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Manuel Garcia, Jr.

# Life Among the Entitled

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Manuel Garcia



## **Aren't I entitled?**

Aren't we all. Don't we all believe that we deserve the good things life offers us? Up to a point it's a very healthy attitude, each of us does have a right to be here, to contribute our energies, creative works, and children to the further development of humanity. I am reminded of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25. 14-30), where a servant is chided by his master for not making better use of the resources he was given, while another more industrious servant is amply rewarded. On the other hand I often find it a bit disappointing to drive on the roads, or walk through the markets, as many people are so intent on their goals that any pretense of courtesy is forgotten as if it would be some major impediment in their lives.

Who are the entitled? Are they the chic sophisticates who must park their Mercedes in a red zone or in a crosswalk so as to more easily snatch a quick biscotti and latte before proceeding with their significant existence? Or are they semi-literate youths prowling in loose packs for flashy thrills, easy sex, and some Aladdin's lamp out of the welfare plantation? Entitlement is an attitude, you can find it everywhere, and it is the fundamental weakness that is undermining our society.

## **The Fall of the Roman Empire**

In 363 AD the Roman Empire was an immense political and military power, extending from the Atlantic to Iraq, and from Britain to the Sahara. By 600 AD the Western Roman Empire was nothing but scattered ancient ruins with its territory occupied by a group of German kingdoms, and Europe was in its "Dark Ages." In the east, from the Balkans to Iraq, stretched the remaining Eastern Roman, or Byzantine Empire. Michael Grant describes this fascinating historical transformation in his book *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, (Collier Books, 1990). By the way the "official" fall of Rome was in 476 AD.

The two forces at work to undo the significance of Rome were external population pressures and internal disunity. The external pressure was supplied by the incredible energy and perseverance of the German people, who sought a better life by moving into northern Roman provinces and adopting the more advanced agricultural economy and technology practiced by Romans. This population influx has been called the German invasions, I would guess because chroniclers have probably focused on the many armed clashes sparked by the inexorable German immigration.

The second and key weakness in the defense of Rome was the overall and bitter disunity among the various social and political classes, extreme racial prejudice, and the self-focus of the numerous cliques which protected their special privileges against the larger interests of the general public. Roman politics of the time was full of influence peddling, patronage and graft.

I was both amazed and frightened by the many parallels I saw between fifth century Rome and our nation today. If an iron age empire could collapse so completely in the space of two or three generations, why not a space age America awash in a flood of automatic pistols, entitlement envy and red ink?

### **The 21st Century**

What are the external pressures hammering in on the United States? Who are our “German invaders?” The Mexicans, some would say. They’re prying open the gates with NAFTA, others will warn. Well, yes and no. Let’s get into this.

Paul Kennedy has written a very interesting book, *Preparing for the 21st Century*, (Random House, 1993), where he describes fundamental population and technological developments that are driving global changes. His book has a small amount of speculation and a great deal of data.

The key fact about human populations is that the undeveloped nations, or the “Third World,” which essentially encompass the equatorial latitudes of the globe, are experiencing a population explosion. These people represent the overwhelming majority of humanity, and they are striving more than ever to find and build a better life for themselves **and their children.**

This population pressure is stressing the ecology of the middle latitudes of this planet: rain forests being cut, speculative mining, heedless industrial developments, irrigation and dam projects, and the like. In the minds of some worried American and European analysts, an impending ecological disaster is looming.

I think these ecological concerns have a lot of merit, but from the point of view of impoverished peasants in Bangladesh or Brazil, Americans and Europeans have had their turn during the last two centuries to plunder the riches of the Earth, and to enslave dark-skinned people through exploitative economic systems. Now it’s their turn. They are entitled to their fair share of the good life. I once calculated that if the entire world were to live at the American (that is to say US) standard of living we would need sixteen planet Earths to provide for all the consumption.

The invasion at our borders and markets is driven by the survival needs and the aspirations of three quarters of humanity. Are the Mexicans our “German invaders?” Mexicans, Thais, Chinese, Hindus, Filipinos, Indonesians, Africans, who isn’t?

