

Chapter 3

Theological Perspectives on Conscience and Conscientious Destinations: An Interview With Guido Perathoner

Guido Perathoner

Free University of Bolzano-Bozen, Italy

Harald Pechlaner (HP): *First the phenomenon of overcrowding arose, then there was overtourism. Now we are experiencing multiple crises, such as the climate crisis, the demographic crisis and an employee shortage. The type of touristic experiences escalated, the limits of growth were exceeded, and as a result tourism changed. Can a kind of ‘conscience’ point the way towards a future of tourism within certain limits? Can it help us understand right from wrong? In order to discuss these questions, it is necessary to understand what conscience means in the first place. What do you associate with the term ‘conscience’?*

Guido Perathoner (GP): There are two classical approaches to the concept of conscience. The first runs through the word ‘heart’. For example, in Jewish-Semitic culture, the word ‘conscience’ does not exist and instead the word ‘leb’ is used, which means ‘heart’. The concept is about feeling what is right at heart. It has been around for a long time, used, for example, back in Egyptian culture. With the Greeks, a second approach to conscience emerged. Now, the concept of ‘knowledge’ took centre stage. It was believed that human beings *know* what is right. The Latin term ‘con-scientia’ (with-knowledge) makes use of that same approach. Later, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, for example, gave the term ‘conscience’ a depth-psychologically conditioned cognitive meaning. From a purely theological point of view, the biblically inspired concept of conscience is closely related to the image of God in humankind as described in Genesis 1:27. Human beings are created in the image of God, and this close God–human relationship is reflected in the conscience. The conscience is a sensorium that involves all personal dimensions and encourages ‘right’ action.

Destination Conscience, 21–23



Copyright © 2024 Guido Perathoner.

Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited. These works are published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of these works (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

doi:[10.1108/978-1-80455-960-420241004](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80455-960-420241004)

However, trauma or other drastic experiences can distort the conscience, so that one might develop too much (scrupulous conscience) or too little conscience (coldness of conscience).

HP: *What might it mean for tourism destinations to have a 'conscience' and how can it be retrieved?*

GP: The conscience approach is very much based on reflecting on one's own actions very honestly and holistically. This applies to every acting subject, and in this sense, our thoughts/reflections could also be extended to tourism destinations. I believe that these current crises we are experiencing can lead to a kind of rethinking, also regarding the development of tourism. I see this as an opportunity for tourist destinations to embark on new journeys together. Hereby, the willingness to implement rational and emotional insights operationally is key. The Greek terms 'syneidesis' and 'synderesis' represent this nicely: the former means the knowledge about something, and the latter tries to move from thinking about what is right to doing what is right. This willingness to act is missing in many tourist destinations. One thing is clear: the human aspect must once again take centre stage, and cultural and scenic aspects must be considered. Likewise, the local population must be involved, and their hospitable feelings must be respected. A destination consists not only of hotel owners but also of residents and employees. However, the voice of these people is usually not taken into consideration in discussions and decisions. These actors need to have more involvement again. The guest wants to get in touch with the simple realities of destinations. They do not perceive them as mundane, but as very interesting. So, when talking about destination conscience, one should try to emphasise the idea of the 'living space'. Through the participation and communication of all population strata of tourist areas, the 'conscience of the destination' can be shaped. The region as a whole will need to ask itself where it wants to go regarding tourism. Tourism must be designed in such a way that the people who live and work at a destination will be satisfied with it many years from now. Otherwise, it must be expected that the area will lose its overall touristic appeal.

HP: *How are values (such as inclusivity, respect, humility, humanity, ...) and conscience related?*

GP: Once one consults the conscience, 'values' come back as an answer. The conscience is not only a mechanism, but it consists of contents that are reproduced. There is also a bad conscience, which means experiencing something one could call 'unvalues'. It is a matter of finding a balance. Aristotle's golden mean points exactly to this feeling for the middle way. Aristotle argues that between 'excess' and 'deficiency', a desirable balance must be found. This should also be the case in tourism: There is a middle ground between tourist growth and over-tourism, and that must be sought. In this context, conscience does not know a middle in the sense of a compromise but is concerned with the right measure, taking all aspects (economic, ecological, social, etc.) into account.

HP: *Can sustainability be a value? And how does this value 'sustainability' influence the conscience?*

GP: Everything that the conscience feels is sustainable. Sustainable means we have recognised what is good for us. Of course, we can also do things that are bad

for us, which is then the opposite of sustainable. Sustainability can be considered a corrective thought. We have realised that we do many things that are not meaningful and thus the necessity for correction arises.

HP: *How may the concept of virtue be important for tourism?*

GP: The strength of the concept of virtue is that it goes beyond the normative defaults, highlighting the inner attitudes of thinking and acting: One does not *have* to be hospitable in the sense of economically dictated constraints, but one *can* be hospitable and feel this as a coherent expression of one's own value system. Thereby, the virtue-ethical approach could be very helpful in the question of the 'conscience of a destination' and the alignment of a moderate touristic development. Especially in discussions about the future, however, we tend to be strongly guided by certain constraints ('pressure factors') and often underestimate the question of strengthening the intrinsic motivation in the realignment of certain factual issues.

HP: *Can conscience be sought after?*

GP: The search of conscience strongly correlates with the willingness towards unconditioned reflection. The inner 'becoming empty' for the purpose of inner motivational strengthening, as exemplified by the yoga teachings, plays an important role in various areas of life. What the search for conscience for touristic destinations could look like exactly remains an exciting question, even at the theoretical level. I observe, however, that certain touristic destinations are already in the midst of that reflection process.