for social justice and human rights as archival values in comparing the study of archival ideas and practices to the three branches of theology—philosophical, symbolic, and applied—and calling for "a moral theology of archives. . . . "

[35] O'Toole and Cox, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*, xiv–xv.

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

posited a meaning of professionalism that situates archivists in a universal vision of service. He wrote " . . . as 'professionals' we have something to profess, something more than devotion to the latest techniques. And further, that in this act of professing we tie our own self-interest to the well-being of the larger society so that our profession is not merely that of a self-interested clique, but instead a legitimate claim on behalf of the greater public interest."[36] Putting this vision into play requires an archival self-consciousness that is turned toward the other—whether colleagues, users, our institutions, or the broader society.

Personal values and commitments play a critical role in this endeavor. In his study, *Ethics, Accountability, and Recordkeeping in a Dangerous World,* Richard Cox includes a brief passage that, for my purposes, is the most important musing in the book. In suggesting that we exhibit a healthy skepticism about the claims and promises of the information age and that we look carefully at how technology affects "society, and life on earth," he asks " . . . what is our basis for doing this? For me, it is my hope in personal redemption, which provides a foundation for evaluating how and what I do, and how and what I teach. . . . it is the basis for what I choose to say, especially in the realm of ethics and morality, about how people should approach the promises of the information age."[37] I admire Cox's candor; his comment is an intensely clear statement of a personal metavalue. The basis for what I choose to say is twofold: an essential belief that public service, and all that it implies, is a higher calling; and grounding in the teachings of Jewish ethics and social justice. It is important for each of us to understand fully what our fundamental beliefs and motivations are and how they inform our thought, speech, and actions.

Looking beyond the archival perspective, this article calls archivists to recognize and formulate a clear sense of archival being and suggests four values to that end: faith, radical self-understanding, intention, and integrity. There are certainly additional characteristics relevant to establishing archival being; this list is not meant to be exhaustive. As philosopher Robert Nozick notes, "Philosophical meditations about life present a portrait, not a theory. This portrait may be made up of theoretical pieces—questions, distinctions, explanations. . . . Yet the concatenation of these bits of theory constitutes a portrait

[36] John A. Fleckner, "Dear Mary Jane: Some Reflections on Being an Archivist," *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991): 12.

[37] Richard J. Cox, *Ethics, Accountability, and Recordkeeping in a Dangerous World* (London: Facet Publishing, 2006), 16–17. Cox draws the "life on earth" quote from Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), 54. The full quote is "Since most of what we are told about new technology comes from its proponents, be deeply skeptical of all claims. Unfortunately, the major question about computers is not whether they serve you or your organizations or your business well. . . . We must look at the totality of how computers affect society, and life on earth."

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

nonetheless."[38] What I have attempted to do is paint some of that portrait, to add to the discussion of a philosophical approach to archives, to the values and characteristics required in authentically doing archives and to the underlying fundamental basis of our actions and beliefs as archivists, and human beings. These values are not necessarily particular to archivists or our profession; however, we can apply them in a uniquely archival manner, and, by doing so, we can meaningfully mediate archival power on behalf of the "greater public interest."

Andrea Hinding, in her wonderfully titled "Of Archivists and Other Termites," concludes that we need to see our "collective work as cultural, as one crucial part of a web of connectedness among people and across time. . . . Seeing archives as part of a larger phenomenon gives us another way to find meaning and value in our work."[39] Heschel suggests an attitude of meaning and value with his definition of *appreciation* as an attitude of the whole person: "It is one's being drawn to the preciousness of an object or situation. . . . The music in a score is open only to him who has music in his soul. It is not enough to play the notes; one must be what he plays . . . ; one must live what he does."[40] This, I hope, describes how most, if not all, archivists live their lives and do their work. Rabbi Hayyim did precisely this; he discovered the sacred in all of his actions, great and small, and he recognized that those actions connected with and benefited others. This is the paradigm for archival being.

Downloaded from http://meridian.allenpress.com/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.72.2.g0321510717r6j14 by guest on 25 July 2024

[38] Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 12. There are many non-archives–related works that enumerate values and characteristics that can be adapted to this thinking about archival being. Included among these are *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin,* in which he lists thirteen moral virtues that he attempted to master. The list is strikingly similar to that proposed in a later work, *Cheshbon haNefesh (A Reckoning of the Soul)* by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Levin who was writing about a particular ethics philosophy in Judaism known as *Mussar*. Susan Neiman in *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-Up Idealists* (New York: Harcourt Trade, 2008) focuses on the four virtues: happiness, reason, reverence, and hope.

[39] Andrea Hinding, "Of Archivists and Other Termites," *American Archivist* 56 (Winter 1993): 60.

[40] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 315.