

David Pollock

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4 July 2023, The Great Room, Royal
Society of Arts

Celebrant: Andrew Copson



Humanist
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Memorial for David Pollock, held in the Great Room, Royal Society of Arts.

Welcome to this celebration of the life of David Pollock. This is our opportunity to remember our friend and his contributions to national and international humanism, which were so significant.

We will have reflections from colleagues and readings from David's own work. Then - just as importantly - we will all have the opportunity to spend time together to share our own memories of David with all those here today who knew and loved him.

My name is Andrew Copson, I'm a friend of David's and the Chief Executive of Humanists UK where we worked together for nearly twenty years. Today's celebration is rooted in the humanist outlook that David held and did so much to promote. That this beautiful planet is our only home, that death is the end of life, and that, our human endeavours being all we have, we should care for and nurture each other and ourselves.

Several weeks have now passed since David's death. The pain of loss is still real but over the past few weeks we have also been looking back on our memories of him with the gratitude that comes from having had him in our lives.

David's legacy is in the friendship that he shared, the wisdom and knowledge he imparted, and the influence he exerted and as we move forward, we carry this legacy with us.

When I visited him just 48 hours before the end, David said how happy he was with his life: that he had done all the work he wanted to do. He left with great love for all his family, gratitude for his friends, praised in particular all those with whom he had worked for humanism, and was genuinely unafraid of death itself.

As he wrote just a few weeks before he died:

Humanists believe this is the only life we have, and that there is no externally imposed purpose or meaning to it. But we can adopt purposes and meanings for ourselves depending on our

interests, talents, and circumstances. And at the end of our lives we can look back and assess whether we have made good use of our time. On the whole, I think I have done so.

Before we talk further about David's life in humanism, his son Lindsay is here to give his own tribute to his dad.

[Contribution ex tempore by Lindsay Pollock]

David was born on 3rd February 1942 and turned out to be the eldest of four brothers in a large and loving extended middle class family with progressive tendencies. He had many happy and vivid memories from his childhood, which was secure and supportive, including of a much loved grandmother, his Nanny. He was the sort of student that teachers were fond of and to whom they give special attention. It was in primary school that he privately gave up on religion but for all other types of education he gained a lifelong interest. At his first school and later in his grammar school he was fortunate to have teachers who inspired in him not just a love of learning but a love of the theatre and of opera that stayed with him always and gave him - and many of us who accompanied him or read his annual Christmas letter reviews - enormous pleasure.

David's time at university - Keble College, Oxford opened him up to radical politics. As he recalled:

The ambience at Oxford was of freedom to question the status quo, openness to seemingly wild ideas, and realistic ambition to improve things - after all, at that time none of the late-1960s reforms had been achieved, and they did not look at the time like low-hanging fruit that by today's standards they were.

On graduating, a professional life in the National Coal Board together with the pursuit of Labour Party politics filled his life for many years, as did family and friends. After a couple of decades, the Thatcher regime made David's exit from the Coal Board inevitable and he became the Director of Action on Smoking and Health from 1991 and 1995, and then of the Continenence Foundation from 1996 to 2001. His research while at ASH led to his writing "Denial & Delay: The Political History of Smoking and Health, 1951-1964", a landmark work of which he remained proud.

On retirement in 2001 David dedicated himself mostly to humanism but with plenty of other volunteering as well as gardening, theatre, bridge, music, books, and time for friends and family. His full and active life drew to its close slowly and then suddenly. Diagnosed with lymphoma in 2019 he outperformed medical expectations - repeatedly - until he died on 12 May after only a very few days in the hospice.

