

Caught in the Middle:

Analyzing Contemporary Wealth Inequality through Marxian Labor Alienation

Devin Gupta

Julia Steinberg

Jeremy D Sabol

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*Part I: Introduction and Present Wealth Inequality*

“It is not great wealth in a few individuals that proves a country is prosperous, but great general wealth evenly distributed among the people... It is the struggling masses who are the foundation [of this country]; and if the foundation [is] rotten or insecure, the rest of the structure must eventually crumble” (Inequality Quotes). Since Victoria Woodhull’s quote in 1872, wealth inequality—the unequal distribution of resources and assets—has grown exponentially and has shaped our contemporary economy to look extraordinarily different than it did even 100 years ago. This radical transition has become a pivotal axis in contemporary politics. The growing concentration of wealth in the hands of a few has sparked concerns about social injustice, diminished social mobility, and the erosion of the middle class, which have become relevant in discussions regarding taxation, income redistribution, education, healthcare, technology policy and geopolitics. Because of this, the American political binary has made this challenge central to either campaign, both claiming themselves “champions of the middle class” with varying interpretations and solutions to the widening wealth gap.

Where political challenges and standstills lie, academia thrives, hence in the past 10 years, economic and political science research into wealth inequality has blossomed. Fortunately, think tanks on both sides of the political aisle like the Brookings Institute, Rand Corporation and even Stanford’s own Hoover Institution have funded research into and around wealth inequality, ensuring politicians have adequate information and evidence to substantiate their public positions. Coinciding with the boom of high-tech giants like Google and Facebook in the 2000s and 2010s, recent work into wealth inequality has incorporated cutting edge methods in data science and machine learning to sift through massive amounts of historical and contemporary data on wealth distribution, organizational behavior

and micro-societal behavior. For the first time in history, scholars have a unique opportunity to develop a comprehensive historical account of economic relations and hence a new generation of data-versed researchers from top institutions are taking this challenge on. Of them, a primary leader in this research area is the Opportunity Insights lab led by Harvard economist Raj Chetty, which focuses on “harness[ing] the power of big data to document both the decline of the American Dream and potential solutions to revive it” (Opportunity Insights Facts Sheet, 1). In attempting to answer this question, the Opportunity Insights lab (OI) has built various data tools helping the public visualize the effects and implications of their research; I’ll be studying their Social Capital Index which tracks “economic connectedness, social clustering and civic engagement”.<sup>1</sup>

However, although these researchers are quite pioneering by using contemporary methodologies, questions about social and economic connection have been asked since the early fifteenth century (Leopold). Specifically, these researchers enter into a vast literature on how human society has distanced one-self from a core tenet of what it is to be human: our first definition of alienation. Alienation has a long history, but perhaps the most famous philosopher to define the term was a revolutionary thinker on the role of the middle class, 19th century German philosopher Karl Marx. Alienation shows up in many of Marx’s writings, but is first outlined in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 when Marx was just 26, as a philosophic distancing between man and his production. At first glance, Marxist alienation maps neatly onto contemporary measures of economic connectedness and social clustering, however within this paper we’ll discover the nuance and modulation between the two conceptions. Examining the convergence and divergence of Marx’s ideas

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<sup>1</sup> The data visualization for the Social Capital Index can be found at <https://socialcapital.org/>.

and OI's measures, this study argues that addressing alienation requires active citizenry, consideration of the effects of upward mobility, and the promotion of social class mingling to reduce labor alienation in both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. To establish this, I'll lay out the principles of Marx's characterization of alienation, beginning with the history of the term alienation, then Marx's simplifications of his definition of alienation, followed by methods Marx identifies to observe alienation in practice, and finally the systematic nature of alienation. Then I'll introduce the Opportunity Insights Lab and their literature on upward economic mobility, explain their methodology of creating the Social Capital Atlas, and synthesize each of the chosen Marx claims with contemporary data and examples using the indicators of economic connectedness, clustering and civic engagement. Ultimately, I'll re-establish the nuances of contemporary alienation and extend my argument to generate modern suggestions for addressing wealth inequality.

