

A Philosophy of Traveling: The Family as Carrier of Culture

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Abstract

Expounding on modern day human activities from a philosophical view leads to a richer appreciation of what seems superficial, ordinary, or inconsequential. This essay espouses the significance of traveling as a family as we contemplate on promoting a lifestyle that celebrates a thriving humanity. The family plays a critical role in the development of values and culture. To prepare children for life, families send them to schools and training. We should add to these more direct experiences in the bigger human community and the world environment. Traveling as a family should be part of the young's life and education. When a family travels, a full worldview is introduced to the children. They develop a richer and deeper appreciation of humanity, as embodied in the food, languages, arts, traditions, religions, technology, environment, and stories. The impressions and insights will influence, not just the way they think, but the way they live and relate with the rest of their communities. The stories, memories, and enriched values the family gathers in traveling will naturally pass on to its sphere of influence: playmates, cousins, colleagues, and later, children and grandchildren. This way, the family serves as the carrier of culture.

Keywords: philosophy, family, culture, travel

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Introduction

This philosophical essay centers on expounding on a day-to-day human activity: traveling, specifically, traveling as a family. The modern philosophical discipline, as eloquently explained by Leonardo N. Mercado in *The Filipino mind: Philippine philosophical studies II* (1994), turns to “humankind as the center, and truth as both dynamic and static.” Travel, as used in this study, refers to physical movement away from one’s regular abode or residence to another territory. The movement can be by any mode of transportation; the destination can be near (local, regional) or far (international); and the travel objectives can vary.

We approach the topic from the pragmatic philosophical worldview. It is pragmatic in the sense that it is real-world and practice oriented (John W. Creswell, 2014). The takeoff point is our experience from actual family travels made. The initial questions were formed based on the same experiences. Analysis and appreciation of traveling are attempts to draw out the pragmatic implications and contributions of family travels to education, religion, culture and society. As a product of self-reflection, a degree of subjectivity influenced this work. To achieve academic integrity, philosophical thoughts and arguments are woven into the discussion. The paper will conclude with philosophical insights, that ought to be useful to families who are still ambivalent about the value of traveling together. We hope to inspire travel support professionals and educators to create more travel experiences designed for families.

Family traveling is still an emerging practice, as more travel alone or with peers. Having chosen an expository and exploratory topic, qualitative research approach is appropriate (Creswell, 2014). We will inductively build from particulars to generalizations. Generalizations will be formed not from our travels alone, but as corroborated by the experiences of other families and written works.

Families and Children

Life is short. Each one must endeavor for quality life and pass it on wisely. Inspirational authors would advise parents to leave children lasting bequests, such as “roots and wings” (Tomas D. Andres, 1989). Family travels is one activity that could simultaneously contribute to developing children’s roots and wings.

Behavioral, psycho-social development and philosophical writings on values development provide the theoretical bases on which this study stands. Piaget, a child psychologist and epistemologist, as cited by Emerita S. Quito, explain how primary values are developed early in life, mostly until 12 years old (*A Life of Philosophy, 1990*). These set of primary values, also called core values, have been formed when the child’s language skills have not fully developed yet. Most individuals tend to be unconscious of it, but they eventually comprise one’s sense of morality. Towards adulthood, secondary values are developed. The secondary values refer to the scale of values held by a person. Since the scale of values are more consciously formed, it may lend itself to modification by way of experience and reason. In contrast, the primary values, being unconsciously held, tend to be stable and less changeable.

According to Rolando M. Gripaldo (2005) a culture becomes the embodiment of what a group of humans did in the past, at present, and is bound to do in the future. It

encompasses the tradition, the mores, and the customs of a society, an ethnic group, or a group of people. It also permeates religion, politics, language, economy, kinship, etiquette, the way of dressing and style of living. In simple terms, culture is the way of life of the people.

In many Asian cultures the family is given primacy. In his essay *Changing Filipino values and the redemocratization of governance*, Segundo E. Romero (1999) concluded that Filipinos give more importance to the family than on the state. As corroborated by other studies, it appears that the centrality of the family is negatively correlated with the sense of security one gets from the larger society or the state. It intensifies in the people's value system as state institutions' reliability weakens. Put differently, family role weakens as larger society's dependability strengthens. In the Philippines, the family takes a more central role as the state fails to provide the sense of stability and reliability among its citizens. Ma. Lourdes A. Carandang, in *The Filipino family surviving the world*, a book co-authored with Queena N. Lee-Chua cited that studies showing "that in the Philippines, many of us feel that we can only depend on 'God, my family, and myself'" (2008, p. 4).