David was a thinker, activist, and writer of enormous energy and vision. His contribution to the Europe-wide humanist movement has had no equal ever and in the UK his contribution to our movement was equalled only by those who formed it in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

He was a humanist activist for over sixty years and his standout contribution came in three waves. First his involvement with the student movement, then his 1960s and 70s involvement with the national humanist political agenda, and finally from 1997 his second wave of involvement in national humanist campaigning as well as considerable international work. Throughout all this he was a director of the Rationalist Press Association for nearly forty years and of Humanists UK for over thirty years, turning from young Turk to wise old head in due course. His achievements in these roles were legion - too numerous to describe in full - but you can read more about them in the published histories of both organisations in which David features prominently.

David started down the humanist path in his early teens, when, as he remembered:

Around the age of 13, seeing that various friends were taking religion seriously, I decided I should read the Bible, but I got only as far as halfway through Exodus before deciding that it was a total waste of time.

When David joined the Oxford University Humanist Group in 1961 it gave him, as he put it, a label for what he said until then were 'poorly articulated beliefs' and introduced him to the national humanist movement. To tell us something about that is Humanists UK's current Director of Public Affairs Richy Thompson, who met David when he himself was a student humanist activist.

Richy Thompson: I first got to know David in the late 2000s, when I was a student involved in student humanism, at Oxford. At that time student humanist groups were being established across the country and this was the first time that was true since David was involved in Oxford University Humanist Group in the early 1960s.

Someone told me that there was a man still involved in the humanist movement who had been involved in the 1960s predecessor of my current society and so I decided to reach out. What I got back was this amazing email of all the activities they got up to. I'll now read it to you:

I joined the OU Humanist Group in Hilary 1961, having somehow missed it at the preceding Freshers' Fair. By the time I was president in Michaelmas 1962 we were the largest OU society, with over 1,200 members at 2s 6d a time. We had 12 main meetings with invited speakers (among them Nora Beloff of the Observer, Prof Lionel Elvin of the London Univ. Inst. of Education, Robert Graves, A J Ayer, Prof HLA Hart, Sir Julian Huxley and novelist Marghanita Laski). Audiences were often numbered in hundreds – once nearly a thousand – at a time when the university was under 10,000 strong. In addition, we had weekly War on Want lunches, six Sunday afternoon discussion groups, and five Sunday evening philosophical discussion groups. We printed our own posters and programme card on a small flatbed press with moveable type and took in a lot of profitable printing for other clubs*. And of course we had weekly committee meetings.

* We also printed an Easter card – front cover: Get Well Soon, Jesus / inside: Hope to see you up and about again in 2 or 3 days! – and put copies marked 1/6d in pencil in the rack at WH Smiths!

Twice while I was up there was a Mission to the University, and on each occasion we ran strong opposition – in fact, the Times reported that the problems at Oxford featured in a World Council of Churches debate in Geneva! We had dozens of letters in the national press, the Church of England Newspaper asked me to write an article on why I was not a Christian and the subsequent correspondence ran for a whole term.

Of course, things were very different then. It was before the major law reforms of the later 1960s (abortion, homosexuality, divorce, theatre censorship) and attitudes were unrecognisable: for example, when an article in Isis about the Humanists referred scathingly to one of them being pregnant (it was actually the girlfriend of our publicity officer) and she replied in a letter in the next issue, all of Fleet Street was suddenly around our ears, with open cheque books in the Union bar (and the publicity officer of course had to field them and only just managed to sweep her impedimenta into a drawer in his digs before they got to him). We

managed to protect her identity at that time but she was sent down later as the pregnancy became more evident.

Enough!

- David

1960s

Humanism in the 1960s had an infrastructure problem. The national organisations, as charities or aspirant charities, could not politically campaign but humanism would look to be a poor thing if it could not make its political ambitions clear. In 1965 as a solution to this, David, still only in his early twenties, founded the Humanist Lobby, and became its Secretary. The Lobby worked to advocate to parliamentarians directly but equally to encourage humanists to become politically active themselves.

