So I have regular chats with my parents about all sorts of things. My writing projects are the most common topic, but we also talk about religion, politics, philosophy, current events and a bunch of others. Mom isn't that interested in the political or economic stuff, but Dad is more than willing to share, and I've found his input valuable and intriguing.

For a long time I've been wondering why I'm different. Why I'm one of the only people I know who supports a socialist, leaderless society. I'm not the only one in existence for sure, but I am the only one in my social circle. Why is that?

When I was a kid I figured I was some kind of alien. I didn't like the same things my classmates did. I didn't revel in being surrounded by others like they seemed to. The way they behaved seemed silly to me most of the time, and straight-up incomprehensible the rest of the time. Until recently, I thought I was just some kind of aberration: with the body of a human but the mind of something else.

In my conversations with Dad, I've come to realize another reason. Something which really should have occurred to me sooner.

Infants really have only one source of insight into how things are done: their parents. Babies are taught to sit up, to crawl, to walk, and then speak. When they're capable of understanding right and wrong, they're taught the difference. When a little boy grabs a toy from one of his playmates and refuses to give it back, his parents chide him (or should, at the very least) and tell him he's behaving badly. Because so much of us is invested in our parents from such a young age, we tend to adopt our parents' values naturally.

That sounds fine so far. But what about when kids grow up? As we get older, we spend less and less time with our parents. Eventually we move out (assuming we can afford to; yay flawed economic system) and our contact with them drops even further. Where do we get tips about our values, and ethics, and proper behavior, at that point? The answer is simple: society at large.

The trouble is most of us live in capitalist countries. Our society tells us that greed is good. It's how you make money. It's how you provide for yourself and your family. If you're not greedy- if you're not acquisitive or opportunistic- then you're judged as a failure.

This is especially true if you're trying to run a business, but it also applies if you just work for a business. No one thinks highly of the diligent worker who spends decades at the same job doing the same tasks, and getting only what their employers choose to pay them (or are legally mandated to pay them in a lot of cases). People venerate workers who are ambitious, regardless of their actual skills or experience, and get noticed by the higher ups. If one person has an encyclopedic knowledge of how the business works, but their peer has a charismatic way of persuading people and getting attention, it's the second one who will 'succeed' according to societal definitions.

So on one hand we have values and morals passed down to us by our family, such as stealing is wrong, lying is wrong, and hurting people is wrong. On the other hand we have the capitalist model reinforced by just about every layer of our civilization. They have a somewhat less, uh, altruistic way of doing things. Stealing is wrong... but wage theft isn't, as long as you can get away with it. Lying is wrong... but we can always pay PR representatives and defense lawyers to lie for us. Hurting people is wrong, but who cares? We can afford to buy them off with the profits we made hurting them.

The influence our parents have on us is very powerful, but it's also temporary. The influence our society has on us is less powerful, but it's sustained. It's the constant background noise in every tv ad; the subtext of every magazine article or newspaper clip. It's the undercurrent of our whole society, telling us in a continuing, almost subconscious way, that greed is good.

Back to my initial point: why I am different. I was raised by good people with good values. They love me and my siblings, and taught us to love each other (among a great many other valuable things they taught). But I grew up overseas. A white American kid, in a country full of black, French-speaking people. I could hear the constant hum of society in the background, but I couldn't understand it! So I never really got the message that 'greed was good' from them.

Of course I also had input from my school. I went to a boarding school filled with other English-speaking missionary kids. We spent most of the year there before being flown back to our respective countries and parents. But that school was a decidedly Christian one. It had Bible classes, regular church services, a student choir- the whole nine yards. It's unlikely in such a strict Christian setting, that capitalist ideals would get much traction. The closest I got to that was the allowance I got and spent, and the class treasury my classmates were so terrible at managing. We were spectacularly incompetent in many ways.

So there you have it. I'm sure it's not the only reason I am the way I am, but the fact that I was raised by good people and unable to understand much of what my society was trying to tell me... made me into this. And I'm very grateful for that.

