Yeshiva University Wurzweiler
School of Social Work

The Philosophical Foundations of Social Work
SWK 6133

Course Description

This course is designed to move students toward enhanced self-discovery by challenging them to confirm, confront, and articulate their own values and spiritual and philosophical beliefs. The classroom environment is to become a learning environment that challenges students to confront beliefs and values different from their own, engage with others in an informed and authentic manner, and in the process, discover the very value system that they bring to the clients with whom they work.

The philosophical content, anchored in Jewish social thought, elucidates the social work philosophy of helping. Students who are not Jewish are expected to investigate and articulate their differences with Judaic thought and contribute them to the class, thereby strengthening their own value system and spiritual beliefs. The basic purpose of this course is for students to develop a philosophy of helping by struggling with their spiritual identity and applying it to social work practice.

In this course, such philosophical themes as spirituality, the dual nature of the human being, conflicting conceptions of time, good and the problem of evil, loss and suffering, the Holocaust and other genocides, sin and repentance/behavior change, and social justice are studied from the value perspectives of Judaism, other religions and philosophies, and social work. Students who are Jewish or who subscribe to other religions or philosophies are encouraged to explore in class and in their final paper their own philosophies in relation to these themes. Spiritual/religious and professional systems of thought, anchored in Judaism and social work, are studied in the course of understanding the complexity of human nature. Conflicts and similarities are highlighted.

The focus of the course is on acquiring specific knowledge and on examining values. It is organized around the following questions: What is the essence of being human? What is the role of time in human functioning? How do human beings deal with the problem of evil, and how do students and clients explain tragedy and pain? Where was God during the Holocaust and other acts of genocide and natural disasters - the crisis of faith? What is the process of behavior change for people who are unhappy with their lives? How can social justice effect social change? The goal is for students to develop conceptions of human nature – a philosophy of helping - that they can apply in their work with clients.

This is a required course for all second year students, located in the Human Behavior and Social Environment sequence. Students should have worked with clients
and client systems for a year and been exposed to a range of problems and issues in social work practice. They are expected to gain insight into their experiences through the application of philosophical concepts. The course further develops themes in the Human Behavior course as we apply the duality of human beings to the stages of the life cycle and the development of the professional self. It connects to the practice courses, as students share their practice experiences to develop new ways of viewing clients and their problems. It incorporates content from Social Welfare Organization in studying the concept of social justice in social work and religion. It includes elements of feminism, substance abuse, battered women, child abuse, the elderly and minorities which are cited to illustrate various ways of understanding human nature. Research is cited in studies of behavior change.

I. COURSE COMPETENCY OUTCOMES

The course will help students achieve the following competencies:

Competency 1 – Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Social workers understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards, as well as relevant laws and regulations that may impact practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Social workers understand frameworks of ethical decision-making and how to apply principles of critical thinking to those frameworks in practice, research, and policy arenas. Social workers recognize personal values and the distinction between personal and professional values. They also understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions influence their professional judgment and behavior. Social workers understand the profession’s history, its mission, and the roles and responsibilities of the profession. Social Workers also understand the role of other professions when engaged in inter-professional teams. Social workers recognize the importance of life-long learning and are committed to continually updating their skills to ensure they are relevant and effective. Social workers also understand emerging forms of technology and the ethical use of technology in social work practice. Social workers: • make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context; • use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations; • demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication; • use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and • use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

Competency 2 – Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of
diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. Social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person’s life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create privilege and power. Social workers:
• apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels;
• present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences; and
• apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies.

**Measure 1A** – Practice personal reflection and self-correction to assure continual professional development

**Measure 1B** – Attend to professional roles and boundaries

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• apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels;
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• apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies.

**Measure 2A** – Gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups
II.  **INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS**

Learning will occur through a variety of methods and experiences, but mainly through a dialogical interchange of ideas, questions and answers. Students are encouraged to ask questions and seek answers to the challenging course material.

III.  **COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING**

Students are expected to attend all classes and to be on time. Grades will be determined based on class participation and the expectation that students will do the required reading specified under each course unit. Each assignment will be weighted as follows 30% for Assignment I and 50% for the Final Assignment and 20% for class participation, attendance and completion of assignments on time.