Daily, the family nurtures and spontaneously passes on culture through modelling and guidance. A popular notion that "values are caught and not taught" point to the potency of lifestyle (as embodied culture) in transmitting culture to the next generation. The family, being the most basic unit of society, is the basic repository of culture. And being the first immediate environment of children, it is the automatic transmitter of culture through the development and passing on of primary values. As the children grow, families send them to schools and training in formal learning institutions. Still, families could influence learning through witnessing, affirming, ignoring, or contradicting what children learn or see in school, the media, and society at large.

The Evolving and Different Views on Travel

People seek to satisfy different needs when traveling. It is a human activity that has evolved through history. In ancient times, our ancestors traveled for survival. They needed to explore the unknown that oftentimes involved risking lives. In the middle ages, it was akin to exploiting new territories and finding new opportunities through trading. Traveling then took significant time, and it also meant being prepared to go hungry, inconvenienced, or even get into war. Thus, in the English language, the etymology of travel is "travail". Still, philosophers during the Age of Enlightenment positively viewed travel as it strengthened human society in the practice of commerce and interaction. St. Augustine even encouraged it in this oft quoted saying: "The world is a book and those who do not travel only read one page."

The more tranquil notion of traveling - that of relaxing, visiting, simply appreciating, and enjoying places - is of the modern world. Technological advancements in communication and transportation made traveling part of the modern lifestyle. So much so that industries and courses have been created for people who developed the interest and passion in working and specializing in the activity. Travel time has been significantly shortened by progress in transportation technology and more open relations among countries. Length of travel time still varies, according to lifestyle, need or purpose, schedules and travel resources. Some travel most of their lives, as in

the nomadic people and the expats; while vacationers only travel periodically or occasionally. Migrants travel to settle somewhere else for good, while tourists only travel to just take a break. Some travel for work, while others travel for the soul.

Mindset remains a factor that make people travel or not. Both sides find fundamental reasons for maintaining their view. Those who choose not to travel, still perceive traveling to be expensive and frivolous, a waste of money. They see more important budget priorities for the family than traveling: home, car, education. Traveling is perceived as an activity only for the rich, an unaffordable endeavor. It can be exhausting to some. Because of some unrest in some places, there is also fear. And others are simply averse of the physical risks in traveling. Then, for family travels, there is scheduling challenge as school days do not always coincide with work vacation calendars. Some would rather stay at home as they find travel unnecessary. This observation of Paul Theroux is still echoed by many: "Travel is only glamorous in retrospect." But those who favor traveling could relate to Michel de Montaigne who argued that, "Travelling through the world produces a marvelous clarity in the judgment of men... This great world is a mirror where we must see ourselves in order to know ourselves." In the end, historical context, previous experiences, and philosophical outlook all influence the way one sees traveling.

Our Family Travels

Our family travels to live and to learn. Traveling as a family is our way of bonding and experiencing the world. We find it an excellent supplement to schooling and other means of learning. We believe that travelling as a family should be part of our children's life and education. This mindset takes off from the thought that families play a critical role in the development of children's values and culture.

Our family travels range from three-days to one month, usually during school breaks. The usual purpose is family visit or to celebrate a milestone in the family. Travel activities include joining group tours, exploring home provinces and new places in the country or abroad by ourselves, or a combination of these. By traveling together, like other shared activities, we wish to enhance our family bond and create learning experiences.

Lifelong learning is concretized in traveling. When on travel, both parents and children are equal learners. Planning for a trip requires research and budgeting. Reading up and inquiring on the destination teaches the value of foresight, foreknowledge, coordination, and planning. The planning stage engages us to do some research, consulting the Internet, books, and friends. We use our information to choose travel packages or come up with our itinerary. Together with the children, we visualize the destination, and pack clothes accordingly. Then, considering the itinerary, we agree on what to bring and not to bring. We also learn to budget and to travel within the budget.

The physical movement itself, makes us understand and appreciate geography, time zones, climate difference, terrains, landscape, and seascape. Trying different greetings sometimes leads to the interest of learning a new language. Tasting food, admiring architecture, and the arts in museums, makes us more aware and appreciative of the distinctness and similarities of cultures, including ours.

Being away from the usual set-up, we get to know and interact with each other longer and with greater focus. Observing families, and interacting with parents and children in other places, we get new ideas on how to take care of each other. Exposure to how things work and how things are done in a major or slightly different manner in different places makes us realize alternatives and possibilities at work and at play. And this awakening does wonders on our attitude at home, towards colleagues, and everywhere.