David also worked to organise a Humanist Parliamentary Group, with parliamentarians like Leo Abse, Bessie Braddock, Michael Foot, Brian Walden, Lord Brockway, Lord Francis-Williams, Lord Raglan, and Lord Ritchie-Calder. He helped win reforms on abortion, homosexuality, theatre censorship, and a lot more.

Over the decade from 1965 to 1975, the Lobby sent over 40 mass circulars. The first expressed support for the immigration work of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) and the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), encouraged letter writing to MPs on the topic of abortion law reform, and requested inquiry into the religious affiliations of political representatives: a diversity typical of the Lobby's efforts.

Containing both informative material and calls to action, later circulars advised on issues from law reforms in abortion, homosexuality, and divorce, to race relations, broadcasting, the prevention of war, world hunger, crime and prisons, civil liberties, town planning, moral education, and disestablishment of the Church of England.

What brought all these perhaps disparate policy areas together for David? Liam Whitton, Humanists UK's Director of Communications and Development, is going to read from a 1970 article by David in which he explained it was the overarching idea of the open society.

Liam Whitton:

In an open society, there is the same plurality of views, the same clash of interests, but there is emphasis also on the values and interests held in common. The open society is one where people with different views, backgrounds and interests are free to express their beliefs and develop their interests without interference or discrimination, but where all cooperate for the common good in governing and running the community. The process of government is attended by the minimum of secrecy; it is open for all to see and influence; and means – especially the mass media – are available and used for the public discussion of public issues. Freedom is cherished, for one's opponents as well as for one's friends, and restrictions on freedom, including restrictions on entry from elsewhere, have to be stringently justified rather than proposals to extend freedom being regarded, as now, with suspicion. No one attempts to impose by force or law his views or patterns of behaviour on others against their will. Education, health and other services are available for all regardless of colour, creed or similarly irrelevant criterion, and no special privilege is granted to any particular group. If society requires the underpinning of shared values, then let these be found, not in the narrow, disputed tenets of a particular religion or moral code, but in a larger, more generous commitment to freedom, truth and cooperation.

Thus (one might say) there is in an open society a minimum of division but a maximum of differentiation. Encouragement is given to experiment, originality and creativeness. Tolerance is in many ways the keyword – tolerance of different views and varying ways of life. The open society exists for its members, not they for it; its institutions are for the benefit of the people, who are not a means to national greatness or any such end, but an end in themselves.

1997

David served on our executive committee from 1965 to 1975, including as chair from 1970 to 1972.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, organised humanism suffered a slump but in the late 1990s it was rising again and David returned to national humanism in 1997, rejoining the executive committee, soon to become the Board, on which he served until his cancer became too advanced in 2021. Just as in the 1960s, his most significant role was on the public affairs side, to which he restored some of the mid-century radicalism.

As Paul Pettinger, who was interviewed by David during this time - successfully - for the faith school campaigner job said:

If you did not know David or of him but have an opinion on Humanists UK and especially its campaign activities, then I think you have a good glimpse into his character. I first met David at my Humanists UK job interview in 2009. I was naturally anxious but when I met the interview panel and saw him with his goatee beard and longish hair, it immediately put me at ease. My first impression was that he looked like a 1960's counter cultural radical and just the kind of person I wanted to work with. My instincts that day turned out to be entirely correct.

At the turn of the century and in the New Labour moment, David was in the forefront of those who realised the enormous significance that human rights and equality law held for humanists and the first to make use of them in practice.

Liam Whitton will read now from one of David's articles that lays out this strategy.

Liam Whitton:

Human rights discourse has overtaken religion as the lingua franca of debate on social morality. The notion of human rights may be a recent construct historically but it commands understanding and support across the world. It recognises the just interests of all and seeks to reconcile them.

These rights include freedom of religion or belief. In some parts of the world merely having the wrong religion, still more apostasy from the dominant religion, entails a risk not just to liberty but to life itself. In Europe, freedom of belief is far from perfectly guaranteed but it is effectively unchallenged as a principle.

