Public Library Quarterly

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wplq20

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Available online: 20 Oct 2008

To cite this article: Leonard A. Hitchcock MA, ABD, MA (2006): An Examination of Article Two of the Library Bill of Rights, Public Library Quarterly, 24:2, 1-18

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J118v24n02_01

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An Examination of Article Two of the *Library Bill of Rights*

Leonard A. Hitchcock

**ABSTRACT.** The prominence of the *Library Bill of Rights* suggests the need to examine carefully its meaning and claims. The question considered in this paper is: What sense can be made of Article Two of that document? After a lengthy examination of possible interpretations of the meaning of Article Two, and of the problems generated by those interpretations, the author concludes that the article is so flawed that a revised version is needed. A possible revision is offered.

**KEYWORDS.** *Library Bill of Rights*, Article Two, interpretation, criticism, revision, ALA policies

Article Two of the American Library Association’s *Library Bill of Rights* (*LBR*) says, in its entirety:

Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval. (*Library Bill, 2002, p. 57*)
On the face of it, the first sentence of this statement conveys a puzzling message: On the one hand, it points to a happy condition that all collection development librarians dream of, on the other, it makes a plainly impossible demand of them. The tension between these elements is palpable and disturbing, especially because the demand made is presented as a fundamental ethical obligation for those in the profession. What is inevitably brought to mind is a traditional principle in ethical theory according to which “ought” implies “can,” i.e., that an assertion of obligation only has legitimacy if its fulfillment is possible. If this is a valid rule, then the injunction of Article Two seems to self-destruct.

It is this perplexing feature of Article Two that has led me to examine it closely and, ultimately, to reach the conclusion that it is indefensible in theory and unusable in practice. In this paper, I review the history and criticism of Article Two and discuss its purported role in guiding collection development practice and defending libraries against censorship. I then examine, at some length, Article Two’s overall cogency, as well as its relationship to other principles of collection development. The paper ends with my own redraft of the article, one that seems to me both valid theoretically and applicable in practice.

**CRITICISM OF THE LBR AND ARTICLE TWO**

David Berninghausen, in 1972, wrote an article in *Library Journal* in which he alleged that those librarians advocating “social responsibility” were, in fact, attacking the *LBR* (1972, p. 3676). The controversy that ensued was intense and lengthy, but turned out to subject the *LBR* to very little critical analysis. Neither Berninghausen nor the nineteen commentators who responded to him in a later issue of *Library Journal* seriously questioned the probity of Article Two (or any other article of the *LBR*), and all argued that their own positions were consistent with it. Nonetheless, William Summers, responding to Berninghausen’s polemic, made the passing remark that, “There is not and there never has been any such animal as a balanced collection except in the minds of a few people who write esoterically about book selection and a few people who teach in library schools” (Summers, 1973, p. 26). Even Berninghausen himself, in his article, admitted, “Probably few except the very largest libraries manage to achieve . . . [collection] balance near the 100 percent level of perfection” (1972, p. 3681). Neither of these
observations, however, appeared as criticisms of Article Two, but
merely as truisms that any librarian would acknowledge.

There have been a few genuine attacks on the LBR, and on Article
Two in particular. Especially forceful and persuasive are two articles
published in an issue of Library Trends (Wiegand, 1996; Baldwin,
1996) that effectively expose the shaky conceptual underpinnings of the
LBR’s rhetoric. Shirley A. Wiegand argued that the LBR is so seri-
ously flawed in its deviation from the legal realities of First Amend-
ment rights that the ALA would do well to create two separate
documents, one of which would clarify the law, and the other would
proclaim the profession’s “aspirational and inspirational creed” (1996,
p. 75). Gordon B. Baldwin assembled a quite devastating array of argu-
ments calling into question the LBR’s cogency. He attacks not only the
legal bases of the LBR’s directives and aims, but also their feasibility.
Several of my observations in this article regarding Article Two echo
those of Mr. Baldwin.