We observe a more mature attitude in our children that immediately results when the family explores, discovers, experiences and adapts to varied locations and cultures. Our children are still young and we have yet to see long term effects of our travels. But parents of family travelers we know observed that early travelers tend to be more open-minded, flexible, independent, and more capable of dealing with people from all walks of life. Indeed, travels are rich providers of social experiences as it requires mingling and dealing with people in different settings.

We have especially striking experiences when we travel to visit family. Physically reconnecting with the family around the globe fosters understanding beyond compare. Spending time with the bigger family, especially multi-generational gatherings, magically reveal a lot about ourselves and our culture. Seeing how they live far from home are not just personally fulfilling but culturally enriching as well. We witness how home values and culture are lost, kept or modified when living in other countries.

Our eagerness to share visiting experiences comes from the awareness that Filipinos are spread all over the world. We share this phenomenon with other cultures undergoing a state of “diaspora.” This physical separation and dispersion is usually cited as one major cause for families breaking apart. For Filipinos, going back to homeland (*balikbayan*) used to be the only option for families with members living overseas to get together. Oftentimes, those who stayed home do not feel obliged to visit those who live abroad, unless there is an emergency. The burden typically falls on the migrants, making visitations one-way. The usual assumption being, those living abroad are better off and those at homeland are poorer and therefore need not visit. This custom need modification. We realize that family visits can be the best way to reconnect with families and relatives in other parts of the world. It can be a balm to loneliness and longing for home. This is found particularly valuable for elders or sick family members who can no longer travel home. Family visits, however short, convey connectedness, breaking through the physical distance. Also, visiting relatives in their work environment can enlighten those left at home on the challenges of surviving and thriving in a foreign land. Historically, parents, elders and siblings who went to work abroad become the family patrons. Anecdotes abound on the sacrifices overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) make to be able to support their families, with children and relatives continually depending on their support over an extended time, seemingly unmindful of the provider’s own welfare. If the dependents could only visit and see their patron’s life abroad, they might better value the support they receive, make better use of them, and perhaps allow the patrons to enjoy their own lives sooner than later.

The best take-away gifts from travels are not the souvenirs and goodies, but the pictures and stories we gather along the way. Ezra Taft Benson made a good point when she encouraged parents to “Build traditions of family vacations and trips and

outings. These memories will never be forgotten by your children.” Indeed, family travels can strengthen the family, but more than that, the family and the children’s worldview and lifestyle get modified and enhanced by the nuggets of wisdom they pick up from the journeys. They no longer just hear or read about them, they get to see themselves.

Traditional set-ups and customary ways of relating within families are based on impressions, some of which are no longer true. Traveling to visit relatives or simply going to other places can change expectations based on old impressions to what is presently true and real. Then, the family can decide what to sustain or change in the tradition. To quote Daniel Kolak and Raymond Martin (1999, p. 1):

There is a frozen sea within us. Philosophy is an axe.
Everything you believe is questionable. How deeply have you questioned it? The uncritical acceptance of beliefs handed down to you by parents, teachers, politicians, and religious leaders is dangerous. Many of these beliefs are simply false. Some of them are lies, designed to control you. Even when what has been handed down is true, it is not your truth. To merely accept anything without questioning it is to be somebody else’s puppet, a second-hand person.

Beliefs can be handed down. Knowledge perhaps can be handed down. Wisdom can never be handed down. The goal of philosophy is wisdom. Trying to hand down philosophy is unphilosophical.

Wisdom requires questioning what is questionable. Because everything is questionable, wisdom requires questioning everything. That is what philosophy is: the art of questioning everything.

Travelling as a family has a unique and far-reaching impact, not just in one’s growth, but also the family and eventually the community. When the family travels, learning as a community, a team, and as individuals simultaneously happens. The family grows closer as it explores unfamiliar grounds and deal with people. In a sense, the children’s roots grow stronger as they build memories together. At the same time, travelling introduces children to a far-bigger world, making them more receptive to learn. In a sense, as their horizons widen, their wings are given space to grow. Travel, as it both bonds the family and educates the children, is one of the best supplements to school education. Traveling makes us more dialogical than parochial, more open-minded than close-minded, and more philosophical than not.

The evident process of strengthening, assimilating and developing values during travels made us see our family as a “carrier of culture.” As we realize the overwhelming power of stories, memories and lessons the family gathers in traveling, we can almost see them naturally passing on to our children’s friends, colleagues, children and grandchildren.

