

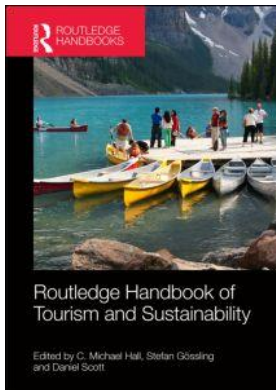
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Ethics in tourism

Georgette Leah Burns

Ethics comes from the Greek word “ethos” and is concerned with answering the question of how to act in order to do good (Fennell 2009: 212).

Utilitarianism, concerned with achieving the greatest happiness for the greatest number, is a moral theory developed in the late eighteenth century (Mill 1863; Bentham 1948). Discussions on the rights and wrongs of tourism are most commonly based in utilitarian arguments (Smith 2009: 621).

Instrumentalism is based on the concept of an extrinsic value and states that the value of an object or animal is determined by its use to humans. It is the opposite to the concept of an intrinsic value, which states that an object or animal has value in and of itself (i.e. the value is independent of its use to humans).

Anthropocentrism, or a human-centered approach, is the dominant ideological justification for most ethical approaches to tourism.

Ecocentrism shifts ethical focus to the environment, and ecosystems and non-humans contained within it. Humans are recognized as a part of, rather than central to, the wider system.

Introduction

The wafer thin air is numbingly cold, the sky is crystal clear and the scenery is stunningly beautiful. Your boots crunch against the snow as you close your eyes against its blinding glare. Following a line of trekkers up the side of Mt Everest you pass another dead body, and walk on...

Ethical considerations in tourism are a potential minefield: simultaneously explaining why understanding them is crucial and why many stakeholders might wish to avoid confronting them. Ethical issues are, however, increasingly a focus in many academic disciplines and applied practices, and tourism is no exception. In a large and multifaceted field such as tourism, ethics are, or should be, integral to aspects of it. Yet, as Macbeth (2006: 963) notes, “dominant

paradigms in tourism development and theory do not acknowledge ethics and values.” He attributes this to the dominance of a positivistic scientific paradigm that upholds “the myth of objectivity” (Macbeth 2006: 963). Fennell (2009: 211) expresses surprise at the marginal willingness of researchers to explore ethics in tourism. That this needs to change becomes increasingly more obvious as the tourism community recognizes that tourism cannot be free of ethics (Smith 2009: 619).

This chapter provides a review of research on ethics in tourism, commencing with a brief outline of the history of scholarly engagement with ethics in the field of tourism studies. It is not possible, nor is it the intention, to cover all types of ethical dilemmas in all types of tourism. Instead, a focus on the broad categories of mass versus responsible tourism serves to elucidate some of the major issues relevant to this topic. The chapter concludes by highlighting key current areas of research focus at the interface of ethics and tourism.

Definitions and basic complexities

“Ethics” comes from the Greek word “ethos” and is concerned with answering the question “what should one do in order to be good?” (Fennell 2009: 212; 2006: 54). As the prescriber of human conduct and laws (Holmes 1992), ethics establish rules for distinguishing between conduct that is right and wrong, and its links with morality enable both individuals and groups to establish a shared basis for appropriate action (Miller 1991). As a key constitutive part of any society that helps to structure patterns of shared behavior (Smith & Duffy 2003: 32), ethics are vital because they function to hold society together (Durkheim 1968, 1993). They differ within and between cultures and are a key aspect of any individual reasoning.

The field of tourism ethics is almost impenetrably muddy, and there are many reasons for this. First, ethics are complex. They represent only one of a multitude of possible ways of ascribing value, they are abstract, and in different contexts, different ethics may dominate making what constitutes an ethical relationship inherently difficult to define. Second, tourism is complex. It is a large and multifaceted industry containing many divergent stakeholders, a wide diversity of situations, and encompassing many heterogeneous practices and purposes. Consequently, the relationship between ethics and tourism is extraordinarily complex (Smith 2009: 614).

An ethical value, of “evaluating the moral worth of a thing, action or person” (Smith & Duffy 2003: 9), is just one of many different ways we have of valuing the things that are important, or not important, to us. For example, we can also prioritize something for its perceived aesthetic, economic, or religious value. These values are not discrete, they overlap, interrelate and an ethical value is often hard to conceptually separate from others.