My own previous challenge to the LBR (Hitchcock, 2000) focused
upon its doctrine concerning labeling. I argued there for the legitimacy,
and the utility, of adding critical and explanatory notes to catalog rec-
ords.

The sparse criticism of the Library Bill of Rights might be taken to
support the assertion that librarians have no real problem with Article
Two because they understand what it intends and appropriately ignore
its literal meaning.

The history of Article Two demonstrates that has not been the case.
Its proponents have made many changes to clarify meaning and to make
it a basis for library policy. These changes unfortunately have resulted
in a statement that cannot be used for either purpose. In the end, we in
the library business are left without a statement of principle or a basis of
policy that helps us defend against censorship. It is this concern that cat-
alyzed the research and writing of this article.

**HOW ARTICLE TWO CAME TO BE**

Within the ALA, the LBR has been the subject of frequent discussion
and revision since its creation in 1939. Article Two itself has undergone
substantial changes. Prior to a 1967 revision, Article Two contained
phraseology that recognized practical limitations on the presentation
of viewpoints. In 1939, the article began: “As far as available material
permits . . .” (History, 2002, p. 61), suggesting that unavailability of
material could hinder completeness of presentation. In 1948 the first sentence was altered to: “There should be the fullest practicable provision of material.” (Italics mine. History, 2002, p. 63), and this phrase, too, apparently acknowledged unspecified but unavoidable impediments to completeness. That 1948 phraseology remained unchanged in the 1961 revision (History, 2002, p. 64). The 1967 version altered the first sentence of Article Two to its present form, in which the directive to collect all viewpoints is unconditional (History, 2002, p. 67). Ervin Gaines (1967), Chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee that proposed the changes, wrote that the reason for this alteration was, “to preclude any appeal to budgetary limitations as an excuse for excluding difficult and unpopular writings” (p. 410). I shall discuss this rationale shortly.

Another aspect of Article Two’s text that provoked debate and amendment in 1967 was a clause that originated in a 1944 revision and then was retained but revised in the 1948 and 1961 versions. The clause asserted that it is those books that are “of sound factual authority” that should not be proscribed or removed from library shelves because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval (History, 2002, pp. 63, 65). A variety of considerations, including the well-publicized case of a Catholic librarian in Illinois who refused to subscribe to a Protestant publication because, in his view, it lacked “sound, factual authority,” led the Intellectual Freedom Committee to recommend removing the phrase from Article Two (History, 2002, pp. 65-66). Ervin Gaines described the effect of the removal in these words: “librarians no longer have the option of using it as a shield for their prejudices” (Gains, 1973, p. 36). Unlike the previously discussed 1967 revision, which I shall argue was ill-considered, this one was probably wise. However, I have proposed elsewhere (Hitchcock, 2000) that it is both justifiable and advisable for librarians to insert an explanatory note in a catalog record that has the effect of warning a reader that a book has come under attack for failing to be sound and factual.

In 1980, the phrase “and historical” was added to the first sentence of Article Two, substantially broadening the scope of its application (History, p. 66). Since then, Article Two has not been altered. The ALA committee that watches over the LBR has handled possible changes in Article Two as “Interpretations” that apply it to new circumstances and types of library materials.

These revision efforts demonstrate that Article Two’s proponents were attempting to create a policy document that librarians were to take literally. Otherwise, they would not have taken such trouble to eliminate
what they saw as the “loopholes” that practicing librarians would use by error or intent. The current version, in other words, seems intended to say exactly what it means.

**TREATMENT OF ARTICLE TWO IN COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT TEXTS**

Virtually all recent and current textbooks on collection development recommend that the *LBR* be inserted in toto, or at least referred to, in collection development policies. Do such texts go beyond that, however, discussing Article Two and calling on it to support collection development policies? The literature shows little evidence that they do either.