### *Part II: Contemporary Readings of Alienation*

In delving into the enduring significance of Karl Marx's analysis of labor alienation and its relevance in contemporary discourse, it is essential to approach his ideas with a critical lens. Marx has undeniably shaped our understanding of the challenges inherent in the human condition. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that certain aspects of his theory warrant a more nuanced interpretation when viewed through a contemporary perspective. This essay aims to scrutinize three key elements in Marx's analysis related to his simplification of alienation: 1) the simple relationship between commodification and labor alienation, 2) his omission of voluntary labor and 3) alienation

being a form of distance between the individual and the collective. By delving into these complexities, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary labor alienation.

Prior to Marx's definition of alienation, the term alienation had a rich history which Marx adopts and develops. Alienation grew originally from the Judeo-Christian religious context in which Christians were being "alienated from God" (Ephesians 4:18), meaning that because of original sin, humans were far from God by nature.<sup>2</sup> Marx relies on this religious definition of alienation—alienation is defined as distance between one and something else like God—to elucidate his own definitions of alienation. Within Marx's piece the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in the note titled Estranged Labor, Marx says, "for on this premise it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself" (Tucker 72). Here Marx relies on the existing religious term to establish a hidden binary: we must be absolved from commodification because commodification (like original sin) is fundamentally bad. He does this without any argument about the fundamental issues of commodification, yet simply through his comparison and reliance on religious terminology.<sup>3</sup> The second notable context of alienation is from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Second Discourse, where he terms the French expression 'amour propre', translating to love of self. Rousseau argues that by effect of existing in a society with other people, people naturally develop inflated amour propre which alienates oneself from their internal needs and

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<sup>2</sup> Original sin refers to the Christian conception that humans are in a state of moral corruption passed down from generation to generation beginning with Adam and Eve's sin in the Book of Genesis.

<sup>3</sup> Commodification refers to the societal tendency to value goods and hence project the features of goods onto all objects, people, ideas, etc.

values towards societal or collective expectations (Moore 81). Marx later relies on this comparison to the collective, the internal-external differentiation when defining his form of alienation (Tucker 12). Marx himself first extensively introduces alienation, or *Entäusserung*, in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, which Marx published in the summer of 1844 while living temporarily in the center of socialist thought at the time, Paris. Uniquely, Marx's piece on Estranged Labor hence comments not only on capitalism in 1844 England (which is largely similar to the present day in which OI is researching), but also French socialism and the German Hegelians which he directs the work towards. Marx responds to the German thinkers Feuerbach and Hegel, by adopting and altering their definitions of alienation. Marx first picks up alienation from Feuerbach who discusses an individual's distancing from religion as I've established above. However, Feuerbach actually responds directly to Hegel who comments on the social/economic alienation and the ways that consciousness as an ambiguous concept has become objectified, which he calls *Entfremdung* or "alienation" (DUPRÉ 217). Marx uses the 1844 Manuscripts to respond to Hegel and Feuerbach by reestablishing the negative characteristics of religious and social/economic alienation as Hegel had originally written, but further expanding on the intersection of labor and the economic nature of alienation.

In his 1844 Manuscripts, Marx characterizes alienation as antagonistic to man's eudaimonia, and creates almost mathematical relationships of the inverse dynamics between one's flourishing and their production. Initially when describing what alienation is within his chapter entitled Estranged Labor, Marx tried to characterize what labor does in relation to production of commodities. Marx says, "With the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion to the devaluation of the world of men. Labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a

commodity—and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally" (Tucker 71). Marx highlights the antagonistic relationship between labor and commodity by personifying labor, using the active verbs "proceeds", "produce" and "does so" attached to labor and the world of things. Marx attaches verbs to amorphous general nouns instead of giving authority and capacity to the individual, hence reinforcing the antagonism between labor and commodity that Marx's content suggests. Notably, Marx uses seemingly quantitative language like "increasing value" and "direct proportion" allowing him to establish simple and clear relationships between concepts when in reality there might be nuance and complication. In this case, *Marx distills the relationship between labor and commodity to be one of clear antagonism*. Furthermore, due to the amorphous nature of the concepts Marx introduces, these claims had been relatively untestable and hence might've gained popularity through resonance with his audience rather than practicality or historical evidence.