As an American Hispanic I find it very hard to criticize Mexican attempts to improve their economy by merging into a North American mercantile alliance with Canada and the United States. All the critiques of Mexican political corruption and economic inequity are correct, but I know from personal contact that Mexican people are very decent and hard working. I cannot find it in my heart to judge the character of a people by the misdeeds of its elites. I have no doubt that these elites will benefit most from NAFTA, but to the extent that this “division of the spoils” between the elites helps the vast bulk of the Mexican working class, I support it. I prefer that those economic roles

that are leaving the US in any event wind up in Mexico rather than East Asia or elsewhere in the developing world.

Even though Grant's and Kennedy's books would seem to deal with subjects that are fifteen hundred years apart, I find they deal with fundamentally the same issue, but from opposite sides of that mirror we call time.

### **Hang Together**

"Yes, we must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately." So said Benjamin Franklin at the American Declaration of Independence in 1776. The same sentiment was expressed by British politicians two centuries later (1773-1775) as "We cannot any longer afford the luxury of tearing ourselves apart."

I think that it is unnecessary to say any more about this internal weakness in American life, (apologies to Canada and Latin America for this usurpation of the continent's name by a US commentator).

Let's talk about NAFTA: the North American Free Trade Agreement.

### **Afta Nafta Disasta (?)**

This estimation of the impact of NAFTA was reported recently in a Herb Caen column in the San Francisco Chronicle, (I lost the exact reference, sorry). Well, what is the story with NAFTA? After months of disinterest by our leading politicians and official flapjaws it became the most crucial issue in our nation's survival since Saddam Hussein. I needed some perspective on the issue so I called my Santa Rosa guru (dad) for an expert opinion. The Santa Rosa guru spent many years on Wall Street, so he had some deep insights. What follows is my recollection of his narrative.

### **Out of the Ashes**

At the end of World War II in 1945 Japan was a smoldering ruin. It gradually worked its way through economic recovery by producing cheap goods at cheap prices. Life was hard. Along the way it had a few lucky breaks, like a major infusion of capital during the US military build-up during the Korean War.

Because of the experiences of the war and occupation the Japanese invested heavily in the education and physical well-being of the people. Industry and government worked closely to develop long term employment and income producing opportunities. The Japanese people themselves were grateful for the chance to earn a living, so they worked hard and saved a large fraction of their incomes against the eventuality of a future disaster. These savings accumulated in Japanese banks and provided a source of capital for industrial development. Finally, the nation did insulate itself as much as possible against foreign economic encroachments in order to protect the development of domestic industry and agriculture.

### **Growth with Full Employment**

By the 1960s Japan had achieved full employment. In order to continue the growth of the Japanese economy, that is to say to produce more goods, more workers or higher productivity methods would have to be found.

Finding new workers is easy, simply have them immigrate. This had been America's solution during the economic expansion of the steam and steel eras. Postwar Germany had seen the immigration of many Turkish "guest" workers (they assemble Mercedes), who chose to stay and bring in their families. Today in Germany tensions are high, and violence has been inflicted by Aryan "skinheads" against ethnic Turks, because economic opportunities are constricted with the burden of integrating the former communist East Germany into a reunified nation.

Japan does not want to share the home islands with other races or ethnic groups. This sentiment combines both positive cultural elements as well as negative prejudicial ones. The effective action as a result of this sentiment was to invest in high technology to enhance the productivity of the Japanese worker, and to build production facilities in poor East Asian nations with large populations that would represent inexpensive labor pools. Japanese investment flowed into South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and later China.

### **Poor Countries?**

Yes, indeed, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, now called the Tigers of Asia, were poor countries. They readily supplied Japanese investors with cheap, willing, hard working, and increasingly better educated laborers. These people emulated the example of the Japanese and very quickly transformed their nations into prosperous societies with very well managed economies. Paul Kennedy speaks at length about the details of this process.

The success of these Newly Industrialized Economies (NIE's in Kennedy's jargon) in East Asia was based on the siting of production facilities near concentrations of abundant cheap labor, but **after full employment had been reached in the home nation.**

### **Fat, Dumb, and Happy**

In America the elites and the insular working classes were each seeking their chosen fulfillments. The populace at large was accustomed to a very rewarding life and easily managed foreign competition. Think for a moment about General Motors in 1959 or 1962. They were producing a lot of car for the money, but were they really producing cutting-edge personal transportation, and were they even trying to do so? If they had, GM wouldn't be the ponderous wreck it is today.