**Texts for the Course**

- Available on E-RES

Note: All required readings are on-line through electronic reserve (ERES). Your instructor will distribute the password and directions to access these readings.

IV.  **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

First assignment - Due Session 8

The purpose of this paper is twofold: to apply philosophical concepts to situations of everyday life, and to understand common experiences from a philosophical perspective. Use APA style. Proofread your paper and use spell check and grammar check to correct misspelled words and grammatical errors. This assignment will enable the student to begin to formulate conceptions of human beings in society in the process of
your integrating spirituality into a philosophy of helping.

Select one of the following topics:

communication  parent-child relationship  
religion  spirituality  
death  search for meaning  
friendship  self-actualization  
love  sex  
mariage  singlehood  
old age  social work  

Other topics may also be acceptable. Discuss with instructor first.

Guidelines for Completion of Assignment

Discuss the topic from the following perspectives:

a) Briefly review Soloveitchik’s typology of human nature in The Lonely Man of Faith. (one or two pages maximum)

b) Apply the typology to the topic, i.e., how you understand your chosen topic from the perspective of Adam I and Adam II.

c) Compare and/or contrast Soloveitchik’s views with those of another philosopher or theorist who work relates to your topic. The philosopher or theorist may be from the course readings or one that is acceptable to your professor.

d) Discuss the relevance of this topic for you both personally and professionally.

Literary documentation is expected using APA style. Six pages. Proofread paper for spelling and grammar errors before submitting. Due around the seventh session of the class.

B. Final Assignment – Due Last Class

This assignment measure:

1) Competency #1 – Engage in Ethical and Professional Behavior  
   Measure #1A – Practice personal reflection and self-correction to assure continual professional development  
   Measure #1B – Attend to professional roles and boundaries  
   Measure #1C – Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics
(2) **Competency #2 - Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice**

**Measure #2A** – Gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups

**Guidelines for Completion of Assignment**

The purpose of this paper is to integrate the themes of the course and to help you to apply religious/spiritual/philosophical values to social work values and practice.

This assignment fulfills objectives 1, 2, 8 and 10 of the course. In this paper, you are asked to integrate knowledge and values from your religious/ethnic group, compare them to social work philosophy and practice, and articulate your own values. In stating your philosophy of helping, you need to articulate your conception of human beings, how you use yourself in the helping relationship, and how this influences your role as a professional.

Select one of the philosophical themes of the course, ie. Dual Nature of Man, Time, Gender, Loneliness, Good and Evil, and Sin and Repentance. Other sub-themes may be acceptable, but you must gain approval from the professor first.

1. Trace the origins of your topic in the sources of your own religious/ethnic/spiritual philosophy.
2. Document its relevance to social work values and ethics using the NASW Code of Ethics; how social work understands with this topic, and social work interventions that may apply to the topic.
3. Apply the topic and your understanding of this topic to a client or a client system. This is the critical section of the paper as it reflects your creativity.
4. Discuss this topic’s influence on your philosophy of helping – how you see your clients and how this influences the way you work with clients.

Literary documentation is expected. 8-10 pages. Use APA style. Proofread your paper and use spell check and grammar check to correct misspelled words and grammatical errors.

V. **Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, akelsen@yu.edu, (646) 592-4280 during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please contact your professor directly to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations.

VI. **E-Reserves**
What is EReserve?

EReserve (Electronic Reserve) is Yeshiva University's on-line web based system used to provide access to journal articles, book excerpts, and other course materials. Most articles listed in each syllabus are available on EReserve. You can access full text articles from your home or from a university computer.

How do I use EReserve?
1. Go to the library’s online resources page: http://www.yu.edu/libraries/
2. Click on online resources.
3. Click on EReserves
4. If you are off-campus, at this point you will be prompted for your Off Campus Access Service login and password (obtain this from the library).
5. In the ‘search for Courses’ box, type in the name of your course.
6. Click on the link to your course.
7. Enter the password given to you by your instructor (ALL UPPERCASE).
8. Locate and click on the item you wish to view. Titles beginning with "A", "An", or "The" are alphabetized under "A" and "T" respectively.
9. When the article text or book record appears on the screen, you can print, email, or save it to disk.
10. If you have any problems, please contact John Moryl at Moryl@yu.edu

