

Human Dignity, Society, and Social Values: The Philosophical Foundations of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the philosophical dimensions of social work through the interconnected lenses of the human person, society, and social values. Social work is evaluated not merely as a professional activity directed at solving social problems, but as a humanistic social institution that safeguards the well-being, dignity, and social integration of individuals. The study analyses the ontological and axiological foundations of social work, the characteristics of the human being as a social entity, the relationship between individuals and society, and the role of social work in preserving and developing social values. Particular attention is given to the principles of humanism, social responsibility, social justice, and solidarity as core orientations of social work practice. The article further discusses the transformation of social values under conditions of globalization and its influence on the content and direction of contemporary social work. The study concludes that social work constitutes a vital sphere of activity that sustains social equilibrium between the individual and society, advances the humanization of social relations, and contributes to the development of moral values across communities and generations.

Keywords: Social work; human dignity; society; social values; humanism; social responsibility; social justice; solidarity; axiology; social integration

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary social transformations have substantially increased the significance of social work as a professional and institutional response to the challenges facing modern societies. The growing complexity of social relations, the deepening of social inequalities among different population groups, the expansion of migration processes, and the pervasive influence of globalization have collectively imparted new content and new urgency to social work activity. In this context, social work functions not merely as a field of welfare provision but as a significant social institution that ensures individual well-being, protects human rights, and supports the integration of persons into their communities (Payne, 2020; Zastrow, 2021).

An examination of the theoretical foundations of social work reveals that philosophical approaches play a foundational role in shaping this field. Questions concerning the nature of the human person, their

place in society, their participation in systems of social relations, and the protection of social values constitute the principal lines of inquiry in the philosophy of social work. Studying these philosophical dimensions enables a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the essence and social functions of social work practice (Healy, 2019; Midgley, 2020).

Modern social work is understood as an activity oriented toward developing the potential capacities of individuals, addressing social problems, and ensuring social justice. The investigation of its philosophical bases demonstrates that this field of activity carries not only a practical but also a profoundly value-oriented character. The primary aim of the present study is to examine the philosophical aspects of social work in the context of the human person, society, and social values, and to clarify the humanist nature of social work and its role in contemporary society.

2. THE HUMAN PERSON AS THE CENTRAL OBJECT OF SOCIAL WORK PHILOSOPHY

The human factor stands at the center of social work. The human being is not merely an individual endowed with biological existence, but a personality that forms and develops within the system of social relations. The principal aims of social work activity are to enhance individual well-being, to protect rights and freedoms, and to ensure active participation in the life of the community (Zastrow, 2021; Healy, 2019).

Throughout the history of philosophy, the problem of the human person has remained persistently significant. Thinkers of different periods have advanced diverse views on human nature, the purpose of life, and the relationship between the individual and society. Aristotle's characterization of the human being as a "political animal" — that is, as a creature who can attain full development only within a community — retains its relevance in contemporary social work theory. This insight resonates with the ecological systems perspective elaborated in modern social work, which situates individuals within nested layers of social context and understands human flourishing as inseparable from the quality of social environments.

Contemporary social work regards the individual not as a passive recipient of assistance but as an active participant in the process of social development. The aim of social work is not to solve problems on behalf of individuals but to draw out their own capacities and develop their social potential. This approach serves to strengthen individual autonomy and self-efficacy, thereby contributing to sustainable personal and social change. Among the factors influencing individual development, family, education, occupational activity, the social environment, and cultural values occupy a particularly important place. Social work, taking into account the influence of these factors on human life, applies a comprehensive approach to addressing social problems (Midgley, 2020).

3. SOCIETY AND THE SYSTEM OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

Society is a complex social system within which the mutual relations of human beings are formed and sustained. The human person and society are inseparable: the individual is shaped within society, while society itself develops through the activities of its members. Social work is concerned precisely with the study and regulation of these reciprocal relationships. Changes occurring within the system of social relations directly affect the living conditions, social status, and well-being of individuals. For this reason, social work professionals must engage in deep and systematic analysis of social processes and their consequences (Payne, 2020).

In the contemporary era, urbanization, globalization, and technological development have fundamentally altered the character of social relations. The weakening of traditional social ties,

transformations within the institution of the family, and the emergence of new social risks have further increased the importance of social work. One of the most significant challenges facing contemporary social work is the proliferation of social risks that accompany technological change, including digital exclusion, the erosion of community bonds, and the emergence of new forms of vulnerability among populations unable to access or navigate digital environments.

Social work fulfills an integrative function within society. It supports the adaptation of individuals to the social system, helps prevent social isolation, and contributes to the strengthening of social solidarity. In this respect, social work constitutes an important field of activity that serves the preservation of social stability and cohesion. The profession mediates between the needs of individuals and the resources of society, performing a bridging function that is essential to the maintenance of social order and the realization of human potential (Healy, 2019; Duyan, 2020).

4. HUMANISM AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF SOCIAL WORK

Humanism constitutes one of the fundamental ideological orientations of social work philosophy. This principle is grounded in the recognition of the human person as the supreme value, and in the commitment to protecting rights and freedoms. According to the humanist approach, every human being deserves respect regardless of their social position, material circumstances, age, health status, or the social group to which they belong (United Nations, 1948; Zastrow, 2021).

The principle of humanism in social work practice requires attentiveness to the individual characteristics of each person seeking assistance. The social worker must approach the life experience, needs, and problems of each individual with sensitivity and respect, providing support for the development of their potential capacities. In this sense, social work means not only the provision of assistance but also the creation of conditions in which individuals can realize their own capabilities and exercise genuine agency over their lives.