By and large Americans were fat, dumb and happy after World War II. They did not give much thought to the rest of the world, they were involved in their own activities and entertainment. They did not feel economically threatened, so they neither saved extensively nor focused on quality workmanship in every facet of the economy. Even so, the US economy grew at a historically unprecedented rate from about 1949 to 1971. We had it good.

### **The Throwaway Society**

Now the competition has heated up. We must make more for less in order to compete, we are told. Will we try some of the winning Japanese or German tactics? That would require utilizing the vast savings of the American workers to make long-term

investments in the health and education of the populace, as well as in the improvement and modernization of the infrastructures of both the nation and our private industries. Unlikely, we need a quick fix, and besides, no savings are to be had. The Japanese save about eighteen percent of their incomes and Americans only about four, (see *Not For Sale At Any Price*, by Ross Perot, Hyperion, 1993, for the numbers in this paragraph and the one below).

Our elites fret, their competitive advantage is waning. How are they to continue showering themselves with exorbitant salaries and regal benefits if the corporations they mismanage slide into oblivion? The CEOs of large US corporations are paid about 119 times the salary of their average worker, in Japan this ratio is 18. Does this mean that US managers are over six times more effective than Japanese managers? Gee, let's compare economies and see!

The elite solution: skip the long and winding road of a Japanese or German style of recovery and just mimic the endpoint, take production to cheap labor pools. It is a hollow solution, something like abandoning inner cities to decay into slums in favor of new suburban development. Only now instead of just throwing away beer bottles, or even cities, we are beginning to throw away regions and even nations.

This then is the essence of NAFTA. The passion of the debate is between those who feel entitled to their profits, and those who feel entitled to their standard of living. It is an inevitability that whole sectors of American production are being exported. NAFTA or no NAFTA, many American jobs will go away. We lost this one a long time ago. In a way you could say we're paying today with NAFTA for all those 1959 chrome-tipped tailfins that we preferred over substantive national development. NAFTA is simply one arrangement to recover some degree of future benefit from this present loss by seeing these jobs relocated on this continent.

The Santa Rosa guru was not very impressed by NAFTA, he didn't think very highly of our arrival to this condition. "Why are we so arrogant as to think we are immune from failure?" he asks rhetorically, "if Rome could fall, and Egypt, and the Mayas, why not us?"

### **Whose money is it anyway?**

The reason I believe that our collective sense of economic entitlement is so destructive is that it propels us into national deficit spending. We have built into our economy a dependence on foreign money. This is discussed at length in Ross Perot's *United We Stand*, (Hyperion, 1992), and Harry E. Figgie, Jr.'s *Bankruptcy 1995*, (Black Bay Books-Little, Brown, 1993).

We have innumerable reasons why this is necessary, like an addict for his drug. Many will point the finger to Lyndon Johnson and claim it all began with his effort to pay for the Vietnam War without abandoning his Great Society social programs. Similar arguments can be made about every US President since then, Figgie goes through the lot.

Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that we are propping up an increasingly larger portion of the American economy on borrowed foreign money. Why shouldn't

foreign governments have lobbyists in Washington looking out for their investments? Wouldn't you want to ensure the billions you'd lent out were working for you, or at least safe? Recall the parable of the talents.

### **Ink as red as blood**

When we fought the 1991 war with Iraq we were fighting for our national interests. An Iraq successful in annexing Kuwait would pose a mortal threat to Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis are valued buyers in American technology, and investors in our financial markets and government paper. Certainly there was more to the Iraq war than this, but who can doubt that Saudi security fears are more closely addressed by the US government because of the financial stakes involved than would be the case with say Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The way to remove the foreign lobbyists is to remove the foreign capital from our indebtedness. The way to remove the foreign capital is to live within **our** means, and to pay down the debt. Public debt will always exist and it has its uses, but excessive debt, and especially owed to foreigners rather than our own citizens, is a fundamental threat to our national security.