Curley and Broderick include a copy of the *LBR* in the appendices of their collection development text, *Building Library Collections* (1985), and they do recommend that librarians build a variety of viewpoints into their collections. They do not call upon Article Two to justify those recommendations. Instead, they argue, for example, that good administrators should “try to build a staff that contains a wide range of views on major issues, thus assuring that neither the staff nor the library collection reflects a single, dominant point of view” (p. 35). They also bring up the “traditional statement of principle” that the library should “See to it that No Race, Nationality, Profession, Trade, Religion, School of Thought or Local Custom is Overlooked,” (p. 35) a principle that would appear to embody the dictate of Article Two.

In the discussion that follows, however, Curley and Broderick come close to repudiating that dictate. They point out that the principle, insofar as it refers to schools of thought, might be taken to imply that a library should, for example, “buy materials that preach the inherent inferiority of non-whites . . . [or] materials offensive to a particular religion within its community.” They then simply toss this hot potato to the reader, suggesting that “librarians must work through for themselves where they stand on this explosive issue (p. 37).

Ultimately, for Curley and Broderick, the overriding rationale for creating a collection that expresses diverse viewpoints seems to be that “All people pay taxes to support the library and have a right to find their views represented in its collection” (p. 151). Thus, Article Two is bypassed as a way of establishing the need for diversity; it is, instead, the commandment to respond to the legitimate demands of the community that requires the librarian to gather diverse materials.
In an earlier edition of the same text, *Building Library Collections*, the authors Bonk and Magrill (1979) are similarly reluctant to bring Article Two into a discussion of guidelines for selection. They review, in their chapter entitled “The principles of selection for public libraries,” (pp.1-24) a great number of such principles, embodying many conflicting perspectives. They include the “traditional” principle referred to by Curley and Broderick, i.e., the one which brings to mind the position of Article Two that no “school of thought” should be overlooked (p. 5). But the context of Bonk and Magrill’s discussion of these principles is summed up in the conclusion to the chapter, in which they counsel the need for “the continual balancing of one principle against another in terms of the immediate library situation” (p. 21). The principle reflecting the attitude of Article Two is characterized as one which is championed by those who “profess the ideal” and seek to respond to the viewpoints of potential library patrons, not only those that are “active, present” ones (pp. 21, 5). Opposed to this group are those who “stress the realities of community service to particular readers” (p. 13). The authors make it clear that only certain libraries—for example, large public libraries—will be justified in pursuing with any seriousness the ideal enunciated by that principle (p. 14). More importantly, even the manner in which the principle is described suggests that the overriding consideration for the librarian are the needs—actual or potential—of the community, and not the non-situational imperative that Article Two seems to represent.

Bonk and Magrill do come very close to acknowledging Article Two in their discussion of the selection of books in the subject area of religion. After reminding the reader that “religion has bred many disputatious items,” they point out that “If the public library tries to carry out its purpose of presenting the various points of view on matters of controversy, it may find itself buying materials which bitterly attack one or another of the organized churches” (p. 78).

The purpose referred to is, indeed, very like that enunciated in Article Two, but the prospect of collecting such material is clearly not a pleasant one for Bonk and Magrill, and they proceed to justify a practice that is inconsistent with the very “purpose” that they cite: the use of additional criteria. Polemical works, they insist, should “contain no distortions or misrepresentations,” and should provide “substantiating evidence” and not “emotional opposition alone.” When the library is offered unsolicited gifts of such material, it is advised to apply the standards of “objectivity, utility, and general interest” and be prepared to apply a “touch of the diplomat” to “show the zealous that the library does not consider their materials suitable for the public library shelves”
(pp. 78-79). And, with regard to “catechizing” materials, these are clearly “too specialized for the general interest of the community” (p. 79). In other words, they choose to repudiate, on the basis of both “quality” and considerations of community need, the stern demands of Article Two.

In his chapters on “The Philosophy of Selection” and “The Selection Process” in *Collection Development: The Selection of Materials for Libraries*, Katz (1980), like the previous authors, makes no explicit mention of Article Two, or of the directive it embodies. Article Two’s diversity requirement makes its only appearance in an excerpt from the *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, cited in Katz’s chapter on “Selection and Censorship” (p. 318).