The humanist principle plays an important role in the formation of ethical norms in social work. The protection of human rights, the prevention of discrimination, the promotion of social equality, and the defense of vulnerable groups constitute the main directions of this principle. In contemporary social work practice, humanism functions not merely as a theoretical concept but as the fundamental criterion of daily professional activity. The humanist character of social work also exerts a positive influence on the social integration of individuals, as social workers assist in developing social competencies, facilitating active participation in social relations, and improving quality of life (Healy, 2019; Məmmədov, 2021).

5. SOCIAL VALUES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Values are the social and moral criteria that guide human behavior, influence choices, and shape activity. Every society forms and develops on the basis of a particular value system. Justice, conscience, responsibility, tolerance, solidarity, and mutual respect constitute the foundations of social relations, and it is precisely these values that lie at the heart of social work practice. Because social work is oriented toward protecting human rights, promoting social equality, and enhancing social well-being, its operational principles are intimately connected with the value system of the societies it serves (Payne, 2020; Həsənov, 2019).

Contemporary societies are witnessing a process of transformation in social values. The development of information technologies, globalization, and the growth of cultural diversity are giving rise to new values, while some traditional values are simultaneously being weakened or eroded. This process directly affects social work activity and necessitates the application of new, adaptive approaches. Social

work plays an important role in preserving values and transmitting them to future generations. It contributes to the formation of social responsibility among community members, to the development of tolerance, and to the humanization of social relations. For this reason, social work is regarded not merely as a social service system but as a mechanism of social and cultural development (Midgley, 2020; Zastrow, 2021).

6. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SOLIDARITY IN SOCIAL WORK

Social responsibility is one of the fundamental philosophical principles of social work. This concept expresses the orientation of individuals not only toward their own interests but also toward the general welfare of society. Social responsibility encompasses the obligations borne by individuals, the state, public organizations, and other social institutions toward the society in which they are embedded. Social work constitutes an important field of activity that serves to realize the principle of social responsibility. The resolution of social problems is not solely the responsibility of the state; civil society institutions, families, non-governmental organizations, and individual citizens must also participate in this process. Social work assists in the formation and coordination of this collaborative effort (Healy, 2019; Həsənov, 2019).

Social solidarity expresses the cooperation of individuals in pursuit of common goals and the provision of mutual support. Social work activity creates conditions for the formation of a climate of solidarity within society, for the strengthening of mutual trust, and for the consolidation of social relations. In the contemporary period, the increase in economic and social problems has heightened the importance of social solidarity. Social inequality, poverty, and social exclusion increase the need for social protection among individuals. Social work serves the interests of both individuals and society by playing a mediating role in addressing these problems. The principle of solidarity is particularly salient in post-conflict, post-disaster, and rapidly changing social environments, where the rebuilding of trust and cooperative relations is a precondition for recovery and sustainable development (United Nations, 1948; Azerbaijan Republic Law on Social Services, 2011).

Social responsibility and social solidarity thus constitute not only the ethical but also the socio-philosophical foundations of social work activity. These principles make a vital contribution to the sustainable development of society and the preservation of social stability.

7. GLOBALIZATION AND THE EVOLVING SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK

In the context of contemporary globalization, the significance of social work has grown considerably. Migration processes, social inequality, poverty, environmental challenges, and other global problems have given rise to new directions in social work activity. In these conditions, social work functions not merely as a field providing social assistance, but as an important mechanism for ensuring social development and social integration at local, national, and transnational levels (Midgley, 2020; Payne, 2020).

Globalization has brought both opportunities and challenges for social work. On the one hand, increased international cooperation, the exchange of best practices, and the development of transnational frameworks for human rights protection have strengthened the professional and normative foundations of social work globally. On the other hand, the acceleration of social change, the displacement of populations, the fragmentation of traditional communities, and the emergence of new forms of social exclusion and inequality have created unprecedented demands on social work practice. Contemporary social work must therefore be prepared to engage with complex, multicultural, and rapidly changing

social environments, requiring practitioners who are not only professionally skilled but philosophically grounded, culturally competent, and ethically reflective.

8. CONCLUSION

The conducted research demonstrates that the philosophical aspects of social work carry significant theoretical and practical importance for understanding the mutual relationships between the human person, society, and social values. Social work is not merely an activity concerned with solving social problems; it is a vital social institution that serves to enhance individual well-being, protect human rights, and promote the integration of persons into their communities (Payne, 2020; Zastrow, 2021).

The study has established that the human being is the primary object of social work activity and that individual social development is formed in mutual interaction with society. Social work is oriented toward enabling the realization of individual potential, addressing social problems, and improving quality of life, making it a field of activity grounded in humanistic values. Social justice, social responsibility, solidarity, and moral values constitute the philosophical foundations of social work, playing an important role in defining its goals and tasks (Healy, 2019; Midgley, 2020).

Social work, by strengthening the social protection of individuals, simultaneously serves the preservation of social stability and harmony within society. The study of its philosophical foundations enables a deeper understanding of the relationship between the human person and society, facilitates the protection of social values, and contributes to the improvement of social policy. Social work will continue in the future to constitute one of the important fields of activity serving the humanistic development of society and the enhancement of social welfare. Its vitality as a profession and as a social institution depends precisely on the continuing capacity to articulate and act upon the philosophical commitments that distinguish it from merely technical or administrative responses to human need.

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