



## GODS OF GEEKDOM

# ELON MUSK

Descended from a long line of genetic engineers—his great-great-grandfather invented the Musk Ox and his crazy great-uncle invented the Muskrat—Elon Musk is a far more savvy businessman than his predecessors. He's also been in the news a lot, so he's only going to score you 3 points in our know your geek gods game. He was an early investor in a lot of cool stuff, like PayPal. The whole PayPal thing and the way it facilitated Internet commerce and was essential to the rise of small-scale entrepreneurs would be enough to justify including him in this chapter, but there is also the rather interesting things he's done since he became morbidly rich. He is a primary investor in Space X, which is working to transform space travel and the launch industry from a government-run collective action into a sustainable private capitalist enterprise. And then there's Tesla. Tesla might actually represent Mr. Musk creating a **privileged group**, which is an alternative to collective action as a means of attaining a collective good or protecting a common resource.

In a few decades, when I'm revising for yet another edition of this textbook, I'll probably have to actually point out that electric cars used to be seriously lame. You know how lame they've been. Seriously, Nissan called their electric car the Leaf. How Canadian (lame) is that? But Tesla built and sold the first kick-ass electric cars. If you're an eco-greenie and think we should all be driving eco-electrics and making them cool so people buy them instead of gas-guzzlers, this does us all a huge eco-favor. Clean air... global warming... collective good... yadda yadda... you might think that is itself a collective good. But Tesla took it a step further and acted in a more concrete way by releasing a whole slew of its very valuable patents into the public domain. The stated intent was to further the global spread of electric transportation and even though it is unlikely that it was an entirely altruistic move, it is still an instance where a private entity created something, in this case knowledge, and shared it with a group that did not directly contribute to its creation. Those who attain a collective good in that manner are called a privileged group.