VII. PLAGAIRISM

Students should remember that the school does not condone plagiarism in any form and will sanction acts of plagiarism. A student who presents someone else’s work as his or her own is stealing from the authors or persons who did the original thinking and writing. Plagiarism occurs when a student directly copies another’s work without citation; when a student paraphrases major aspects of another’s work without citation; and when a student combines the work of different authors into a new statement without reference to those authors. It is also plagiarism to use the ideas and/or work of another student and present them as one’s own. It is not plagiarism to formulate your own presentation of an idea or concept as a reaction to someone else’s work. However, the work to which you are reacting should be discussed and appropriately cited. Any student who can be shown to have plagiarized any part of the assignment in this course will FAIL the course, and will be referred to the Associate Dean automatically for disciplinary action that may include expulsion.

VIII. HIPAA ALERT

In line with the new HIPAA regulations concerning protected health information, it is important that you understand that any case information you present from your work will need to be de-identified. What this means is that any information that would allow
another to identify the person needs to be changed or eliminated. This includes obvious 
things like names and birth dates but may also contain other information that is so 
unique to the person that it will allow for identification, including diagnosis, 
race/ethnicity, or gender. If diagnosis, race/ethnicity, gender is directly related to the 
the case presentation it can be included if it will not allow for identification.

IX. COURSE OUTLINE

Readings with an * are on E-RES

Unit I. Introduction to Course: Spirituality and Religion (Sessions 1-3) 
Competency 2

Learning Themes

1. Attitudes about taking a "Jewish" course. 
2. Content and structure of course. 
3. Objectives and expectations. 
4. The role of spirituality in life and in social work. 
5. Human nature in Jewish and Christian liturgy – selections from the High Holy Day 
   prayer book and writings from other religions. 
6. Chapters I and II in Genesis.

Readings

- Bible. Chapters I and II in Genesis.

Readings:

spirituality and social work: Insights from a national qualitative study. Families in 
society, 85, (1), 27-35.

Social Casework,

on feminist spirituality. Tikkun 13 (5), 52..

Gotterer, R. (Mar/Apr 2001). The spiritual dimension in clinical social work 


Unit II. The Nature of the Human Being: Sessions 4-7
Covers learning objectives 1, 2, 8, 10,

Learning Themes:

Session #4 - man and woman as created beings; the two creation stories in Genesis and their implications for an understanding of human nature; the spiritual quality of the human experience.

Competencie 1 & 2

Readings


Session #5 - the individual as a majestic being; relationship to God, relationship between the sexes, creativity and productivity, the natural community. The client and social worker as Adam I.

Readings


Session #6 - the individual as a spiritual being; relationship between the sexes, feminism, relationship to God; existential loneliness; the spiritual, faith community. The client and social worker as Adam II.

Readings


Session #7- the dual nature of the human being in dynamic interaction - Adam I and Adam II in the same individual. Applying the Adam I-II typology to social phenomena, developmental life stages, and social work.

Readings:


Unit 3. Time - (Session 8)
Covers learning objective 4

Learning Themes:

Conceptions of time - religious, philosophical, sociological, historical and contemporary; time as linear; time as cyclical; time phases and the social worker; the concept of process; time in a managed care environment.

Comopetencie 1 & 2

Readings:


Unit IV. Good and Evil: (Sessions 9-10)
Competencies 1 & 2

1. Conceptions of good and evil in Judaism and other religions.

Readings


2. The "good" and "bad" client – making value judgments about client behavior.

Readings


3. Theodicy - the religious legitimation of evil. How clients and social workers explain suffering and personal tragedy, or, why bad things happen to good people.

Readings


Unit V. Sin and Repentance/Faith after the Holocaust, other genocides and natural disasters. (Session 11-14)
Competencies 1 & 2

Readings


4. The role of the social worker with survivors and children

Readings


Unit VI. Sin and Repentance: The Psychology of Behavior Change: (Sessions 12-13)

1. Definition of sin; the impact of "sinful" behavior on the personality; the social worker's observation of clients' behaviors.

Readings


Linzer, N. *The nature of man in Judaism and social work.* (Chapter 5.)


2. Repentance – Teshuvah - the process of behavior change in religion and social work

Readings


Supplemental Bibliography