However, later in *Estranged Labor*, Marx allows for a more complicated interpretation of alienation as dependent on willingness. When describing how labor exists in an emotional location separate from one's home, he says "when [one] is working, he does not feel at home. His labor is, therefore, not voluntary but coerced; it is forced labor... Its alien character is clearly demonstrated by the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague" (Tucker 74). While Marx's analysis in "Estranged Labor" highlights the coercive and involuntary nature of labor under capitalist conditions, Marx then concedes instances where individuals find fulfillment and satisfaction in their work. His emphasis on labor being "coerced" and "forced" can be seen as a critique of the exploitative nature of capitalist systems, where individuals are compelled to work for their survival rather than pursuing their passions and interests. *Marx doesn't address instances where*

*people willingly and passionately engage in their occupations*, experiencing a sense of purpose and fulfillment, by instead assuming implicitly that all labor's reward is simply a wage. As we critically diverge from Marx's concept of alienation, we might explore the complexities of contemporary labor experiences like the impact of job autonomy, meaningful automation, and better work environments in shaping individuals' relationship with their work.

Another avenue of analysis lies in Marx's claims about how individual alienation of people and their labor transforms on a collective level. In *Estranged Labor*, Marx states that "In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labor therefore estranges from man his own species. It estranges the species from man and man from the species" (Tucker 75). In this case, using mirroring within "species from man" and "man from species" emphasizes the clear distinction between the two concepts—man and species—as though they require profound explanation to be considered equivalent. However, in the first line, Marx is using man to explain how all people collectively are being alienated, hence equivalent by use to the species' alienation. By doing so, Marx underscores his central claim: *alienation makes the individual (man) become progressively more distinct and further from the collective (species)*. Marx projects that increasing alienation between one and their production, makes an individual distanced from society, hence drawing a parallel between the community's clustering and labor alienation.<sup>4</sup>

Importantly, Marx's larger project depends on the fundamental premise that alienation is fundamentally negative, which he argues is due alienation's differing effect on the bourgeois and the

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<sup>4</sup> Opportunity Insights uses the terminology "community clustering" later on, which is why it is referenced here in this language. Clustering is an academic term used in sociology as a characteristic of social networks. More information can be found here: <https://theory.stanford.edu/~nmishra/Papers/clusteringSocialNetworks.pdf>.

proletariat. Marx makes this claim clearly in his slightly later work with Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family*, from 1845: they write that “the possessing class and the proletarian class represent one and the same human self-alienation. But the former feels satisfied and affirmed in this self-alienation, experiences the alienation as a sign of its own power, and possesses in it the appearance of a human existence. The latter, however, feels destroyed in this alienation, seeing in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence” (Tucker 133). Herein lies Marx’s fundamental critique of alienation. The stark contrast between alienation’s effects on the bourgeois and the proletariat underscores Marx’s critique of the capitalist system, where the bourgeoisie benefits from and perpetuates the alienation of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie, through their control of the means of production, exploit the labor of the proletariat, leading to a heightened sense of power and affirmation within their self-alienation. In contrast, the proletariat, who must sell their labor to survive, cannot view themselves above another social class, leading to a sense of impotence and an awareness of their dehumanized condition. Hence through their ownership of capital, *the ruling class derives a distorted sense of fulfillment from the alienation of the working class*. This systematic incentive for alienation is what makes alienation such a central issue according to Marx. In setting up this binary between the proletariat’s alienation and bourgeoisie’s alienation, Marx develops a useful model for analyzing the effects of a capitalist system. However, Marx’s analysis did not have the foresight to include a middle class, which has a relevant presence as both owners of some capital and active workers. The middle class thus experiences and perpetuates alienation at the same time.