Broadus, on the other hand, in his text’s chapter on “General Principles of Selection” (1973), does bring up the diversity requirement of Article Two, though somewhat as an afterthought, in a section entitled “Lacunae” that deals with “other factors not to be overlooked” (p. 25). Broadus asserts that “In order to be fair and to insure the presentation of as much truth as possible, there should be some material on all sides of controversial issues” (p. 25). But he immediately backs away from this by adding, as clarification, that “All responsible opinion should be represented [italics mine],” and illustrates this point with the remark that “there is no reason to give absolutely equal time to flat-earth advocates in order to balance those of the spherical and pear-shape persuasions. One or two books on the former position should suffice” (p. 25).

**ARTICLE TWO IN DEFENDING LIBRARIES AGAINST CENSORSHIP**

If Article Two seems to play little more than a walk-on role in texts on collection development, it would seem destined for stardom when the issue is defending libraries against censorship. As Wood and Hoffman (2002) put the matter in *Library Collection Development Policies*, most libraries, when dealing with cases of censorship, “have opted for basing their stance on an endorsement of one or more policy statements developed by the American Library Association for this purpose. ALA’s core document is the Library Bill of Rights” (p. 60).

The reasons for the LBR’s prominence in anti-censorship strategies are obvious. A citizen who persistently seeks to have a library remove a book from its shelves will be confronted, at some point, with that library’s commitment to the LBR, in which Article Two’s second
sentence explicitly states that materials are not to be “proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval” (Library Bill, p. 57). Though it is the second sentence that most directly addresses this matter, Article Two’s first sentence is by no means irrelevant to the anti-censorship cause and cannot be ignored. For one thing, if a library declares its acceptance of the obligation to present all points of view, it gains the moral high ground whenever it is pressured to remove materials. Furthermore, there is an implied argument in that sentence that independently leads to the proposition asserted in the second sentence. The argument is simply this:

(A) The library must present all points of view; Book X (already in the collection) presents a point of view; Therefore . . . the library must retain Book X.

Article Two’s prowess in combating censorship thus seems assured; it explicitly forbids censorship in its second sentence and establishes a premise that leads to the same conclusion in its first sentence.

What we seem to have discovered at this point, is that the history of Article Two’s formulations suggests that it has always been taken quite literally, but that librarians have displayed some ambivalence regarding its usefulness when so interpreted. Article Two receives little respect as a working principle in collection development, but it is widely believed to support libraries in their struggle to fend off censorship by the public. For purposes of public consumption, in other words, librarians are content to have Article Two (and probably its companion articles in the LBR, as well), taken at face value. For private use, i.e., as a guideline for professional practice, it is either ignored or re-interpreted.

The librarian’s inclination to let the public read Article Two literally at least has the virtue of coinciding with what the public is going to do anyway if left to its own devices. The problem that arises, however, is that there are reasons to doubt that Article Two, thus interpreted, is really such a dependable ally in the crusade against the would-be censor. Unfortunately, there is good reason to believe that it is actually imprudent to encourage, or even tolerate, that interpretation.

To begin with, there is another argument implied by the first sentence of Article Two:

(B) The library must present all points of view; Book Y (not now in the collection) presents a point of view; Therefore . . . the library must acquire Book Y.
What, then, if citizens took seriously this apparent implication of Article Two, understood literally, and availed themselves of the opportunity to attack a library for *failing to fulfill its collecting obligations* as prescribed in that article? Suppose, for example, that a citizen makes the case that a library had not acquired “all points of view” on a given issue. (It is hard to imagine that such a case would be difficult to make.) On the basis of this claim, the citizen charges the library with (1) failure to follow its prime directive (presenting all points of view), and (2) possessing an unbalanced collection, i.e., presenting some points of view on an issue but not others. Would not that citizen then be entitled to demand that the library either buy books presenting all of the un-presented points of view, or, alternatively, remove the books which were already owned, in order to restore “balance”? If the library takes the latter course, which appears to be the most feasible (and cheapest) of the alternatives, then, for all practical purposes, it would have succumbed to patron censorship. And, if it takes the former course of action, it accepts a preemption of its right to select materials.

