

# Chains and Invisible Threads: Liberty and Domination in Marx's Account of Wage-Slavery

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## The author:

I am a Postdoctoral Fellow in Political Theory at the Justitia Amplificata Centre for Advanced Studies at the Goethe University Frankfurt and the Free University of Berlin. My research interests include the work of Karl Marx, theories of popular democracy, the republican political tradition and nineteenth-century social and political thought. Before coming to Frankfurt, I completed my DPhil at the University of Oxford. In September 2018, I will begin a Max Weber Postdoctoral Fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence.

## The paper:

This paper explores neo-Roman republican ideas in Karl Marx's account of wage-labour. I argue that this account can be divided into three sequential parts. First, the worker was *structurally dominated* as a result of the ownership of the means of production. Marx argued that though workers had the freedom to sell their labour-power, the fact that they owned no means of production meant that they were forced to sell their labour-power to a capitalist. Though they were not tied to an individual master (like serfs and slaves), their structural necessity to sell their labour-power meant that workers were tied to the mastery of the capitalist class. Second, the worker experienced *extractive domination* during the bargaining over the labour contract. Marx argued that during this transaction the capitalist used their superior power to set the terms of the labour contract in their favour, in order to extract as much surplus from the worker as possible. Third, the worker was subjected to the *personal domination* of the capitalist inside the factory workplace. Marx repeatedly compared the arbitrary power of the capitalist inside the factory to the arbitrary power of a despot over their subjects and argues that because of this they are unfree inside the factory. Marx thus maintained that the putatively free wage-labour contract disguised its underlying domination and unfreedom, which meant that wage-labour in fact amounted to wage-slavery.