Altogether, Marx accomplishes his task of calling attention to labor alienation as a challenge to the human condition and has successfully become prominent for his unique understanding and

communication of these ideas. However, if we read Marx with a contemporary critical lens, we've established that Marx first redefines the religious terminology of alienation, then claiming an overly simple relationship between commodification and labor alienation. Marx then asserts we have to replace this relationship because it makes the ruling class derive a distorted sense of fulfillment from alienating the proletariat. To prove his theory, Marx suggests we can find alienation wherever the individual becomes further from the collective while implicitly conceding that his theories might apply differently to cases where labor is willing and passionate.

### *Part III: Data-centered Research on Wealth Inequality*

The Opportunity Insights lab (OI), a renowned research lab founded by Harvard social scientists, employs data-driven analysis and rigorous methodologies to address economic mobility and social inequality in the United States. By leveraging large-scale datasets, OI aims to inform policymakers and the public about the factors influencing economic opportunities, with a focus on understanding and mitigating disparities faced by disadvantaged individuals. OI's work is largely observational; they attempt to predict indicators of 'upward economic mobility' but don't argue they've found the causes of disparity. OI claims upward economic mobility—the number of individuals who make more lifetime income than their parents—is critical for an economic system like capitalism to be functioning well because it represents the 'American Dream' that every citizen might be able to achieve the level of wealth they work for.<sup>5</sup> The lab was founded in 2018 and has received

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<sup>5</sup> Opportunity Insights has a fascinating graphic, indirectly related to this paper on the fading American Dream on the front page of their website: <https://opportunityinsights.org/>. Scroll down slightly to find it under 'what we do'.

significant funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Overdeck Family Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies (Opportunity Insights Facts Sheet 1). One of OI's significant initiatives has been their *Social Capital Atlas*, enabled by collaborations with the US Census Bureau and Meta's Data for Good team as part of the Humanitarian Data Exchange project, which aims to leverage data on Facebook 'friendships' to understand interconnectedness within communities via 'social capital'.<sup>6</sup> Through analyzing the way Opportunity Insights defines and collects data, I'll argue that their measures of social capital rigorously measure and add contemporary nuance to Marx's ideas of labor alienation, while Marx offers psychological justification for the causes of systemic disparity that OI recognizes in their data.

OI's research began in 2018 at (now) Meta's Data for Good team, where Meta's internal teams aggregated and anonymized data on Facebook users while capturing their demographic characteristics and friendship connections using a method called differential privacy. Differential privacy allows Meta to anonymize their dataset by adding "fake users" with representative demographic and network characteristics such that adversarial researchers can't identify particular users due to noise in the data (that doesn't reduce statistical reliability significantly). After cleaning the data, OI's researchers started by measuring socioeconomic status (SES) by combining various indicators like income, wealth, educational attainment, occupation, family background, neighborhood, and consumption into a single SES index using a machine-learning algorithm. Each individual's percentile rank in the national SES distribution is calculated relative to others in their birth cohort, and this method "demonstrates a

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<sup>6</sup> Meta's Data for Good team works to use large scale privacy-protected data with a variety of partners like NGOs, governments, & universities across the world to generate behavioral insights, visualizations and demographic information.