So, Argument B, no less than the direct and explicit commandment of Article Two’s first sentence, seems clearly to oblige a library to take every opportunity to *add* points of view to its collection. Citizens have, in fact, brought charges against libraries for a failure to do so. In the March, 2001 issue of *American Libraries* (pp. 34-36), Chris Kertesz reports several cases in which individuals have attempted to donate books to libraries, had them refused, and subsequently accused their libraries of censorship. There is also the interesting case of a refusal by the Toledo-Lucas County Library to accept a gift of George Grant’s *Killer Angel*, a decidedly unflattering portrait of Elizabeth Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood. An online news source (Poole, 2004) quotes the Office of Intellectual Freedom’s Judith Krug as defending the library’s decision by arguing that selectors should be given wide discretion in determining what materials are in the library’s collection and insisting that the book was not “banned” because it had never been acquired. Her response, in other words, consists of a stout, if simplistic, defense of the “right” of the librarian to select whatever he or she wants, and a linguistic quibble about the meaning of “banned,” all the while ignoring the clear principle of Article Two.

Merritt discusses the case of the citizen who “protests the absence of books which have not been selected” (1970, p. 15), admitting that this may be a more difficult problem than its obverse case, in which a library must defend the presence of books. His solution to the problem is,
However, no more persuasive than Ms. Krug’s. First he stigmatizes the motive of those who would have libraries add materials as a desire to have the library “serve their propagandistic purposes.” Then he argues that it is only “when it is clear that the patron wants to read the book” that the librarian should “consider very carefully” the request for it. The operative rule is: “There is no reason . . . either to buy the book or borrow it because an interested citizen wants it to be available for others to read” (p. 15).

Only a few pages earlier, Merritt had argued for the need to strike a balance between the “value theory” and the “demand theory” of book selection, that is, to give equal weight to intrinsic value and community demand when selecting. Now he seems to have swung around to the view that demand is all that matters, and that the only legitimate demand is a patron’s desire to personally read a given book. Without that, a request needn’t be given serious consideration. Whether or not this is a defensible position, the rationale that Merritt offers totally ignores the apparent claims of Article Two, which clearly do not tie the obligation to represent all points of view to the desires of patrons, whatever their motives. In Article Two, the obligation is presented as a priori.

Another possible target for critics when a library claims to accept Article Two at its face value is that library’s weeding policy. The library literature doesn’t seem to find weeding policies to be particularly susceptible to criticism. Slote, when listing the “factors discouraging weeding,” is willing to include, sarcastically, the “sacredness of the collection” as one such factor, but makes no mention of the commandment of Article Two (1997, pp. 5-6). Bonk and Magrill (1979, pp. 314-315), who also take note of some librarians’ “exalted view of the book” as a cause of a reluctance to weed, acknowledge only cost and lack of time as reasonable excuses for not doing so.

But the question must be raised: Can weeding ever be justified if removing books from the collection, for whatever reason, removes points of view not replicated in the books that remain in the collection? How could such an action not constitute a clear violation of Article Two, taken at face value? Even the apparently most neutral, unbiased weeding process, one that, for example, discards any material that has not been checked out for several years, should be impermissible by that standard.

The LBR itself doesn’t discuss weeding, but its interpretation entitled Evaluating Library Collections states that “. . . obsolete materials may be replaced or removed in accordance with the collection maintenance
policy of a given library” (Evaluating, 2002, p. 136). How can this be reconciled with the first sentence of Article Two? Does Article Two in any way imply that points of view become obsolete? No, it simply commands that all viewpoints are to be presented, and on both “... current and historical issues” (Library Bill, p. 57). To me, this suggests that Article Two would require, for example, that a library “present” both Pope Urban VIII’s Ptolemaic viewpoint regarding the planetary system, and that of Galileo. Though both are, in some scientific sense, “obsolete” viewpoints, as measured against current astronomical knowledge, they both played vital roles in the history of science. Thus does Evaluating Library Collections, which quotes Article Two in its entirety, appear to betray the very principle it purports to explain.