What would happen if our foreign investors, most undoubtedly honest and decent people, were to view America as another Rome circa 475 AD? Figgie plays out this nightmare in his book. The money would flee, all our debts would be called in at the same time and our economy, collective and individual, would collapse.

How would we allocate the pain? How would we deal with our social divisions then, and how would our numerous self-interest groups act when called upon to yield some of their privileges? We've fattened up a lot of sacred cows on borrowed feed, and when we're called upon to settle accounts and live within our means I fear it will be hard for us to shed the excess fat without spilling blood.

### **Gratitude**

I believe that America's greatest problems come from within, rather than from any external "enemy." I believe that our attitudes are the roots of these problems, and that one of our failings in this sense is a lack of gratitude. Despite the imperfections and iniquities of our times and personal circumstances, there is much to be grateful for, life is a gift. I believe that if we each were to start from this point, that we could find some positive commonalities across all our social divisions, and from this we could build specific and undoubtedly complex systems to address the economic and social failings which tarnish our national pride today.

Think of how great it will feel once we've met this challenge.





# The Political Landscape

- or -

## an ethical-freedom mapping of political hierarchies

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Manuel Garcia

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### **Anarchy: Freedom with Ethics**

People today do not realize what anarchism really is. The propaganda of “hierarchists” during the greater part of the 20th century has been completely effective at equating “anarchism” with the concept of “lawless chaos” in the mind of the average person.

Anarchism is nothing more, and nothing less, than a politics of complete personal freedom coupled with complete personal responsibility. In an anarchist society every individual is a completely ethical being who provides for his needs by honest labor, and ensures that his actions do not infringe on the rights of another, or on the general good.

In this ideal situation there would be no bosses, and no compulsion (like police), because each individual would voluntarily be an active and non-competitive contributor to society.

Henry David Thoreau (“That government is best which governs least.”), the author of *Walden*, and *Self-Reliance*, would be an example of a person with anarchist ideals.

### **Don’t anarchists throw bombs?**

If anarchism is such a wonderful ideal, then why is anarchy seen as lawless chaos? The common picture of an anarchist is of the turn-of-the-century madman who drops a bomb on a parade, or assassinates a public figure like President William McKinley at close range with a pistol. Yes it is true that people who had been inspired by socialist and anarchist ideals committed such acts as desperate forms of protest against political oppression, but in abandoning all ethical behavior they had also effectively abandoned the principles of anarchy.

The lingering image of the bomb-throwing anarchist is a remnant of the successful propaganda campaigns waged by hierarchical people from a bygone era to discredit anarchist ideals.

### **Viva Zapata!**

As I write this the Mexican army is “mopping up” the remains of the EZLN: Ejército Zapatista para la Liberación Nacional, (Zapatista Army for National Liberation), which revolted against the Mexican state in Chiapas on New Years Day. Maya people, completely frustrated by centuries of political oppression and economic deprivation, revolted against the state because they saw no other ethical way of improving their lot.

To trivialize these “Indians,” Mexican and US national media program you to understand that they have “naive,” “anarchist,” or “socialist” ideas, or they have been

incited by “external communist influences.” After all, how could these people, from the preeminent indigenous culture of the Western Hemisphere with over 3000 years of history and mathematical achievements unequaled by Europeans until the twentieth century, how could they possibly develop their own original political analyses and ideas?

To swallow this propaganda is to continue supporting hierarchists in Mexico and elsewhere who benefit from the status quo. These elitists would not long enjoy the spoils of our present political situations if national populations at large were to critically examine the underlying causes of revolts such as the EZLN.

Desperate people resort to desperate measures when they have been denied a legitimate voice. The reason given by EZLN for its revolt was NAFTA. Under this treaty Mexico could import US grown corn at our unbeatable mass-produced bargain-basement price, and thus undercut the sale of domestic corn in Mexico. The cultivation of corn is the agricultural and spiritual basis of Maya culture, and the sale of excess corn (after the family is fed) is the major source of cash in rural communities. Literally and truly these people saw the combination of NAFTA, and their inability to gain clear title to their farmland (against large cattle ranch interests, i.e. “MacDonalds”), as undermining their very ability to exist, both physically and as a distinct culture.