high correlation [with] external measures of income, such as ZIP codes, high schools, and colleges” (Chetty et al. 109). Notably, their work only focuses on Facebook users between 25 and 44 years old, but they claim based on previous work, their conclusions can be generalized across racial, socioeconomic and age groups. OI researchers then measure ‘social capital’ via a unique combination of friendship links and demographic information using three categories: cross-type connectedness, network cohesiveness, and civic engagement. Cross-type connectedness assesses the extent to which different types of people are friends (ex. bourgeoisie and proletariat friendship), while network cohesiveness focuses on clustering of friendship networks and mutual friend support. Civic engagement is measured through indices of trust and participation in civic organizations. At this point, the researchers developed unique visualizations and cross-checked their data, preparing to publish their paper and provide policy recommendations to various levels of government. Access to this scale of data, over 21 billion connections, has never been available to researchers before and OI’s data-centric observational methodology has been widely acclaimed such as by the [New York Times](#), [Bloomberg](#), the [US Congress](#) and [NPR](#) for being cutting edge and rigorously tested by journals including Nature, CES, NBER and the Quarterly Journal of Economics.<sup>7</sup> The Opportunity Insights lab’s rigorous methodology, currentness and comprehensive analysis makes it an ideal research authority with which to reevaluate a historical ideology like Karl Marx’s labor alienation.

First, we’ll connect OI’s civic engagement analysis with Marx’s first claims: 1) labor and commodity production are clearly antagonistic and 2) all labor is forced and coerced. To measure civic engagement, OI employs two main indicators. Firstly, they construct a proxy for the rate of

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<sup>7</sup> A full list of Opportunity Insight’s Papers might be found at <https://opportunityinsights.org/paper/>.

volunteering by analyzing the share of Facebook users in an area who have titles indicating a volunteering or activism group. This measure demonstrates a correlation of 0.58 with survey-based measures of volunteering rates across states (Chetty et al. 113). Marx leaves out this very group by assuming all labor is forced, while OI measures them in their research analysis. Marx doesn't acknowledge that while some work is for wage and within our capitalist systems, other work like volunteering and civic activism is purely by choice, whether paid or unpaid. Chetty searches for these examples and constructs a proxy measurement for civic engagement by measuring those people that Marx excludes, allowing us to understand how effective Marx's critiques of forced labor are in a contemporary society and specifically over time and space. This analysis lets us conclude that in places where civic engagement is high, by Chetty's measurements, Marx's thinking is less palpable, while also suggesting the inverse. Secondly, OI develops a measure of the density of civic organizations in a county by calculating the number of Facebook pages for such organizations divided by the population. This index shows a correlation of 0.67 with other data based indices across counties (Chetty et al. 113).<sup>8</sup> Similar to the first proxy index, Chetty constructs mechanisms to measure the pervasiveness of counterpoints to Marx's thinking that Marx himself acknowledges in the 1844 Manuscripts. Concretely, according to Chetty's measures, King County (Seattle) has high volunteering rates, at the ~61st percentile nationally, making Marx's critiques of forced labor less pertinent to those in high-activism cities like Seattle. Alternatively, Santa Clara county has low volunteering rates at the 24th

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<sup>8</sup> These correlations are zip-code-level univariate correlations between upward economic mobility and the specific social capital measure, and are weighted towards those in lower socioeconomic groups. More information included in Social capital I, Extended Data Table 2 (Chetty et al. 26).

percentile, making Marx's critiques particularly pertinent to those counties like Santa Clara, including scholars at Stanford.

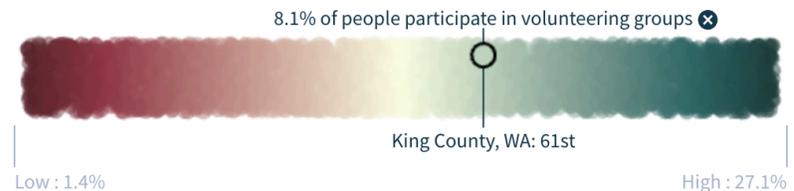
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**Figure 1:** Volunteering Rates in King County and Santa Clara County as measured in the Social Capital Atlas by the Opportunity Insights lab (Chetty et al.). Due to Marx's concession to uncoerced labor in the 1844 Manuscripts, King county is less vulnerable to Marx's critiques than Santa Clara County.

#### KING COUNTY, WA

##### Volunteering Rates

This county exhibits **high** volunteering rates, ranked at the **61st percentile** nationally. **8.1%** of people participate in volunteering groups.



#### SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CA

##### Volunteering Rates

This county exhibits **low** volunteering rates, ranked at the **24th percentile** nationally. **5.4%** of people participate in volunteering groups.




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Importantly, this gap within Marx's thinking helps us break down the simplistic relationship Marx has between labor production and commodification. If we can prove one example where a form of labor is clearly exempted from Marx's critiques and also prove using contemporary data that this form of labor

is common hence relevant to a correct cohesive view on alienation, then it calls into question Marx's framework as a whole. Hence while Marx claims a direct proportionality between alienated labor and the increasing value of things, we might add the nuance that *alienated labor can be correlated with the increasing value of things, depending on how engaged and passionate citizens are* in contributing to their communities. I argue this reinterpretation of Marx's economic framework to be one of political engagement is significant and could only have been derived from an active comparison of data like OI's visualizations to close reading Marx's analysis.

Next and possibly most importantly, we'll compare Marx's distancing of man from his species as an effect of alienation with OI's measurement of network cohesiveness. Marx claims that because of labor alienation, the individual becomes distanced from the collective or that each person, as an effect of being less in touch with the products of their labor, also understands less who puts labor into the goods one uses. As part of measuring social capital, OI defines a term 'clustering' which measures how many friends are also friends with one another. For clarity, we will take the example of Alice, Bob and Charlie. Alice and Bob, and Alice and Charlie are friends. Clustering measures if or if not Bob and Charlie are friends. OI cites "the logic underlying clustering as a measure of social capital is that if a person's friends are friends with each other, they can act together to pressure or sanction that person, which enforces norms and induces pro-social behavior and investment" (Chetty et al. 112). The connection between Marx's concept of alienation and the measurement of network cohesiveness by Opportunity Insights lies in their shared focus on the distance between individuals and the collective. According to Marx, labor alienation leads to the individual's estrangement from the collective, as the person becomes less connected to the products of their labor and the laborers behind the goods they

consume. OI's measurement of network cohesiveness, specifically the concept of clustering, reflects the collective connections and interactions within a network, highlighting the potential for joint action, norm enforcement, and pro-social behavior. By drawing this parallel, Marx suggests that increasing alienation in labor creates a distancing effect between individuals and society, resonating with OI's observation of the importance of cohesive networks in promoting collective behavior and social capital. Thus, both Marx's theory of alienation and OI's measurement of network cohesiveness emphasize the significance of the individual's relationship with the collective and the consequences of that relationship for social dynamics.<sup>9</sup> Within OI's data, we can study plots of community clustering versus upward income mobility, and specifically compare different geographical regions that show different relationships. As we draw out Marx's analysis and use a bit of a real world test, we realize that different economic structures have different sensitivities to the various forms and effects of labor alienation as termed by Marx. He predicts that in places with more labor alienation, we'll see more distance between an individual and the people around them, hence low social clustering. If Marx is correct about alienation, then as we analyze upward income mobility, we should see more clustering because clustering has been proven to be correlated with economic mobility, and hence the presence of less labor alienation. This would be indicated by the roughly positive slope on both graphs. One way to understand this is that those who are economically able to choose their work generally feel closer to the products they create. However, interestingly, in different geographies and varying economic environments, the slope of these graphs are different, meaning that places like California have a steeper

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<sup>9</sup> While both OI and Marx track 'social distance' between people in a community, we should note that in implementing the measurement, OI simplifies Marx's broad definition of the collective to instead be 2nd order social connections (friends of friends). Hence OI tracks how distanced one is from their 2nd order connections rather than "the collective".

relationship between clustering and mobility. This ultimately means that people in California who experienced upward mobility are more likely to be alienated from their labor, while people in the Midwest remain connected between the individual and the species even at high mobility levels. This analysis is extraordinarily important and relevant as we critique modern financial hubs like San Francisco and New York for being “cultural bubbles”. Not all capitalism is the same and *not all upward mobility equally unalienates us from our labor.*

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**Figure 2:** Community Clustering in California (left) and the Midwest (right) as measured in the Social Capital Atlas by the Opportunity Insights lab (Chetty et al.). Marx claims that labor alienation causes an individual to be distanced from the collective, hence in California where there is a steeper slope, those with upward income mobility are more likely to be alienated from their labor. In the Midwest, the slope of clustering versus upward income mobility is less stark, and those with higher upward income mobility are less likely relative to California to be alienated from their labor.