Human rights do not require all people to be treated the same in all circumstances - but if everyone's human rights are to be respected then strong reasons are needed for differences of treatment, especially at the hands of the community as a whole as embodied by government and other public authorities.

From all this it follows necessarily that the state, the law and the public institutions we all share must be neutral as between different religions and beliefs. On questions of profound disagreement and deep sensitivity where there is no agreed way to establish the truth or falsehood of the claims made variously by Christians, Muslims, atheists and everyone else, it is quite wrong that the state should throw its weight behind any one particular religion or belief.

This neutrality is what we mean by secularism. Secularism asks for equal treatment of everyone regardless of religion or belief unless in the face of compelling reasons. It provides a foundation for living together despite our differences. Anyone who opposes secularism (in this sense) is demanding that one belief group be privileged over the rest.

In his many years chairing the Campaigns and Parliamentary Working Group and then volunteering within what is now a professional team, David laid the foundation for all of Humanists UK's many campaigning successes in the years that followed.

I first met him in 2004 and his detailed and intense approach to work matched my own. We would leave a meeting in the afternoon and then send emails back and forth through the night working on briefings and plans for the Equality Act, for reform of RE, creationism in schools, abolition of blasphemy and dozens of other issues that the reforming pre-2010 governments kept us busy with, before our next meeting the following morning.

Without his support I would never have become Director of Public Affairs nor Chief Executive but David was not just a colleague to those of us in the public affairs team but a friend. Long nights drinking together, holidays after our international trips, and many hours of time spent together socially, and in that fulfilling zone between work and leisure, have characterised all of our relationships with him.

So, we'll hear now from the three Directors of Public Affairs that David worked with after me: Naomi Phillips, Pavan Dhaliwal, and Richy Thompson.

Naomi Phillips: It's funny, the first things that come into your mind when you think about someone. When I think about David, I think about his trademark hair, which was cut so straight it had corners, and his goatee beard – a look that I don't think changed at all over the decades. The other thing that

comes to mind is David drumming his fingers. When you were talking to him, David would put his briefcase on the table, close it, and then drum his fingers on top – this was usually to mark the end of a conversation (from his point of view anyway), so he could move swiftly on to implementing a great idea that he'd had, and go. He would also drum his fingers on the table to indicate that he was keen to get on with a meeting, bored of the general chit chat that might have been happening.

It's one of those semi-conscious habits that I think said a lot about David – his impatience not to get lost in conversation but to take action. He wasn't interested in small talk really – not that he was difficult to talk to at all, he wasn't. He immediately beamed when he saw you and I always felt comfortable in his company. But you always knew that David wanted to talk about the important stuff, about work, about influencing, about that next briefing he was drafting or the meeting he'd just had with the government about humanist marriage.

He had incredible energy and resilience, and this made him an effective campaigner. He worked for literally decades on some issues – education, legal reform, ethics – where the pace of change was, and is, glacial. Yes he got a bit pissed off some times but he shook it off quickly and instead focused on what could be done next. He might come out of that meeting on humanist marriage, cursing the stupidity of the Minister or their reluctance to take action but within a few minutes his eyes would be twinkling with a fresh idea, his fingers drumming on the table, ready to get going on the next stage of the campaign.

The other memory that comes to mind about David, is how he never changed the time on his watch from UK time, however long he was going abroad for. I discovered this once on the Eurostar with David, when we were going on one of our many trips to Europe, for a meeting with the European Humanist Federation, or to lobby at the European Parliament – the latter being an activity that David thought was fairly futile but which he approached with army-like preparation and energy. And he told me his watch always kept the same time, and he wasn't going to change it just because he was abroad. I think this says a lot about David – a true internationalist, he was passionate about the worldwide humanist and ethical movement. The power of working together across boundaries and borders, and I know David made many friends over the years through his international endeavours. But not changing the time also reflects that David was, at the same time, very British. He liked order and purpose and efficiency, and thought overall we did things rather well. He was never keen on the long and slightly boozy lunches the Belgian humanists insisted on when they hosted the EHF board meetings – but he did take advantage of the time to network, to try to get support for something. Basically, he was lobbying while everyone else was, well, being very European.

