

## Auszug aus dem Buch *Common Values* (Columbia 1995) von Sissela Bok

Sissela Bok argumentiert in folgendem Text, daß es drei Kategorien von moralischen Werten gibt, die für das Überleben einer Gesellschaft notwendig und daher in allen Kulturen gültig sind:

- positive duties of mutual care and reciprocity
- negative injunctions concerning violence, deceit, and betrayal
- norms for certain rudimentary procedures and standards for what is just.

Neben diesem minimalen Kern universell gültiger Werte gibt es noch andere Werte, die von Kultur zu Kultur variieren.

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### *1. Certain basic values necessary to collective survival have had to be formulated in every society. A minimalist set of such values can be recognized across societal and other boundaries.*

[...] I suggest that there are three categories of values so fundamental to group survival that they have had to be worked out in even the smallest community.

A. All human groups, first of all, and all religious, moral, and legal traditions stress some form of positive duties regarding mutual support, loyalty, and reciprocity. Children have to be reared and the wounded, weak, and sick tended. [...]

[...]

The Golden Rule has been formulated, the world over, either positively, as an injunction to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12), or negatively, urging that you not do to others what you would not wish them to do to you, as in the sayings of Confucius or Hillel. In either formulation, the Golden Rule represents not so much a moral value or principle in its own right as a perspective necessary to the exercise of even the most rudimentary morality: that of trying to put oneself in the place of those affected by one’s actions, so as to counter the natural tendency to moral myopia.

B. The second category of fundamental values consists of negative duties to refrain from harmful action. All societies have stressed certain basic injunctions against at least a few forms of wronging other people – chief among these “force and fraud,” or violence and deceit. [...] To cement agreement about how and when these curbs apply, and to keep them from being ignored or violated at will, another negative injunction is needed – against breaches of valid promises, contracts, laws, and treaties. Together these injunctions, against violence, deceit, and betrayal, are familiar in every society and every legal system.

[...] all communities, no matter how small or disorganized, no matter how hostile toward outsiders, no matter how cramped their perception of what constitutes, say, torture, have to impose at least *some* internal curbs on violence, deceit, and betrayal in order to survive.

[...]

C. A third category of basic values worked out in all societies consists of norms for at least rudimentary fairness and procedural justice in cases of conflict regarding both positive and negative injunctions, prominently including those listed in the first two categories above. Views regarding the modalities of justice differ, as do legal systems; but all societies share certain fundamental procedures for listening to both sides and determining who is right and who is wrong in disputes. Thus, in working out the basics of fairness, every known society with rules for trials has rejected the bearing of false witness – something that vitiates a fair

trial from the outset. Likewise, all societies have some rule of “treating as equal what is equal under the accepted system,” just as it is everywhere perceived as unfair, from childhood on, to punish one person for what someone else has done.

These three categories of moral values – the positive duties of mutual care and reciprocity; the negative injunctions concerning violence, deceit, and betrayal; and the norms for certain rudimentary procedures and standards for what is just – go into what P. F. Strawson has referred to as a “minimal interpretation of morality” one that takes the recognition of certain virtues and obligations to be a “condition of the existence of a society”: There are certain rules of conduct that any society must stress if it is to be viable. These include “the abstract virtue of justice, some form of obligation to mutual aid and mutual abstention from injury, and, in some form and in some degree, the virtue of honesty.”

Because no society can do without at least rudimentary rules of this kind, they are recognized across all cultural and other boundaries. [...]

The fact that certain values are so widely recognized does not mean that people automatically acknowledge them as held in common, least of all among enemy groups. On the contrary, the tendency to regard outsiders and enemies as less than human, barbarians, utterly alien from a moral point of view, is well known. And the three categories of value are limited in scope even within communities. Violence, for example, against women, or children, or slaves and servants has been common from biblical times on.

In setting forth the three categories of values, therefore, my intention is not to suggest that they can somehow serve right away as cross-cultural standards of conduct. The difficulties of extending the perceived scope of these values within societies as well as among them are great. Rather, I suggest viewing them in a minimalist perspective. The term *minimalist* is increasingly used to characterize a limited set of fundamental values, helpful in specifying the characteristics and possible functions of values recognizable across cultural and other boundaries. I suggest that these types of values are minimalist ones in at least the following senses:

- They are limited in number, in scope, and in degree of elaboration. They are therefore far from constituting entire systems of ethics, law, or theology and have arisen before any such systems were formally elaborated. They represent the bare bones of more abstract and complex values and ideals such as “love,” “truth,” “respect for life,” “fidelity,” “equality,” “integrity,” and “justice.”
- Consequently, minimalist values require no special erudition, or even literacy, to be understood.
- They concern primarily what people should do or not do, rather than all that they may plan, fear, intend, dream of, or feel tempted by.
- They start out from clear-cut cases, as in the injunction not to kill, leaving open the question of how to evaluate borderline cases.
- They call for no agreement as to their source, foundation, or construction. People may differ in basing their view of lying, for example, on assumptions about divine authority, natural law, community agreement, moral sense, utilitarian reasons, or autonomous choice.
- They may not be the only values necessary for collective survival: indeed, certain other values such as a constraint on official secrecy have come to be stressed only in the past three centuries but are now increasingly seen as indispensable for public officials and others bound by rules of accountability.