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Finally, Marx argues that the problematic nature of labor alienation lies in the internal psychological dissonance it leaves both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie with. This argument explains OI's claim that an implementable mechanism for increasing upward economic mobility is to ensure more cross type connectedness, or mixing of social classes. As explained earlier, Marx argues in *the Holy Family* that alienation affects each social class differently. The bourgeoisie perceive alienation between social groups as a sign of power and, as a result, possess a distorted sense of fulfillment, while the proletariat, who are exploited by the bourgeoisie, experience the destructive and dehumanizing impact of alienation, feeling impotent and aware of their marginalized existence. At the same time OI claims "the share of high-SES friends among individuals with low SES—which we term economic connectedness—is among the strongest predictors of upward income mobility identified to date... If children with low-SES parents were to grow up in counties with economic connectedness comparable to that of the average child with high-SES parents, their incomes in adulthood would increase by 20% on average. Differences in economic connectedness can explain well-known relationships between upward income mobility and racial segregation, poverty rates, and inequality" (Chetty et al. 108). Chetty et al. claims that more interaction between those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds and those from high socioeconomic status backgrounds would help reduce the effects of alienation and hence allow for more upward economic mobility.<sup>10</sup> Pleasantly, OI's finding that economic connectedness across social classes can contribute to upward income mobility and Marx's argument of

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<sup>10</sup> Here I'm citing socioeconomic status (SES) as equivalent to the proletariat and bourgeois classifications. While high SES individuals might not be part of the bourgeois due to occupations where they don't explicitly own their means of production (ex. doctors), they often make enough money to engage in other capacities with capital like the stock market or purchasing expensive homes.

different effects of alienation by social class might offer unique justifications and validations for one another. While Chetty hosts an observational study of economic inequality in the past 70 years, Marx might be able to provide more theoretical frameworks for us to explain why this is the case: specifically, the distorted sense of fulfillment and systematic nature of class-based psychological dissonance. Clearly stated, Marx offers Chetty et al. a framework in which *mixing of social classes reduces psychological distorted fulfillment experienced by the bourgeoisie and helps humanize the proletariat's labor*, explaining the necessity of 'cross-type connectedness'.

#### *Part IV: Conclusions and Present Relevance*

Altogether, it is clear the Opportunity Insights lab's data-driven work on studying societal and economic behavior lends itself instinctively to contemporizing Marx's theories of labor and social alienation. Through critically analyzing Marx's ideas in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, I've identified the sources of the term "*Entäußerung*" (alienation), Marx's simplification and limits of alienation, the problematic nature of alienation, and measures with which to track alienation. Referencing these ideas, I outlined OI's larger project of upward economic mobility and how particular measures of social capital might predict upward mobility, including economic connectedness, social clustering and civic engagement. In synthesizing OI and Marx, I argued that 1) alienation, while related to commodification, also depends on an active citizenry, 2) sometimes, upward economic mobility causes more alienation than other times, and 3) social class mingling reduces both the bourgeoisie and proletariat's labor alienation. As we revisit the contemporary political and economic challenges of wealth inequality globally, this analysis suggests that at an individual level,

each citizen should work to engage with political institutions, volunteer groups and other activism outside of their primary wage labor. Additionally, more research is necessary in characterizing the types of capitalist systems where upward mobility might effectively solve challenges of labor alienation, and where other mechanisms need to be investigated. Finally, institutions must find new ways to ensure the mixing of the bourgeoisie and proletariat, emphasizing the unique opportunities of university systems like Stanford with a diverse and vibrant student body.

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