When traveling, the family becomes a carrier of culture as it builds memories based on experiences that are direct and personal. Their stories, lessons, and insights will enrich their worldview and traditions before they get passed on to the community and the next generation. Alternatively, the family becomes an ambassador of its own

culture as it meets others. The families, communities and places they get to visit will learn about their culture, too.

Traveling, Learning and Philosophizing

There is natural kinship between traveling and learning, and between philosophizing and traveling. The Magic Tree House are children's books authored by Mary Pope Osborne. The series introduces children to topics in literature and history. In such titles such as "Mummies in the Morning" (1993), Osborne virtually transports her readers to the Pyramids of old Egypt and various other historical places. The books are so impressive and moving that aside from effectively teaching history, they also trigger our children's interest and choices on what places they would want to visit next.

Kolak and Martin in "The experience of philosophy" (1999), explained how one must consciously live one's culture as well as experience those of others for one's culture to be deepened and enriched. To bring this about, they point to drawing students out of their usual frame of reference and bringing them into a new territory. We can say, reading good books can do that, but traveling can do that better.

Philosophizing stems from wondering and exploring truths and ideas. It opens one's perspective to diversities and changes. Sincere philosophizing makes people eager to dialogue. Traveling is one activity that physically manifests human wondering, seeking, exploring and verifying for one's self. Naturally, when people travel, philosophizing becomes part of life, and vice versa. For the next generation to thrive in times of change, they need to be comfortable to work and live in a bigger environment and with different people. They need to be oriented on the distinctness and commonalities among different cultures and beliefs, as well as appreciate different environmental settings. Such mindfulness need to be inculcated while still young.

Creative authors of philosophy reference books, such as Willian F. Lawhead (2002a, 2002b, 2003), use travel metaphors and analogies to lay down abstract philosophical issues. Lawhead's books are largely textual, but the travel notion in its organization gives students a mental map for appreciating the major philosophical schools and era. Rather than simply give a report, say, on Western Civilization, from the pre-Socratic era to the 20th century, Lawhead helps students trace the philosophers' intellectual journey so that the students see how the philosophical questions arose. This approach brings the reader or student to accompany the philosopher facing a problem and engages him to follow until the end.

In Graham Parkes' essay *Between nomadism and nationalism: Wondering about the languages of philosophy* (1991), he noted philosophical thoughts dwelling on travel from proponents of both nationalism and nomadism. He quoted Johan Huizinga, a Dutch intellectual historian, who in discussing nationalism said:

Every cultured and right-minded person has a particular affection of a few nations other than his own, nations whose land he knows and whose spirit he loves. Summon up an image of such a nation, and enjoy it... you feel that altogether, stamped with the ineradicable mark

of that one specific nationality that is yours. All of this is alien to you
– and tremendously precious as a wealth and luxury in your life.”

Then, citing Nietzsche’s partiality to the practice of intellectual nomadism in “Where one must travel to” (1879) and quoted this aphorism: “Direct observation is not nearly sufficient for us to know ourselves: we require history, for the past continues to flow within us in a hundred waves; ... To understand history... we have to travel... to other nations....” (p. 464).

Indeed, travelling instills a wider worldview, much more when started young. When a family travels, a bigger worldview is introduced to the children. A variegated and deeper appreciation of humanity, arts, culture, religions, environment, and history becomes their framework of thinking. Whatever further studies or profession they take on, will be in this richer context.

Conclusion

Parents must see the relevance of traveling beyond appearances and movements. Traveling, especially when done with the right mindset, is an excellent gift to children and to society. It promotes well-being as it enriches not just the mind, but also our culture. It widens worldviews. As it involves physical movement, it also promotes a healthy way of life. Family travels require a decision. Some say, it is an investment decision. It is a choice that merits serious attention and consideration. It is also good to take time deliberating on it and saving up. Remember however to put some urgency to it since traveling, journeying, and sojourning need physical strength. It should be done while still able.

Scheduling will always be a challenge. When an opportunity to travel as a family comes up, do not hesitate to seek permission from employers and school administrators. One might be surprised that they too encourage family travels. Remember that they, too, have families. More people are recognizing the value of traveling when the purpose is clearly consistent with their goals for their employees and students.

Travel professionals and students in the tourism industry, including schools, travel agents, travel organizers and service providers, need to be aware and sensitive to the needs and objectives of family travelers.

Family travels need not always be grand and expensive. As Lao Tzu said, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” Whether the destination is near or far, we should remember this advice from Confucius, “Wherever you go, go with all your heart.”

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