Ok, so the other day when I outlined my beliefs, I noticed something people might consider unusual. I specified that killing and lying are wrong, but I said nothing about stealing.

As I think about it, I don't think I actually missed it. I left stealing off the list on purpose. To me, stealing isn't wrong. Not because it's *good*, mind you, but because it's part of something else. To quote Hugo Weaving (or a character he played actually), 'stealing implies ownership'. I'm ok with stealing... because I'm *not* ok with ownership.

Now that's a very unusual attitude. Even I can see that. In the modern world, and especially here in the States, everyone owns things. Everyone *has* things. It's normal. But as I like to say, just because something's normal (substitute traditional, usual, or expected instead if you want), doesn't mean that it's good.

When I was a kid, I watched the movie The Gods Must Be Crazy. In it, a South African pilot tosses a soft-drink bottle out the window of his low-flying plane, and it lands in the sand near a tribe of bushmen living in the wilderness. This is Africa, so soft drinks are bottled in glass instead of metal. The bushmen, who've never seen anything like it before, prize it for its hard surface and usefulness as a tool.

Trouble is, there's only one bottle, and a whole tribe of people who want it. For the first time in the tribe's history, there's an object they can't make more of, which is useful to everyone. Eventually one of them hits another with it, drawing blood- another first for the previously peaceful bushmen. That's the driving force of the movie, actually. The main character claims that the gods must be crazy for giving them such a cursed object, and sets off on a quest to get rid of the bottle.

Maybe it's because I saw it so young, but that idea really stuck with me. If I owned something, that meant someone else didn't. If I had something, someone else had to do without it!

Years later, our home in the capital city was robbed. And I mean really robbed- like totally cleaned out. We were away at the time, so the robbers must have pretended to be moving the stuff for us. I lost everything I had of value, but it didn't really bug me that much. The only stuff I really missed were the academic achievement medals I'd gotten in school. When one of my classmates asked me why I wasn't angry, I just said, "I guess they just needed it more, that's all."

When I moved back to the states, I had a lot of trouble adapting to the American way of doing things. Everything moved so fast, and people were always busy. It seemed the only way I could get anyone to engage with me in any real way was to give them an incentive of some kind. Everything was contractual- no one did anything without getting something out of it in return. And that was if I was lucky. Most people didn't even help unless they were helped first.

It's an extension of the idea of ownership. People here 'own' their time, and health, and efforts. Those things aren't available to everyone, like they were to the bushmen, but only to the individual.

Eventually, much later on, I started to think about it in more economic terms than just 'people can be real jerks to each other'. I began to see how ownership of money (which is only valuable because it can be exchanged for other things and services), was so foundational to this society. People weren't rude or dismissive or cruel because it was natural to them. They were those things because they'd been *conditioned* to be! Being raised in a society where the accumulation of wealth was the only real sign of whether you were a successful person... made all other considerations secondary. If even that.

Extend that into personal relationships as well, now. In family custody situations, parents or step-parents are called 'guardians'. Now literally, that means they guard. As in, keeping bad guys away. It doesn't include the myriad of other duties required of a parent. But it does imply ownership.

I get that kids are too young to decide many things for themselves. That makes sense. Someone has to make the calls for them until they're old enough. But for all intents and purposes, the children are owned by the parents. I've also read a lot of history, from European, to African, to Middle Eastern, to Asian. This idea of children being property goes back for millennia. Women were property too for a long time, and still face global systemic injustice as a lingering effect of that.

It's also part of our language. A random high school girl might complain that her friend 'stole' her boyfriend. But you don't steal people- you abduct them. By saying that, she's implying that her boyfriend is an object, not a person. If I love someone, and I say to myself, "that person is *mine*," I might not mean it in a bad way. Doesn't change the fact that it is bad, though.

So what am I getting at, you might ask? Good question. I'm not really sure. I only started examining this more closely in recent years. I'll do an exploration of it in a later Musing, but for now I suggest a change in how we raise our kids.

I bet almost everyone reading this was taught math using coins. We're taught that one cent plus one cent makes two cents, and such. Not one cloud, or one thought, or one pet. One cent.

Just watching that one movie as a kid had a huge impact on how I grew up. My parents raised me with protestant Christian ideals rather than capitalist ones, and that probably helped. Still, the idea that every*thing* belongs to every*one* was put into me at a very young age. When I finally started living back in the states, it made it that much easier for me to recognize just how wrong we are here. How *mean* we are here to each other, if we think otherwise.

Fast-forward through a few iterations, and you get billionaire CEOs harming hundreds of thousands of people to make a fraction of a percent more than they made before, and buying politicians and media companies to convince everyone that it's not happening at all. Sure, those CEOs could just be bad people, but I'd argue that it's the system that made them that way, and that system includes how they were taught as children.

We have to move away from greed. We have to move *them* away from greed while they're still young.