And he was very straightforward, you knew where you stood. He was always supportive of me, when I was really starting my career at Humanists UK, when we were just a tiny team with big ambitions. I learnt a huge amount from David. And he was really pleased when I joined the Board of Trustees, and very pleased when I became Vice Chair. But, after five years, I needed to step down from the Board for personal reasons. And I felt terrible about it. I was really emotionally invested in supporting the organisation. I was dreading telling Andrew and Tamar that I was leaving mid-term. And it was all a bit emotional. When I saw David and I told him, he said, 'If it were a few years ago, I would try to convince you to stay. But actually we've got a really strong Board – we don't need you!' And so I was told! He was being completely upfront, no messing around and, of course, he was totally right – classic David. His bluntness in that moment still makes me smile.

And definitely, the first thing that comes to mind when I think about him is David's broad smile, his infectious enthusiasm for life, for learning, for making change happen. He was a remarkable man and I'm so glad to have known him.

Pavan Dhaliwal: Many of us here today knew David as a man of immense intellect and integrity, a staunch humanist and also a devoted friend and mentor.

When I first met David in 2011 I could not have imagined in that first meeting, the incredible friendship that would form that would leave such an indelible impression on me.

On the face of it it didn't feel obvious:

- our 40 year age difference,
- our backgrounds couldn't have been anymore different
- my love of novels versus his love of non-fiction (if it was well researched and referenced)
- his annoyingly describing me as "from 'the provinces'"

However, a shared worldview, commitment to human rights and justice, love of theatre, wine and new experiences cemented our friendship that flourished further when I had left my role at the humanists.

Having David as a friend was like having the best personal cheerleader anyone could ever hope to have, which I know Lindsay, Andrew, Richy and Mark can also attest to.

I remember a few years ago being inducted into an organisation and being told that the 'growth mindset', was the culture they were trying to foster and thinking instantly "oh basically like David Pollock", he who never stopped learning, questioning or resting on his laurels.

The price of admission into David's world was to be constantly challenged, to be the best you could be and then some, to be open to 'in the moment' feedback, and be prepared to defend your corner. And the benefit was the friendship that came with it, deep kindness, and lot's of good humour.

So what I want to highlight today (given that it has brought me so much joy over the years) and given we are amongst friends....David's excoriatingly honest feedback.

Anyone who ever received his infamous christmas round robins, read his tripadvisor reviews or indeed just spent an hour or two in David's company knows what I am talking about.

Some headlines from Tripadvisor:

EXCELLENT...if it suits you

EXCELLENT....with serious flaws

EXCELLENT.....with severe drawbacks

To being in a meeting with Ministry of Justice officials with him to discuss humanist marriage when he called out the unhelpful analysis being used a means to kick the issue into the long grass attributing it to a 'low grade clerk' (she was a law professor and she was sitting right there) to a Council of Europe meeting in Azerbaijan with him chaired by the President, when he unexpectedly intervened early doors to call out the countries anti LGBT laws and human rights record, in his 2014 Christmas letter he wrote "leading one prominent Christian to say to me afterwards 'that was a brave thing to say - worthy of Jesus', as if they were going to drag us off to some prison cell!" - which I genuinely thought they may well do after the delegate from San Marino tapped me on the shoulder and advised "I really think you should leave now".

I feared for our safety given the cold treatment we received from our hosts after that intervention but was then dragged around the Carpet Museum in Baku (twice!) by David who had not a care in the world!

There was no setting, no room, no meeting be it at the highest levels of Government or at a grassroots level that David did not feel comfortable with his right to be there.

