

Introduction

When we think of slavery in history, many immediately imagine individuals owned as private property, treated inhumanely, and devoid of rights. Yet historical studies increasingly suggest that in many early societies, so-called "slaves" were not merely personal property but rather public laborers—people bound to cities or noble estates to provide essential services for the functioning of urban systems. In this context, slavery may have been less about personal domination and more about institutional servitude.

The Nature of Ancient Slavery

In ancient times, production capacity was extremely limited. Land was abundant, but human labor was the core productive force. A person had to produce enough not only to feed themselves but also to generate surplus for their owner, if they were considered a slave. Under such harsh economic conditions, most people simply couldn't afford to "own" others.

This leads to a hypothesis: perhaps slavery in its earliest forms was largely a city-state mechanism, organized around public infrastructure rather than private profit. Slaves were laborers bound to urban elites, functioning like today's municipal workers—except without pay or freedom.

From Scarcity to Surplus

Fast-forward to the modern era: technological advancement has drastically changed the scale and efficiency of production. One person can now control machines that till hundreds of acres, manage thousands of transactions, or maintain entire systems. This shift in productivity has created enormous surplus, theoretically sufficient to support entire populations with minimal labor.

Yet societal structures have not evolved accordingly. Many remain trapped in outdated systems of ownership, reward, and identity. Debates continue to swirl around capitalism, democracy, governance, and morality—while the core reality is that very few people are needed to produce the goods everyone consumes.

The Core Contradiction

This is the contradiction I find most striking: technology has progressed, but social institutions have not. Humanity can now meet material needs with unprecedented efficiency, but wealth remains concentrated, and systems of power and distribution remain rigid. What should have been a liberating force—automation, AI, digitization—has instead become another tool of inequality.

A New Possibility

My core idea is simple: what if we minimized the roles of capital, ownership, and even technology itself, and instead reimagined a social structure based solely on distribution and participation? Not utopia, not ideology—just a new structure of fairness built atop the surplus we already have.

This is not a full solution, merely a starting point. Perhaps, in the future, if I can take these thoughts further, and build a working example, a second paper will follow. For now, let this be a seed.