Admittedly, Evaluating Library Collections does have second thoughts about weeding, but that’s because of Article Two’s second, anti-censorship sentence, not its first. The interpretation worries that such a procedure might be “... used as a convenient means to remove materials presumed to be controversial or disapproved of by segments of the community” (2002, p. 136). Let us give some thought to this argument.

To oppose weeding only when it might be used to cover up censorship implies, clearly enough, that if the motivation to dispose of controversial materials has nothing to do with their controversial content, then their removal is permissible. Presumably, then, if a library had a weeding policy that simply disposed of all books that had not been checked out for ten years, thus ensuring that no tainted motive could enter into the process, that policy would violate no principle. But the consequences of such a policy would surely be to gradually weed materials that did not suit popular taste or opinion, shaping the collection into one which reflected only the views and interests of its users. Would not the apparent intent of Article Two be violated by such a policy?

I have argued to this point that a literal interpretation of Article Two is implied by the history of the text itself and also by the use libraries make of the article’s assertions in combating censorship. And yet, a consequence of taking the article at its word is that a library, in doing so, opens itself to attack on the grounds that it fails to abide by its own principles. Perhaps it would be useful to investigate the arguments that led the ALA to its current formulation of Article Two. If they are weak, there may, in fact, be no good reason to tolerate the article’s awkward consequences.
A CLOSER LOOK

It is worth recalling, to begin with, that Article Two did not always make the demand that all points of view must be represented in a collection. For twenty-seven years prior to the 1967 revision, Article Two’s directive regarding presentation of all viewpoints was conditioned by recognition of the impossibility of literally obeying it. The phrase “There should be the fullest practicable [italics mine] provision of . . .” served this purpose. Why was that phrase dropped in favor of the unqualified “Libraries should provide books and other materials . . .”? As mentioned earlier, Ervin Gaines, who was, at the time of the revision, the chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee proposing the change, explained that the original phrase was removed in order to “preclude any appeal to budgetary limitations as an excuse for excluding difficult and unpopular writings” (1967, p. 410).

The oddity of this rationale is striking. Are we to suppose, to begin with, that librarians are regularly required to respond to public challenges arising from their decisions to not purchase books? However unrealistic this seems, at least one librarian, Merritt, appears not only to entertain this possibility, but regard it as quite threatening. He asserts that “the reader who chooses to argue can almost invariably place the librarian in an untenable position. If the book in question is of dubious value the reader can find a lot of volumes already on the shelves equally if not more dubious” (1970, p. 21). Merritt concludes that “the plea of poverty is one which librarians must learn to avoid as being too easy an answer to an important question and one which only the casual inquirer will accept and which the intelligent reader considers either evasive or dishonest” (p. 22). Katz, as well, cautions against the use of this defense, for essentially the same reason (1980, p. 108).

Yet I think it’s likely that employment of the poverty excuse in a public confrontation is not what Gaines and the committee were chiefly concerned with; rather, they were concerned that librarians would use the excuse to justify to themselves such self-censoring selection behavior. This fear of librarians’ covert misuse of budgetary restraints in making selection decisions is certainly to be found in the literature. Curley and Broderick, for example, in an apparent effort to counteract such tendencies, put forward the view that librarians should see to it that “at least twenty-five percent of the materials they buy for the library are personally offensive to them” (1985, p. 150).

Is it, in fact, realistic to assume that librarians justify bias in their selection practices by reflecting upon their budgetary restrictions? How
often does it happen that a book selector runs out of money just as he or she is contemplating a particular purchase? Ordinarily, as long as there is any money to buy books, it is possible to choose to buy a particular book “x,” either outright or in place of some other book. So, practically speaking, within any given fiscal year, lack of funds is seldom a credible excuse for a failure to buy book x. And even if it were, there would be no excuse at all for failure to buy that book in the following fiscal year.