He had a way about him that was rare. In a world that often clings to tradition and resists progress, he stood tall, challenging the norms of his time. He embraced his privilege, but rather than using it for personal gain, he harnessed it as a catalyst for meaningful change, championing causes that sought to address social inequalities and fought for justice with unwavering determination.

David's honest feedback wasn't limited to any specific area of life; he applied it across the board. Whether it was in the professional world, where he fearlessly challenged the status quo, or in personal relationships, David's feedback left a lasting impact on everyone fortunate enough to receive it.

I will miss our trips to the theatre which would often end with me saying "I really enjoyed that" to which he would respond "hmmm, yes quite" and then months later when the christmas letter would drop I would read a scathing review as if we were at two completely different performances, he was a man of exacting high standards.

As much as David continually adapted to the times there were specific instances in which he was decidedly old school...my last trip to the theatre with him at the end of last year, we went to see what I thought was a brilliant production of *The Crucible* at the National. I arrived late for dinner, David was already halfway through a bottle of red and ordered another when I arrived. I had an early start the next day so said I would only having two glasses max. The remaining wine was poured into a plastic glass for him to take into the theatre.

I think on this occasion he genuinely agreed it was an excellent production and walking out I said "I'm heading to Waterloo to catch the overground, your bus from the bridge right?" to which he responded "oh no, I'm parked in the basement, would you like me to give you a lift home"? I asked him to message me when he got home!

I also wasn't immune to his 'in the moment' feedback. Walking along a busy road in Malta David trying to tell me about a classical concert he had attended, his naming the piece of music, me not knowing it, his then naming the composer, me still none the wiser and then being told "really Pavan you really know nothing!". I told him that I doubted he would know much about the music I listen to!

But David wasn't just a critic; he was also a mentor and a wonderful friend. He, we, understood that feedback was a gift, one that should be given and received with respect, good humour and gratitude.

In his penultimate Christmas letter David wrote *"My view has always been that I've had many valuable colleagues in my various campaigns and enterprises in which we have worked as a team. My interest has always been primarily in the task in hand, with the warm friendships that came with the work as a wonderful bonus."*

This is something that we discussed in one of our Sunday night zoom calls which we started a few weeks after the first lockdown and continued for over a year, Richy, Andrew and I laughing at David's surprise and bemusement at the lovely messages he had received from people after they learned about his diagnosis. He insisted that he had always been more interested in ideas than people but was delighted at the impact he had left on those who had encountered him.

So, friendship with David Pollock, one of the best people I have ever known?

EXCELLENT....if it suits you.

Well David, it suited us just fine and we are better people for it - so thank you and we will miss you.

Richy Thompson: After I was a student humanist activist, I became President of the UK-wide Humanist Students. I managed to persuade David to join its Board. Then when I became a volunteer and then staff member with Humanists UK's Public Affairs and Policy team, I found he was an active campaigns volunteer. In fact he was the institutional memory - knowing about the history of our work on inclusive religious education and marriage laws in particular, the two campaigns he was most committed to as well as two of our most important. That alongside his work with the European Humanist Federation and Humanists International.

On legal recognition of humanist marriages, there are files on our system of letters he wrote to Government about it as far back as 2001. That has gradually inched towards becoming a reality across the UK and it's in no small part thanks to him. He is particularly a good person to take to court with you and I remember fondly his and my frequent trips to Belfast in 2017-18 when we successfully were taking a case to secure legal recognition there. Today around one in nine marriages in NI are humanist.

Similarly with RE. He had been at that cause for even longer – occasionally referring us to Objective, Fair and Balanced, the groundbreaking pamphlet he wrote in 1975 with Harry Stopes-Roe setting out a vision for what an inclusive subject would look like. I think it would be objective, fair, and balanced to say that the direction of travel in RE ever since then has been to inch towards his vision. It's a tragedy that he didn't live to see our High Court win on RE last month – something he had worked towards for many years. But he knew before he died that our day in court was coming soon and was confident of victory.