Ethical values are vital to everyday lives, yet are less tangible, less measurable, and more abstract than economic values (Smith & Duffy 2003: 5). They lack clarity and objectivity (Hultsman 1995: 554) and, unlike the objects of tourism, ethics cannot be commoditized. Thus, as Smith (2009: 626) notes, there are “few definitive answers in ethics.” This contributes significantly to their complexity.

The field of tourism ethics is additionally complicated because each distinct situation will often contain many different and conflicting ethical concerns. Choosing which to prioritize may be unclear. Putting aside the difficulties of multitude, single ethical problems are frequently ambiguous, open to debate along cultural (among many other) lines; thus it is often not possible to find solutions that are uncontested (Bauman 1993). Despite this, ethics are often treated as though they can provide formulae enabling a definitive determination of right or wrong. As Smith (2009: 626) cautions, this is a “fundamental mistake.”

Involvement in tourism clearly generates many ethical quandaries (Smith 2009: 615) and, while some of these will become apparent in the examples used in this chapter, the aim is not to examine, or even acknowledge, them all. Instead, having established that the philosophical field of ethics is complicated and the relationship between tourism and ethics extraordinarily complex, the chapter focuses on how research has approached studies about tourism and ethics.

History of scholarly engagement with ethics

Tourism has been responsible for profound socio-economic changes to many communities around the world. In situations where the host and guest cultures differ substantially, this can, and has, led to conflicts over different perceptions of values. It comes as no surprise then that many researchers have focused on these changes in their ethical investigations into tourism.

Ethics were given limited attention in tourism studies until the 1990s (Holden 2003). In 1993, Lea traced the history of environment and development ethics, noting a lack of tourism in this domain. In 1995, Hultsman's literature survey found that the discussion of ethical issues was increasing in frequency, but more likely to be present in journals and conference proceedings than in textbooks. This trend has persisted, with authors such as Fennell (2006) and Smith and Duffy (2003) being notable exceptions. Is it still the case that many texts (e.g. Hall & Lew 2009, and Telfer & Sharpley 2008) focus on impacts rather than ethics?

Fennell's recent review of the field of tourism and ethics notes a "tendency of tourism researchers to examine impacts as the traditional root of ethical issues in tourism" (2006: 1). This is evidenced in the work of Smith and Duffy (2003: 14), for example, who state "the ethical issues that arise in many, if not most, cases of tourism development are closely connected to the socioeconomic effects that development has on the 'host' community."

Not surprisingly, given the initial domination of tourism by Western interests, tourism scholars have most frequently drawn upon Western theories of ethics. The potential contribution of other research approaches and ways of knowing are yet to have a noticeable influence on the field. Western ethics traditionally focused almost exclusively on human relationships, though this began to change in the 1960s as world focus on environmental issues and sustainability grew (e.g. Carson 1962; see also Chapter 1).

Different types of tourism elicit different ethical concerns. Sex tourism raises concerns about the physical wellbeing and exploitation of workers in this industry. This is one example of where ethical considerations overlap with human rights (the focus of Chapter 7). A recent trend toward marketing destinations as "last chance tourism" (Lemelin *et al.* 2010, Lemelin, Dawson & Stewart 2012) raises concerns about the potential for increased damage to fragile environments (Dawson *et al.* 2011). It is not possible to focus on all the potential permutations of ethics in tourism research here. Instead, I discuss the study of ethics in regards to the two – very broad – categories of "mass" versus "responsible" tourism as a way of highlighting issues amongst two theoretically polar opposite types. This dichotomy persists in the literature. I follow this with a discussion of some current pivotal works in the field which enables us to see how it has moved on from an early, yet long-lasting, focus on the ethics of impacts.

Ethics and mass tourism

Tourism is essentially an egotistical and hedonistic pursuit, and the much maligned "mass tourism" began in an era when ethical considerations, beyond the satisfaction of the tourist, did not take center stage. Most definitions of tourism from the 1980s and early 1990s have in common the consensus that tourism involves temporarily and voluntarily visiting a place away

from home (e.g. Przeclawski 1993: 11; Smith 1989), with tourist motivations based on desire for leisure, notions of escapism and the perceived need for a “break” from daily life (e.g. Lanfant 1993: 75). Defined this way, the tourist is fundamentally concerned with seeking pleasure; pausing to contemplate the ethical issues of their actions may reduce that pleasure.