The committee’s rationale is not only unrealistic in this regard, it also underestimates the resourcefulness of librarians in assuming that depriving them of one “excuse” for not buying books will make a significant difference in their behavior. Surely any selection librarian could come up with a half-a-dozen decent excuses/reasons for not buying book x.

In any case, and as I have attempted to show already, however tempted librarians may be to refrain from purchasing books they disapprove of, and however effective it may be to deprive them of one, rather lame, excuse for succumbing to that temptation, the 1967 change in Article Two that the committee brought about creates a much bigger problem than it solves by depriving librarians of the ability to defend themselves and their libraries against the charge that their collections are incomplete, hence unbalanced.

It begins to appear that a non-literal interpretation of Article Two might, after all, be preferable. The most promising candidate for such an interpretation is the claim that Article Two’s first sentence directive should be understood to express only a laudable aspiration, a distant, and perhaps unreachable, goal. Richard Gardner, for example, discussing the theory and principles of selection, says, “It cannot be stressed enough that the selector should constantly strive for balance in the collection, to present all points of view in as equitable a manner as possible. Often this will seem an impossible task, but it should always be the goal” (1981, p. 191).

One can’t avoid wondering why, if that is what the authors of Article Two intended, they wouldn’t have said it. Admittedly, the ALA leans toward a rather biblical rhetoric in the LBR and prefers the language of moral imperatives. But this doesn’t relieve it of the responsibility to say what it really means.

The practical impossibility of achieving the goal in question might also seem to count against this interpretation. Religions, however, seem to have no problem with impossible goals; moreover, one can always strive to fall less far short of a goal, and congratulate oneself upon exceeding others in the degree of one’s accomplishment, however
inadequate it might be. But two problems suggest themselves: First, the “goal” of Article Two is not merely an unreachable one, it is also always over the horizon in an unknown direction. Consider the simple question of what practical steps a collection development librarian should take to follow Article Two’s directive. Should she examine each new book to determine its viewpoint and then seek out books that take alternative positions? Should she pick an “issue of the week,” evaluate the spectrum of views already represented in the collection, then select new books to fill gaps? But what “issues” deserve to be selected, and which ignored? The proper path to a balanced collection is not so easy to find.

Second, a simple question confronts those who opt for the “goal interpretation:” Is it indeed the case that the “goal” implied in Article Two is always a legitimate and worthy one? What happens when pursuing this goal conflicts with other goals? In practice, should achieving balance always trump other collection development considerations, such as building the children’s book collection, or replacing that old edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica? All texts that propose to guide librarians in collection development state emphatically that the actual needs of the community of users are primary. Meeting those needs might well make Article Two’s “goal” the wrong goal—or at least drop it to a lower priority within a library’s collection development framework.

Whether one is a literalist or a non-literalist, the text of Article Two presents other problems of interpretation. How, for example, are “points of view” to be construed? If in accordance with common sense, then the argument could be made that there are roughly as many points of view as there are people with an opinion. It may seem wiser to interpolate the word “significant” before the phrase, and, indeed, that is explicitly stated in many texts on collection development. Robert Broadus, for example, in the passage quoted previously (1973, p. 25) says that responsible opinion should be represented in a collection. Even the Intellectual Freedom Manual (fifth edition) suggests the following language for collection development policies: “Collection development shall be content neutral so that the library represents significant viewpoints [italics mine] on subjects of interest...” (Development, 1996, p. 204).