At any rate, it came up when I was talking about socialism vs capitalism with my Dad. I described the theoretical leaderless socialist way of doing things, and my Dad commented on how similar it was to the early Christian societies. This was after Jesus' death, but before Constantine got the ball rolling on Christianity eventually becoming Rome's state religion.

Keep in mind it wasn't long after Jesus' death. At this point Christians were a small segment of the population, and nowhere near enough in numbers to be thrown in the coliseum and fed to lions. There just weren't enough of them yet for the Romans to consider them a threat.

According to verses he quoted from Acts, they basically lived in a socialist way: those who had money used it to care for those who didn't. Widows and orphans were taken care of instead of abandoned. It sounds encouraging, doesn't it?

Then Dad brought up the story of Ananias and Sapphira. I remembered those names from my Bible classes, but couldn't remember the details. According to the Bible, they were a Christian married couple who owned a field. They sold that field and gave the proceeds to help others, as was the custom in this caring Christian community. They did it publicly, too. I assume they wanted people to know what they'd done.

The modern phrase for that is virtue signaling. Basically it's broadcasting the message, "everyone look at me! Look how righteous I am; how pious. Look how I'm being generous and kind." Virtue signaling happens all the time in modern politics, and it's nauseating to me. Sure those two in Biblical times were doing the right thing, but they were doing it for all the wrong reasons.

What's worse, is they lied about it! They only gave part of what they'd made, and then told the Apostle Peter that it was the whole profits. For that, the Holy Spirit struck them dead. They just died on the spot.

Now I know why I recognized the names. That kind of 'God's Wrath smiting the wicked' is common in the Old Testament, but in the New... it's pretty memorable.

After Dad gave me a refresher on the story, I used it to comment on the differences between those early Christian societies and the socialist one I was talking about. I argued that in a true socialist society, there is no money. There's not even personal property. Ananias and Sapphira might have had access to a field, but they couldn't have sold it. They couldn't have profited from it, because profit wouldn't be a thing!

Think about it. If there is no money, is there any incentive to hoard things for yourself? I mean food, sure, but food doesn't last forever. Especially back in those days when they didn't have refrigeration or effective preservatives.

If you were good at making clothing, would you have any real need to hoard lots and lots of clothes to yourself? Not really. You could store them, but eventually they'd get moldy, or moths would get to them. They would just be more stuff to look after.

If you're a metalworker, or toolmaker, what use could you have for a massive stack of wrenches or hammers? They'd just get in the way!

I argue that the only reason people hoard money is because it can be exchanged for other things. By extension the main reason we have greed at all... is because by inventing money we made it easy to be greedy! Money isn't real, after all. It's not a physical object like a tree or a desk. It's just paper and metal, imbued with value by the mass delusion of societies like ours.

In that ancient Christian society, Ananias and Sapphira wouldn't have been struck down by the Holy Spirit. Because they never would have been greedy enough to lie about the money they gave. Because no one would have had any money to begin with! I hope that Ananias and Saphhira wouldn't have been greedy at all because of that. Yes, the ancient Christians had a very good way of doing things- much better than we do today. But that doesn't mean their way of doing things couldn't have been improved even further.

Dad and I disagree all the time on this. He admits that my socialist leaderless society would be a vast improvement over our current system, but he's convinced it could never come to be. His argument is that we (humans) are simply too flawed to care for each other enough to make it happen. My bog-standard response is that the only reason we are this selfish and greedy is because we're taught to be. If we teach subsequent generations not to be, in the same way that I was taught with my somewhat unique upbringing, it's more than possible to create this society.

After repeatedly disagreeing with him for several hours on this, we called it a day. The only compromise we could reach was this: whether a true socialist society is impossible or not, we can make this society a little better. We can push it towards more socialist ideals, such as that worker co-op alternative I talked about in a previous Musing. We can improve lives for people within this system, if only by a little bit. And we should.