Traditionally for many, then, there was no concern for the effects on the environment or on different cultures or even of the sustainability of their actions. This initially suited well the purposes of an economically driven industry. Thus, tourists and proponents of the industry were, and in some cases still are, unlikely to willingly engage with an ethics of care.

For many Third World, and so-called “developing” countries, tourism was embraced, perhaps most strongly between the 1960s and the 1980s, as a form of development and optimistically viewed as an answer to their financial problems (Lynn 1992). Tourism seemed a natural and logical path to economic development because it placed an economic value on everything – it commodified and commercialized people, animals, landscapes, cultures and artifacts.

It was under this unspoken (un)ethical, but widely publicized, economic approach that tourism moved in the late 1950s and early 1960s to something done by the masses rather than by the elite few. In its heyday, this led to the types of tourism now known as mass tourism – when infrastructure struggled to keep up with demand in popular tourist destinations and international chains of hotels opened up in more and more destinations. However, scholars soon began to question this growth on many fronts.

A binary separation, based on the notion of classifying tourism as either fundamentally positive or negative (Burns 2004) or as either a “godsend” or an “evil” (Crick 1988: 88), frequently appeared in the 1970s and 1980s literature on mass tourism. A “pro-tourist position”, MacCannell (1976: 162) argued, was held by those who saw tourism exclusively as a way of making money, in contrast to the “anti-tourist position” held by those who questioned the value of touristic development for the local people. Observing that economic benefits from tourism often did not reach the host community in large quantities or lead to widespread positive social changes, authors such as Turner and Ash (1975), Mathieson and Wall (1982), and Lea (1988) claimed that, when the industry is not managed by local community members, tourism becomes a form of imperialism. While not writing specially about “ethics,” authors such as these began to question the moral grounds upon which tourism development was based. Ultimately, mass tourism came under heavy criticism for being culturally insensitive and damaging to both indigenous communities and the local environment. The demand for alternative forms of tourism was born.

Ethics and responsible tourism

The scholarly move away from a focus solely on the economic positives of tourism to consider social negatives led authors to write of exploitation, commercialization, commodification and consumerism (e.g. Greenwood 1989). This focused debate on social over economic issues as interest grew in forms of tourism that were considered more socially and culturally responsible, better meeting the needs of the host community. The concept of pro-poor tourism, for example, first coined in 1999, explores the use of tourism to assist with poverty reduction (Ashley & Goodwin 2007) thus attempting to combine both social and economic benefits.

Concern with tourism impacts on the environment was a later consideration and paralleled a wider spread interest in ethics. Holden, for example, noted a conservation ethic was emerging (2003) and much needed (2005) but that rationale for it remained limited. This can be linked to the traditionally anthropocentric focus of tourism business and scholarship.

Alternatives to mass tourism are collectively called many things: responsible tourism (Lea 1993), just tourism (Hultsman 1995), and New Moral Tourism (Butcher 2003). Butcher (2003) refers to ecotourism, sustainable tourism, and responsible tourism as the New Moral Tourism because these concepts are associated with the idea that these are more morally aware and responsible forms of tourism. They “define their practices and purposes in contrast to what they regard as the socially and environmentally damaging aspects of mass tourism” and represent a structural response to consumer pressure (Smith 2009: 615).

As previously stated, ethics are inextricably linked with all tourism. However, they are particularly pertinent to sustainable tourism, which tends to place itself on higher moral ground than other forms (Lansing & Vries 2007). Literature on sustainable tourism, like literature on ethics in tourism, barely existed prior to 1990 (Weaver 2012). We might understandably expect ethics to feature in the sustainable tourism literature, especially in the more recent work, but it remains absent from or is given only cursory comment in many texts (e.g. Mowforth & Munt 2009).

Ethics and ecotourism

A type of tourism that highlights ethical issues of a more environmental, rather than humanistic, imperative is ecotourism. Perhaps because of this connection with the environment, or because of the more recent rise of ecotourism as a phenomenon, ethics appears as a more persistent theme in the ecotourism literature (e.g. Malloy & Fennell 1998; Honey 1999; Fennell 2007) than in literature on other tourism forms. Indeed, the topic of ethics has been viewed by some as so crucial to the ideology of ecotourism that it should distinguish itself from other forms of tourism by being based on principled values and ethics (Fennell 2004). Other authors, however, argue that it is unrealistic to define ecotourism in ethical terms (Buckley 2005: 129).