He was also heavily involved in our parliamentary work. In fact he established that work in the 1960s, under the name Humanist Lobby. He also instigated the Parliamentary Humanist Group. Today the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group has 115 MPs and peers – it is by far the strongest grouping of non-religious parliamentarians anywhere in the world. What is more, after Humanists UK essentially collapsed in the 1990s, he was a driving force in getting it back on its feet, helping establish the Public Affairs and Policy team that we have today.

So we owe him a tremendous debt. As well as a personal friend and mentor, he is professionally a figure to whom no-one else can be compared. He shall be sorely missed.

International

From 2006 to 2012 David had what he called one of the most intense periods of work in his life, when he became President of the European Humanist Federation. I joined him on the Board there, as Pavan did later too and we saw how he was effectively in his words “not just President but secretary, lobbyist, PR head and general dogsbody!” He threw himself into the work, which involved conferences, meetings and lobbying – at the European Union, European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Again in this field his achievements were immense. It's no exaggeration, for example, to say that it is because of David that the European Union is not an officially Christian organisation - he ran the successful continent-wide campaign to prevent that just fifteen years ago.

At the World Humanist Congress in Oslo in 2011 he was awarded for Distinguished Service to Humanism but then went on to serve for four more years as head of delegation for Humanists International at the Council of Europe.

The Chief Executive of Humanists International Gary Mclelland has joined us to share some thoughts on David from the international perspective.

Gary Mclelland: David's invaluable contributions earned him the respect and admiration of his colleagues and peers. His mentorship and friendship have inspired many, and he was regarded as an insightful, articulate, and dedicated advocate for humanist values. With a remarkable ability to concisely and eloquently articulate the arguments and reasoning behind our cause, David became a driving force in promoting humanist issues at the international institutional level.

He possessed a deep understanding of the challenges posed by Christian fundamentalist opposition movements in Europe, recognizing their threat to human rights, equality, and non-discrimination long before many others. With diplomatic grace and unwavering conviction, David fearlessly advocated for reason, kindness, and universality, always speaking truth to power. Those who had the pleasure of knowing him will fondly remember his incredible hair and infectious smile, traits that exemplified his warm and approachable nature.

Today, as we bid farewell to David Pollock, we honor his international achievements and the enduring legacy he leaves behind. His exceptional contributions have paved the way for progress in humanism, ensuring that his advocacy for secularism, human rights, and equality will continue to resonate for years to come. We will miss his wisdom, his eloquence, and his unwavering dedication to the cause.

I will now share a small selection of the testimonials we have received, on behalf of the many humanists around the world who David's life touched.

Alan Tuffery, longstanding member of the Humanist Association of Ireland, said of David:

"At the all-Ireland humanist Summer School of 2015, devoted to the topic of War and Peace, David gave a talk on the concept of the just war, memorable for its lucidity.

I had the task of providing short and long reports of his talk for the Humanist Association of Ireland. He was kindly and gracious in making the full text of his talk available to me. It was a pleasure to meet such a great humanist and to learn from him.

In his talk he considered the concept of 'Just War' from its beginnings. A modern human-rights approach rejects the analogy between states and individuals and the idea that a state may wage war in its own defence. Rather, the state's duty is to defend the rights of its citizens. But war can only be justified if a greater evil will ensue if it is not fought".

Iain Middleton of Humanists New Zealand, had this to say:

David was a meticulous worker, tirelessly seeking law reform to remove discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. With family ties to New Zealand, David was aware of the progress that we had made in New Zealand in some areas of law where we had eliminated religious privilege well ahead of the UK. We corresponded on matters of law in these areas for several years. He sought a clear understanding of how we had modernised our marriage law in 1976 to allow Humanist and other secular marriages, removing religious privilege, and how the laws operated in practice. Animal rights were also of interest. Never satisfied with a cursory understanding, David sought a deeper understanding, and was grateful for the information he received.