### **Anarchist history**

Quite simply, those groups of people who require lack of freedom, internal security forces, economic elitism, class systems, slavery, and imperial conquests find that when anarchist ideals spread through a populace they are less able to command and dominate it.

It is for this reason that anarchism has been ruthlessly persecuted by all hierarchists from the extreme “right wing” of fascism, to the extreme “left wing” of communism. During the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939 both Franco (with massive aid from Hitler), and the Republican government forces (with Stalin as their major supporter) eliminated the grassroots anarchist movement in Spain by killing the people involved.

Anarchism erupted onto the European scene in 1848 as one of the socialist sentiments entwined in the revolutions that swept across the continent that year. This was the era of Karl Marx and Michael Bakunin. Marx’s communists represented the hierarchical faction of the socialist movement, while Bakunin personified the anarchist “anti-authoritarian” view.

Starting in Russia during World War I, and continuing until the 1970’s, communists gained power over numerous national governments and they imposed exceedingly rigid hierarchies of control. During the 1930’s and 1940’s the European fascists (Mussolini, Hitler, Franco) exterminated socialists of any type whenever they found them. Also during this time the communists (lead by Stalin) were finally able to eliminate the anarchists, along with all other less authoritarian socialist factions, from the various national territories under communist control. Most poignantly this political purging of anarchists by both the “left” and the “right” occurred simultaneously in Spain during the Civil War. People who believed in control, compulsion, and the limitation of

personal freedom had thrown ethics to the wind and become united in purpose to rid the world of those individuals who championed unfettered personal freedom. Wasn't this the philosophical basis for the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact of 1939, which shocked so many people because of its cynical betrayal of "principles?"

The references I found most interesting on these subjects were: *The Spanish Anarchists, The Heroic Years 1868-1936*, by Murray Bookchin, (Harper Colophon Books, CN 607, 1977), and "Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship (1968)," by Noam Chomsky, in *The Chomsky Reader*, (Pantheon, 1987). Also of interest, especially after Chomsky's comments, is *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931-1939*, by Gabriel Jackson, (Princeton University Press, 1965).

### **A Political Map**

As anyone can see by reading any of my essays, I am clearly an amateur in social analysis and political theory. In addition I want to assure you that I am not an oddball trying to entice unwary readers into a political lunatic fringe. Everything that follows is pure speculation, please remember that. Now that the warnings are over, let us proceed.

I find it useful to have a visual image of any concept I am trying to understand. In this regard I was interested in seeing if I could define a visual representation of anarchism and all other political-hierarchical systems relative to one another.

I concluded that the two dominant parameters to this understanding are "ethics" and "freedom." Furthermore I concluded that ideal anarchy, the absence of any hierarchy, was a state of unlimited personal freedom coupled with complete personal ethics and responsibility; while dictatorship, the complete and ruthless domination by a rigidly defined hierarchy, was a state of zero personal freedom or ethics. From this I developed the "map" which is shown as the Figure at the end of this article.

I would like to make some comments on my choice of terms in the map. I chose numerical scales of "0" to "1." Zero represents the complete absence of a quality (by the way the mathematical concept of "zero" was first invented by the Mayas). Numerical "1" in the map represents unlimited availability of a particular quality.

By "freedom" I mean personal mental and physical freedom. By "ethics" I mean that combination of honor, decency, morality, personal responsibility and justice that we all understand to be exemplary behavior.

At the origin, the 0-0 point on the map, I place "dictatorship", the state of maximal hierarchy, of one man rule. Think of Hitler or Stalin. The most rapid diminution in hierarchy is found along a 45° path of increasing freedom and ethics. Let me describe the states along this ray.

"Authoritarian" states have strict hierarchies with few members at the top, such as sheikdoms in the Middle East or a Latin American country with a few landowners and top military brass in charge.

“Elitist” states have select classes of people who benefit most from the system, and populate the positions of political and economic power. The US today is largely an elitist state.

A “parliamentary” state is the one most of us imagine the US as being in its original 18th century conception. Regional groupings of citizens have their interests balanced fairly and for the national good by representatives they elect. In an elitist setting these groupings are based more on the common financial interests of the members involved (i.e. PACs), or their social and economic classes, rather than on the proximity of their habitations. Parliament as an institution is the arena of bargaining between competing blocs of citizens, whether populist or elitist.