Buckley (2005: 129) asked “Can one be an unethical ecotourist?” The subsequent wealth of literature on the abuse and misuse of the ecotourism label, particularly in marketing, leans so strongly towards a “yes” that the question no longer seems necessary. Ecotourists can, and are, capable of being unethical. The real question is, should they be? If they are unethical, are they still really an ecotourist? Responding to Buckley (2005), Malloy (2009: 70) argues that “ecotourist must be defined in terms of its ontological ethical nature” and therefore “a ‘genuine’ ecotourist cannot be ethical.” Following this, ecotourism projects not sufficiently informed by environmental ethics are easily transformed into a form of mass tourism (Smith 2009: 626), and the need for consensus and regulation becomes apparent.

Ethical codes for the tourism industry

The World Tourism Organization Network (WTO) developed a Tourism Bill of Rights and Tourist Code in 1985 that, mirroring popular definitions of tourism from around that time, focused on tourist rights to leisure, rest and freedom to travel. Coinciding with a moral turn in tourism (Caton 2012), scholars in the following decade began to comment on the need for a code of ethics in tourism.

Krohn and Ahmed (1992), for example, argued for the need to develop an ethical code for international tourism services and D’Amore (1993) suggested that such a code should incorporate guidelines for both socially and environmentally responsible tourism. This was a sign of the increasing recognition of environmental considerations creeping in to scholarly debate about tourism in the 1990s.

In 1998, Malloy and Fennell carried out a content analysis of forty separate codes of ethics in the tourism industry, joining the call for a more global and comprehensive code (Fennell & Malloy 1999). The calls were answered by the World Tourism Organization's (WTO) 1999 adoption of a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. The code contains ten non-legally binding articles designed to guide tourism development:

- Article 1: Tourism's contribution to mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies.
- Article 2: Tourism as a vehicle for individual and collective fulfillment.
- Article 3: Tourism, a factor of sustainable development.
- Article 4: Tourism, a user of the cultural heritage of mankind and contributor to its enhancement.
- Article 5: Tourism, a beneficial activity for host countries and communities.
- Article 6: Obligations of stakeholders in tourism development.
- Article 7: Right to tourism.
- Article 8: Liberty of tourist movements.
- Article 9: Rights of the workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry.
- Article 10: Implementation of the principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism.

The code stands as a valuable reference guide, but is not legally binding. A notable absence, in its recognition of rights accorded to various stakeholders such as workers, tourists and hosts, is consideration of non-human species and the environment. In this way its approach is anthropocentric, mirroring the dominant ideological justifications for most ethical approaches to tourism study and practice. Given current directions in tourist demands and tourism marketing of new experiences, as well as recent scholarly endeavors, it is perhaps time the code was revisited.

Current directions

In the last decade, scholarship around the topic of ethics in tourism appears to have increased significantly and branched into more areas of tourism. Jafari's four platforms of tourism, devised in 1990 and revised in 2001, for example, were the object of scrutiny by Macbeth in 2006 who suggested adding a fifth platform on sustainable development and a sixth on ethics. As Macbeth (2006: 963) noted:

one of the rising challenges in the 21st century will be to find an ethical stance that facilitates tourism scholarship moving beyond the paradigm of objectivity and frontier thinking in order to contribute to a more thoughtful, reflexive, and sustainable platform.

While a particular stance may not yet have been found, there is certainly increasing research around such an ideal. The *Journal of Ecotourism*, for example, published a special edition on ethics in 2011 and in 2012, *Tourism Recreation Research* introduced a series of papers on tourism and animal ethics (e.g. Fennell 2012), which were described as a "somewhat obscure though significant theme" (2012: 157).

Tourist interest in the fields of nature-based, and particularly wildlife, tourism will hopefully ensure that the consideration of animals in tourism ethics becomes less obscure. Increasing scholarship in this field is evidenced by a chapter on "Animals and Tourism" in a new text by

Lovelock and Lovelock (2013) and a proposal to reframe wildlife tourism management to align with more ecocentric values by Burns, Macbeth and Moore (2011).

