

## Philosophy (03/24/2026): Report by Pete Redgrave

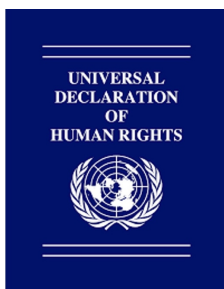
### Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was announced by the United Nations General assembly 10-12-1948. After the horrors of two World Wars the aim was to promote justice and to prevent future conflicts. The mission was to reaffirm Universal Rights; assert the dignity and worth of individual humans; and to assert equal rights for men and women. Although aspirational it has since acted as a global reference used by governments, organisations, and courts. The Universal Declaration asserts core rights of individuals – people are born free and equal in dignity and rights to which they are entitled without discrimination (race, sex, religion and language); they have a right to life, liberty and personal security. Moreover, individuals have rights and duties before the law with courts established to review violations. There should be fair trials open to scrutiny and an initial presumption of innocence. Individuals should have freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and should be able to express their opinions freely.

The Human Rights declaration was heavily influenced by centuries of evolving ethical and moral philosophies. The analogy would be – If ethics provide the philosophical architecture, human rights are the specific building codes and legal guarantees. However, philosophical and practical dilemmas can arise when ethical principles and particular rights come into conflict – lying to the authorities/protecting life; individual rights/the common good; honesty/loyalty; autonomy/paternalism. In such cases Human Rights Courts adjudicate using principles of proportionality and necessity.

So, if ideas of ethics and morality are the foundation of Human Rights, what forged the foundation ? The evolution of humans solved the Darwinian problem of survival and reproduction by becoming an ultra-social species. For most of the 200,000 years *homo sapiens* has been around, survival involved cooperation between individuals within small groups (~50-150 people). The down side of cooperation is that it creates opportunities for exploitation (free-riders/cheats). Morality can be viewed as psychological adaptations that developed in human societies to balance social vs selfish interests. Within this framework Martin Luther King claimed that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” However, viewing the world today it seems that “rules-based order is fading...with a shift from the cooperative to individualist transactionism at personal, national and international levels.” (Mark Carney – Davos 2026). Wither the arc now ?

As one might imagine, these ideas lead to spirited discussion.



The Philosophy group meets on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month, and all are welcome. Future dates are 23<sup>rd</sup> April and 26<sup>th</sup> May.