- No claim to universal acceptance need be made for these values: there will always be persons who reject every moral value including the most basic ones. But the amoralist, as Bernard Williams points out, is “a parasite on the moral system. . . . For, in general, there can be no society without some moral rules, and he needs society.” In addition, while the minimalist moral values have arisen in most societies, stressing their commonality does not call for proof that no group whatsoever has survived without them.

- Nor, finally, are such minimalist values absolute in that they allow for no exceptions. While *constraints* on lying and violence, for instance, are stressed in all traditions, more stringent total prohibitions of such conduct are not.

Given that minimalist moral values are so widely to be found, they offer a basis on which to build negotiation and dialogue about how to extend the scope within which they are honored. In turn, they also provide criteria and a broadly comprehensible language for critique of existing practices. Within societies, they can shape a dialogue about why certain groups are left out of consideration when it comes to even the most fundamental forms of respect. Across societal boundaries, taking these values seriously can support claims that the constraint on murder, say, or child abuse or enslavement, should not be restricted to one’s own society and that cross-cultural critique is fully justified with respect to such political or religious practices as torture or human sacrifice, as well as to political, theological, or moral theories that endorse such practices.

***2. These basic values are indispensable to human coexistence, though far from sufficient, at every level of personal and working life and of family, community, national, and international relations.***

In all cultures, the socializing process involves fostering a recognition of shared cultural values in children. Central to these shared values are the minimalist ones to which I have referred. But although it is thought necessary to develop a modicum of respect for such values in any family or group, doing so is hardly regarded as sufficient. From the very beginning of life, children are also surrounded by other values, more numerous, more richly developed, and intertwined in more complex ways. These values may be contrasted to the minimalist, bare-bones ones as being “maximalist.” Particular sets of values may be more or less maximalist along all of the dimensions mentioned above for minimalist values:

- Maximalist moral values may be more numerous, extensive, and elaborated. They may approximate or constitute entire systems of ethics, law, or theology, and concern more abstract and complex values and ideals such as “love,” “truth,” “respect for life,” “fidelity,” “integrity,” “equality,” and “justice.”
- Some among these values may require special erudition to be understood.
- They may concern not only what people should do or not do, but also what they may plan, fear, intend, dream of, or feel tempted by.
- They may include precepts or methods for how to evaluate conflicts and borderline cases.
- Holders of maximalist values may insist on agreement as to their source, foundation, or construction.
- They may insist, likewise, on more than minimalist values as necessary for collective survival.
- They may claim that such values are or must be universally accepted.
- Likewise, they may regard some such values as absolute in that they allow for no exceptions.

[...]

While necessary, minimalist values are nowhere near sufficient for a good life, for being in full touch with one's humanity, for a thriving family or community. Rather, they represent the minimum of what we can ask of ourselves and of what we owe to others, but not in any way all that we might owe to, or ask of, those who stand in special relations to us, such as our family members, friends, colleagues, clients, or political representatives; nor all that we might aspire to in terms of the respect due to all human beings, ourselves included.

In debates about moral issues, minimalist and maximalist perspectives enrich one another, providing mutually challenging and reinforcing approaches. The minimalist approach seeks common ground, some baseline consensus from which to undertake and facilitate further debate. The maximalist approach begins, rather, by setting forth a more complete position – often an ideal position seen as the correct one, whether or not it is generally shared. It is when these approaches are seen as different, each necessary but neither one sufficient on its own, that they best serve debates concerning values.

Whenever, in the complex interactions involving values, the minimalist values are undermined or overridden altogether, human relationships suffer.

[...]

***3. It is possible to affirm both common values and respect for diversity and in this way to use the basic values to critique abuses perpetrated in the name either of more general values or of ethnic, religious, political, or other diversity.***

[...]

These values provide[...] a common language in which to conduct a dialogue about what further agreement may be possible, and what disagreements remain. They also offer common standards for critiquing practices such as those of torture, or religious persecution, even when carried out in the name of purportedly higher religious or political values. [...]

Cultural diversity can and should be honored, but only within the context of respect for common values. Any claim to diversity that violates minimalist values – such as claims defending child prostitution or the mutilation of girls and women on “cultural” or “aesthetic” grounds or insisting that human sacrifice is religiously mandated – can be critiqued on cross-cultural grounds invoking the basic respect due all human beings.

[...]

***4. The need to pursue the inquiry about which basic values can be shared across cultural boundaries is urgent, if societies are to have some common ground for cross-cultural dialogue and for debate about how best to cope with military, environmental, and other hazards that, themselves, do not stop at such boundaries.***

A degree of adherence to minimalist values, rooted in the biological and social survival needs of families, groups, and larger communities, is what makes minimal trust, and therefore cooperation, possible. This need for values for purposes of group survival, whether considered from the point of view of families, tribes, communities, or nations, must now also be taken into account for purposes of collective survival. Societies face threats that respect no linguistic, ethnic, or other boundaries and that cannot be overcome on a piecemeal basis. [...]

If societies are to have some basis, some common ground, for dialogue about how best to respond to threats that so clearly call for cooperation at levels higher than ever mustered in the past, then the same values will have to be taken into account internationally that have long

operated on a smaller scale. I have suggested beginning with a minimalist conception of three categories of fundamental values: positive duties of care and reciprocity; constraints on violence, deceit, and betrayal; and norms for procedures and standards for what is just. (Sissela Bok (1995): *Common Values*, Columbia, S. 13–26)