At the same time, inserting “significant” before the phrase introduces the problem of determining how significance is to be attributed. It seems doubtful that there are, in fact, trustworthy criteria that would enable one to distinguish unerringly between the significant and the insignificant. If it is asserted that some viewpoint is “significant,” one finds it appropriate to ask, “Significant to whom? And when?”
An even more serious problem concerns what it means for a library collection to “present” a point of view. Any satisfactory presentation of a point of view must contain more than a simple statement of that viewpoint. After all, behind every statement of a position lies a congeries of assumptions and arguments that define, elucidate and support that position. A mere statement of any position is little more than a label for it. Even when secondary literature discusses a position at length, it inevitably introduces its own point of view. Furthermore, it cannot be depended upon to make a full and persuasive effort on behalf of a given viewpoint. Those familiar with the history of ideas would suggest that the only fair and accurate way in which a library can present a point of view is either in the words of its originator, or in those of one of its recognized and respected proponents. That is to say: only primary literature will do the job. Just as no one would assert, in the case of fiction, that a Masterplots summary of *Oliver Twist* could legitimately replace the original novel, so, in non-fiction literature, it would be absurd to argue that a library that possessed a history of classical philosophy could legitimately fail to possess Plato’s *Dialogues*.

A final difficulty should be mentioned: How sound is the supposition lying behind Article Two’s apparent insistence that the library be a resource providing all viewpoints on issues? Arguably, the social goal that librarians pursue is to present a complete spectrum of viewpoints, thus enabling the citizenry to profit from the marketplace of ideas. But why must the library behave as though it’s the only source of available viewpoints, especially when individuals and communities are being bombarded by viewpoints from national and local print and electronic media, the pulpit, elected and appointed officials, the chamber of commerce and individual businesses?

In this modern-day setting, couldn’t it be argued that the library should seek to balance the presentation of viewpoints to which the public is *actually exposed*? In other words, in response to the prevalent biases of the makers of public opinion, shouldn’t it make an extra effort to present viewpoints that are under-represented in the public arena?

**WORKING TOWARD A USABLE ALTERNATIVE TO ARTICLE TWO**

The issues that I have raised regarding the interpretation of Article Two of the *Library Bill of Rights* lead me to the conclusion that, in its present form, Article Two cannot be taken seriously in either a literal or
figurative way. I believe, in fact, that it is so deeply flawed that a full-scale revision is called for. The criteria for a responsible re-formulation, in my view, are that the article must say what it means, be easily understood, and be honest with the public. In order to do so, it must eschew the absolutist language of the current version and exhort libraries to strive for a realizable goal. It must acknowledge that there are limits to what a given library can achieve in presenting different points of view, and explain that these limits are a consequence of rational choices between competing library goals, all of which reflect the intent to serve the library patrons’ interests.

Within the context I have developed in this paper, I offer the following revision of Article Two for the reader’s consideration.

**Article Two**

A library should seek, within the constraints of its budget and its overall obligation to address the needs of its users, to acquire materials that present significant and disparate points of view on issues of interest to those users. Whenever possible, materials presenting those points of view should do so in a comprehensive and cogent manner, preferably in the words of authoritative proponents of the viewpoints. Furthermore, a library should strive to represent within its collection not merely the dominant viewpoints within its community, but also those held by that community’s minorities. With full awareness that, within its collection, a perfect balance and comprehensiveness of viewpoints will never be achieved, a Library should hold as valuable whatever it succeeds in acquiring and oppose all efforts to remove materials from the collection that express points of view that are alleged to be, in some way, and to some user or users, objectionable.

I have no doubt that readers will find weaknesses and obscurities in this draft, not to mention questionable assertions. It represents, I realize, a radical change from the existing text of Article Two, both in content and tone. And, in both respects, it is incompatible with the other articles of the Library Bill of Rights. But if the current text of Article Two is as seriously flawed as I allege, it is unwise for the profession to continue to treat it as a firm foundation for our collection development and anticensorship policies. An effort should be made to reform Article Two, to bring it into line with the realities of library practice and make it consistent with the authentic philosophical principles in which librarians
believe. The elected officials and staff of the American Library Association need to take the lead in bringing about this important reform. The place to begin is within the membership of the ALA committees charged with overseeing and reforming the canons on which the profession builds its future.

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Received: 06/05
Accepted: 07/05