A “populist” state is one in which the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of the population are consolidated into a few widely supported themes which are enacted into national policy by an enabling governmental structure. A populist state may have a parliamentary government apparatus with which to assess and implement the “will of the people.” The statewide initiative process in California is an example of a populist form of government.

“Anarchism” is the ultimate in personal freedom and lack of restraint. It can only exist when each individual is unswervingly ethical, hence it is an ideal unlikely to be reached, though it has been achieved more often than is commonly realized.

The states encountered along the “freedom” axis are those which evolve as freedom increases and hierarchy diminishes *while ethics remain totally absent*.

These states start with the ethics and freedom void of a one-man dictatorship, followed by the “warlord” state of a 1920’s China or a present day Lebanon or Somalia, to a predatory “mercantilism” of a renaissance city-state like Venice (remember *The Merchant of Venice*, ?), the Gilded Age US railroad barons, and today’s junk-bond “free-traders.”

Further increases in freedom open up opportunity to a larger number of smaller unethical groups, such as the Al Capones of a “gangster” economy, while further along a larger diffuse mob or “rabble” ranges about such as during the terror of the French Revolution in the 1790’s. Ultimately we reach the state of complete lawless “chaos” in which every individual is liable to murder, rape, pillage, loot and burn, and where there is not one iota of social cohesiveness.

States along the “ethics” axis (*with zero freedom*) begin once again at the ethical-freedom void of dictatorship. The next more ethical unfree state is “feudalism.” This is an ethical-authoritarian state because even the king, along with his dukes and barons, acknowledges certain basic rights of every person, and certain royal responsibilities towards the serfs.

More ethical still is the “bureaucratic” or mandarin-Confucian state. To experience this state go to the Alameda County courthouse in downtown Oakland and try to buy a marriage license.

A more ethical low-freedom state is one in which the vast majority of a nation's workers are organized into grassroots unions which have little control of the national economy. The history of unionism, especially during the latter part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th, give a flavor of this "proletarian" state.

Further on the no-freedom ethical scale is the "communal" or villager society which one associates with certain island people, tropical jungle nomads, ancient Hopi Indians, 1st Century Christians, the Shakers, and some of the 1960's hippies.

At the extreme of complete ethics and no freedom one finds a "monastic" life. This is a devotional and ascetic life in a medieval friary, or as a Hindu, Buddhist and Zen hermit monk.

On the map there are various bands. As an example consider the band which includes the "parliamentary" state. At its unethical extreme a parliamentary state is a gangster state, while on the other hand if the ethics of a parliamentary state are maintained but personal freedom is reduced to a minimum one reaches a "proletarian" condition.