It was always a pleasure to work with David, and to have assisted him in his work. David was a person that many were pleased to have known and to have worked with. Let us hope that others will continue with his enthusiasm for Humanism.

Michael Bauer, President of EHF 2020-2022

I have had the honour and pleasure of meeting David on several occasions in recent years. His determined commitment and deeply humanistic attitude were always an inspiration. His services to European humanism will remain.

Former Humanists International President, and Belgian Humanist education, Sonja Eggerickx, said:

" I knew him as a member of the British Humanists, he was there at every event of the European Humanist Federation and Humanists International. Always friendly, he knew why he was a humanist. Then I got more involved in IHEU, he in EHF... And later on we became presidents of these organizations. We talked a lot, trying to find the right way for IHEU and EHF to work better together... I am afraid that one day I wrote him a reaction on a text and he felt really offended! I apologized: sometimes I just used terms, words, which were not appropriate. My English didn't reflect exactly what I wanted to say.

However, we talked about it and just went on, working together. That was David: talking with instead of not listening to each other.

He seemed in a good mood all the time, always dressed in a distinguished way. And I may be wrong but I am sure that I never saw him in dark colours. One day we met in Brussels and he wore air plugs. He told me that during the trip in the Eurostar, he listened to Bach... We talked a bit about it and he said that we could go to a concert together. It was a lovely idea. However, like it happens with so many good ideas, we never did...

Elizabeth O'Casey, Director of Advocacy, Humanists International (worked with David advocating at the European Parliament and at the Council of Europe)

I am grateful I knew David and got to work with him a little; I valued him as one of the most insightful, articulate, and dedicated advocates for humanist values that I had the pleasure of knowing. He had an enviable ability to articulate concisely and eloquently the arguments and reasoning that motivate us to champion humanist issues at the international institutional level.

He was a keen tracker of the Christian fundamentalist opposition movement in Europe and understood before many the nature of its threat to human rights, equality and non-discrimination. Whilst he was always diplomatic in his manner, he never faltered in being a robust and tenacious advocate for reason, kindness, and universality, and speaking truth to power. A man with incredible hair and a wonderful smile, he will be greatly missed in the world of humanist human rights advocacy.

Conclusion

We have been remembering, with love and with gratitude, a life that has ended. But the best of all answers to death is the wholehearted and continuing affirmation of life, for the greater fulfilment of us all.

As we come to the end now of the formal part of this evening, I know I speak for all when I say David was an inspiration and a guiding light as well as a dedicated, generous, and loving friend.

It's fallen to me today to conduct proceedings - David asked me to - and that's fortunate in a way because I don't think I can yet find the words to express what David meant to me. I only want to add

that he was one of the best friends that I've had. We were in complete intuitive agreement and sympathy on almost everything. He was a joy to collaborate with, we worked hand in glove together, and I miss him every day. The memory of the years I spent with him will be a treasure for me for the rest of my life.

As David wrote:

Humanists create meaning and purpose for ourselves by adopting worthwhile goals suited to their talents and circumstances and by seeking to live our lives to the full. We react with awe and curiosity to the immensity of the universe and the intricate nature of its workings, we take inspiration from the richness of the natural world, from music, the arts, the achievements of the past and the possibilities of the future, and we find fulfilment in worthwhile activity, in physical recreation and endeavour and in the pleasures of human society, affection and love.

I know that David, through the example of his life, has helped us all to do all this in our own lives.

There has been no moment of silence today. We didn't think it was suitable for David, who preferred a dynamic life, but I will invite you all shortly to give a round of applause for him before we step next door.

Many of us travelled with David Pollock in the course of work or on holidays and the staff of Humanists UK all share the memory of his invariable Campari aperitif on those occasions so Campari will be available for us to drink a toast to him as well as a bar and canapes.

Now, for our friend David, a last round of applause.

Andrew Copson

4 July 2023