

CONWAY HALL

HUMANIST LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

ACQUISITIONS POLICY

DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS POLICY

Humanism: In the context of this document, 'Humanism' is meant to be understood as that view of life which rejects supernatural explanations for reality, which is atheist or agnostic, which makes sense of the world using reason and experience, puts human welfare and fulfilment at the centre of its ethics, and which believes not in an ultimate meaning to the universe but in the capacity and obligation of human beings to make their own meaning and purpose. At different times in history, from Confucius and the pre-Socratic philosophers to the present day, this worldview has been identified by many labels – rationalism, freethought, scepticism, secularism, atheism, agnosticism, Humanism – many of which are interchangeable. If the subject of a work corresponds to the concept of 'Humanism' as it is defined here, it does not matter if the word 'Humanism' is not used in connection within it – it nonetheless falls within the scope of the Humanist Library and Archives.

Kindred organisations: In the interests of brevity, 'kindred organisations' is used to refer to those organisations (and their predecessor organisations) that are members of the Humanist Liaison Group or have an ethos similar to that of the South Place Ethical Society. These organisations include, but are not limited to, the British Humanist Association, the Ethical Union, local Ethical Societies, the National Secular Society, and the Rationalist Press Association. The collections of some of these organisations are held in the Humanist Library and Archives.

The Society: All references to 'the Society' should be read as meaning the South Place Ethical Society.

PURPOSE OF THE HUMANIST LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The Humanist Library and Archives strives to be the national research library for Humanism and closely related subjects. It is the UK's largest and most comprehensive humanist research library with a collection that includes books, periodicals and pamphlets. It is accessible to the general public for reference only, and to members of the Society and kindred organisations for loans.

SCOPE OF THE HUMANIST LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

a. Works held

The Library holds material in the following subject areas, listed according to priority.

- Works on the history of the Society and kindred organisations
- Works on Humanism by the major figures within Humanism
- Works on Humanism, including humanist beliefs, values and life choices
- Works about the founders of the Society and kindred organisations
- Works about the major figures within Humanism

b. Works not held

The Library does not hold material in the subject areas listed below, in most cases because of availability of resources in other institutions.

- The 'humanism' of the European Renaissance and Reformation
- Works on religion, unless the work contains substantial material on Humanism
- Works on science, unless the work contains substantial material on Humanism
- Works on the political movements partially related to Humanism, including radicalism, the labour movement and the suffragette movement, unless the work contains substantial material on Humanism
- Works by the founders of the Society and kindred organisations that are not about Humanism
- Works by the major figures within Humanism that are not about Humanism

c. Formats of material held

The Library is mainly interested in books and periodicals, but will collect other formats, including portraits, photographs, archival material, audio, and video, provided they fall within the scope outlined in 'Works held' above.

d. Types of material not held

The Library does not hold material of the following types, either because they are not considered relevant to the intended readership or because the Library does not have the specialised equipment necessary to interpret, preserve or access them.

- Fiction or children's books, unless the work contains substantial material on Humanism that makes it suitable for use as a teaching resource
- Textbooks and specialist academic works, unless the work contains substantial

material on Humanism

- Books in languages other than English, unless the work is of exceptional merit and an English language translation is not available
- Braille books, talking books, and electronic resources

METHODS OF ACQUISITION

The Library may acquire material in the following ways:

Purchase

New publications will be purchased, their selection to be based on criteria which will depend on the type of material and the subject area being considered, and may include:

- Correspondence with the scope of the collection
- Intended audience
- Availability at other institutions
- Price and other costs such as processing and maintenance

Preference will be given to English language material in paperback format. Readers are welcome to recommend works for purchase and a list is maintained of titles for consideration or to fill gaps in holdings.

An annual budget is allocated to the Librarian for this purpose.

Donation

The Library is always happy to accept donations or bequests that enhance its ability to fulfill its purpose, provided the following conditions are met:

- There are no unnecessary or onerous restrictions on access or availability for research
- The donor has the authority to transfer the material and signs a formal deposit agreement
- The material becomes the property of the Humanist Library and Archives, or its responsibility to be administered as it sees fit
- The donor may be requested to provide finding aids if the size of the collection is likely to render the material inaccessible until processed
- The physical condition of the material and any consequent conservation implications will be considered, as will the cost implications of processing, housing, and providing appropriate access.

We are particularly interested in books and periodicals that fill gaps in the collection, and we welcome donations of readers' own publications that meet the criteria of this policy. If they do not, the Library reserves the right to refuse donations.

Long-term loans

Custody and responsibility for material may be transferred to the Library whilst the depositor retains legal ownership. Specific agreements on the nature of the loan and any conditions of use or access will be made on a case-by-case basis, although the Library strongly prefers deposits to be donated.

Exchange

The Library seeks to acquire relevant periodicals on an exchange basis for the Society's periodical *Ethical Record*. Readers are welcome to suggest possible exchange partners.

DISPOSALS

Duplicate items are occasionally received as gifts, as are works outside the criteria of this policy. These items will either be returned to the donor or sold. Superseded books in old editions will be withdrawn unless there are specific reasons for retention (for example, because the item is of historical interest).

Damaged stock will be withdrawn if it meets the following criteria:

- It cannot be repaired without excessive cost and effort
- It is not of historical importance
- It can be replaced by a more modern edition

Withdrawn stock may be disposed of by sale to second-hand booksellers, through Library book sales, by sale or gift to other institutions or charities, or by environmentally-friendly means of destruction.

REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

The Library Advisory Group will review this policy in December 2013.