Despite branching out in new directions, issues relating to the ethics of tourism and development have not gone away. Feighery (2011) laments the scholarly neglect of “consulting ethics” within tourism studies, describing how the role of tourism scholars as consultants in development processes is fraught with complex and competing interests that the scholar needs to negotiate through ethically informed decisions.

The following boxed case study offers a practical example of many of the complexities theorized in this chapter and clearly follows the historical pattern of the rise of ethics in tourism.

Case Study

Human–Wildlife Interactions on Fraser Island

Fraser Island in south-east Queensland attracts approximately 500,000 visitors per year (Alexander 2009). World Heritage listed in 1992 for its Outstanding Universal Value, the island is home to over 350 species of birds, 48 species of mammals and approximately 200 residents. Managing the ethical issues between and within the numerous stakeholder groups (see Burns & Howard 2003) at this destination demonstrates many of the ethical complexities of tourism, but I will focus here on just one and that is the ethical responsibilities of tourism to the non-human world it commodifies.

World Heritage listing highlights the unique features of a location and invariably results in increased visitor numbers. On Fraser Island, visitors are the leading threat to these heritage values. In the pursuit of tourism in this fragile environment, four-wheel drive vehicles are driven over sand dunes and wildlife is regularly shot to prevent it from harming people. What is right and what is wrong in this situation? Different stakeholders hold differing opinions and perspectives. Some think it is right to kill wildlife if it threatens the safety of people. Others do not.

Particular controversy exists over the interactions between dingoes and tourists. Once treated as pets by some residents and offered food by some tourists, habituation of this wildlife species has been blamed for increasing negative interactions in which people are bitten and dingoes are subsequently shot. The dingoes are just one of many tourist attractions on the island, famous for being the world’s largest sand island, a popular fishing destination and heavily marketed to both domestic and international travelers.

Should managers prioritize protection of the tourists or conservation of the dingoes (Burns 2009)? If we argue it is wrong to kill the dingoes, do we not also have an ethical responsibility to protect the people? Does tourism have an ethical responsibility to assist with the conservation of the species it commercializes?

An extrinsic and anthropocentric ethic currently dominates the management strategies practiced on Fraser Island over the more intrinsic and ecocentric ethic suggested by the location’s World Heritage listing (Burns, Macbeth & Moore 2011). This manifests in the construction of fences to exclude dingoes from popular tourist areas as well as the lethal control of those classified as potentially hazardous to human safety. The practical, and ethical, challenge lies in keeping both people and dingoes safe from harm; thus the case study highlights the ethical complexities of managing the sustainability of wildlife (here as the tourism product) and the sustainability of the tourism market.

Conclusion

Ethical considerations are an essential part of tourism being sustainable (Smith & Duffy 2003) and “At the heart of ethics in tourism is a concern about our environment and future generations” (Moufakkir 2012: 20). However, the argument has been raised that tourism scholars have not been tackling the centrality of ethics effectively (Macbeth 2006; Burns, Macbeth & Moore 2011). There is a “pressing need for a more profound ethical analysis of tourism practices” (Smith 2009: 615) and this requires “an ethically reflexive scholarship” (Macbeth 2006: 963).

That the very core of tourism is based on individual pursuit for personal satisfaction means that tourism has long proceeded under the guise of an instrumental approach. That is, the industry is based on valuing its product, be that people, landscapes or artifacts, by its use to the tourist. Viewed in this way, any chance of recognizing an intrinsic value, of the subject having a value in and of itself that is independent from its use to tourists, is impoverished. This may have assisted the lengthy uptake of ethical issues in tourism. As Kant (1785) argued, an ethical relationship needs to be based in the recognition of intrinsic over instrumental value. The historically widespread lack of such recognition led Smith (2009: 614) to question whether tourism is inherently unethical and argue that “tourism ethics are important because they make us mindful of the importance of resisting a worldview which would reduce everything to economic objects, commodities to be bought and sold” (Smith 2009: 629).

For the vast majority of tourism stakeholders, ethical considerations are not as personally confronting as stepping over a dead body on the way to achieving your goal. Although more subtle for most, often by virtue of the fact that any deaths (such as those of dingoes) are more hidden, ethics are nevertheless a pervasive element of all tourism activities; scholarly recognition of, and engagement with, this concept is crucial. Twenty years ago Lea (1993) predicted “tourism ethics in general and environmental ethics in particular will become an important subdiscipline within tourism studies in the new future.” He was right.

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