### **Political journeys**

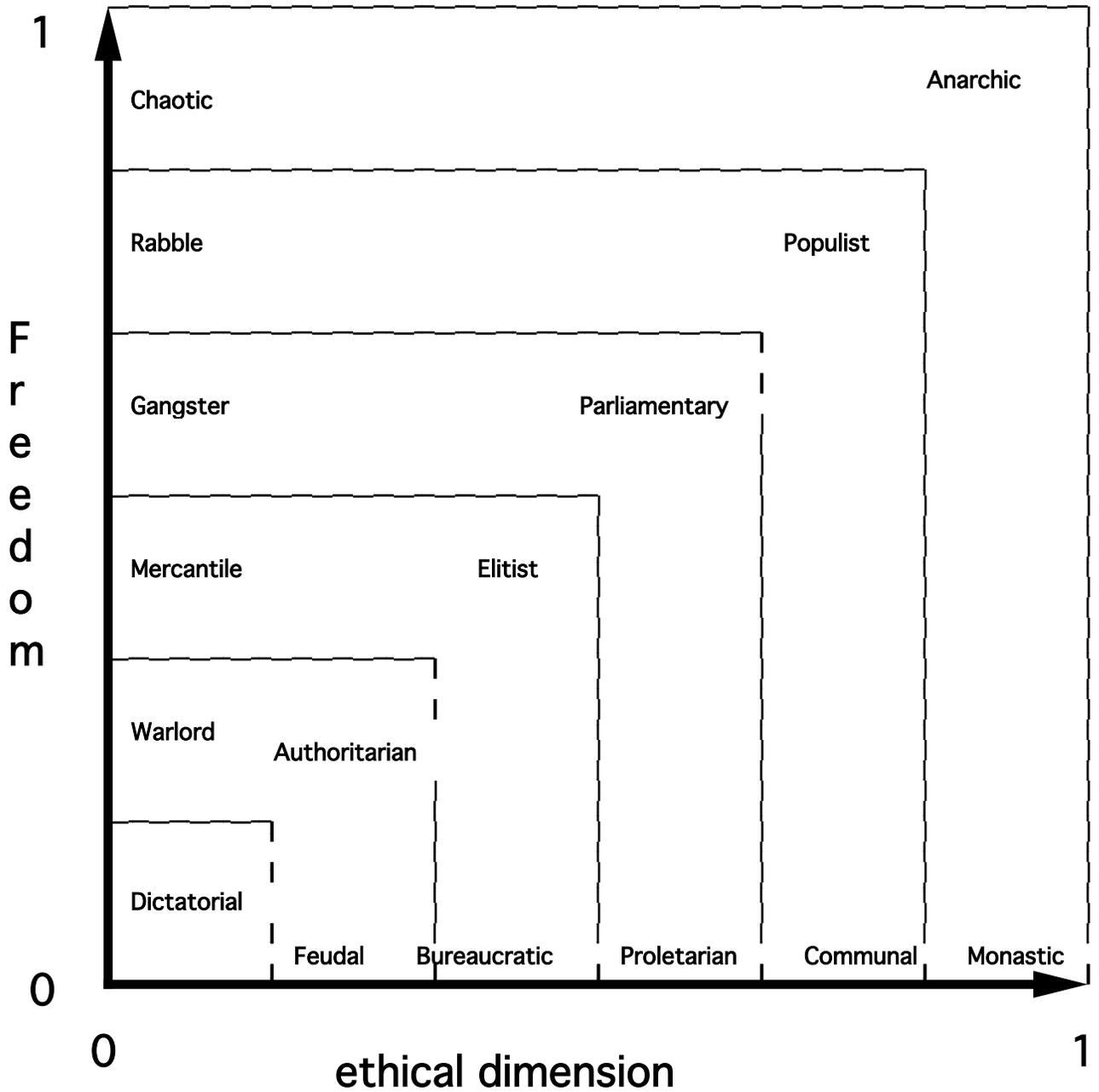
Look at the map. Now, what are Ross Perot and most "third" parties trying to do? I think they (we) see the United States as currently being an elitist state which has a diminishing sense of ethics (moving to the left on the map) and is becoming an increasingly heartless mercantile state.

Certain domestic movements, such as the enviro-regulatory and humane civil rights forces, agitate to maintain ethical standards though often at the cost of reduced freedom (moving downward on the map) and thus increasing bureaucracy.

I think that forces like Perot and today's "outsiders" are trying to change the American political vector from elitism toward a parliamentary-populist state (upward and to the right on the map). I believe the squabbles between Democrats and Republicans today are largely a charade because both of these parties essentially represent similar and overlapping spectrums of American capital and self-interest groups, and as a result both parties are expressions of an elitist state. One of these parties *may* be slightly more bureaucratic in its orientation, while the other *may* be slightly more mercantile.

From this perspective it is obvious why both Democrats and Republicans were united in their opposition to Ross Perot's presidential candidacy in 1992: it was too credible a challenge from outside the system, it was intrinsically anarchic and had to be suppressed, our job as citizens after all is to conform, obey and consume. Ross was not a "third force" in this election campaign, he was the missing "second force," the authentic expression of the anti-authoritarian, populist-parliamentary yearnings of the American working "classes." The ongoing trivialization of this voice is an attempt to limit a wider participation in governance, and it has its parallels in the trivialization of the anarchists of yesteryear, and of the Mayan "Indians" of this very day.





An ethical-freedom mapping of political heirarchy

Heirarchy diminishes as personal freedom and ethics increase