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# SYMPOSIUM<sup>1</sup>

What Does Job Insecurity Do? Talking to, and Learning from, Arne Kalleberg's *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*

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Arne Kalleberg has been writing about insecure work for decades; in the mid-1990s, he started looking at contingent employment, and job quality in the United States has been the major theme of his work for the last 25 years. His expertise in work is deep and profound. But in my view, the book we discuss here—*Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*—is a step toward thinking much more broadly, not just about precarious work, but also about its impact beyond the worker and beyond the workplace.

This is a big intellectual move, and one I think we need to recognize; I point it out as part of a provocation I am offering here, one aimed at sociology generally, but work scholars in particular. If sociology is an omnivorous discipline, open to studying any realm of human activity (and even some nonhumans), we control this chaos of study objects by organizing ourselves into defined silos, as represented by the ASA sections, which are a very large pile of nouns, from Family to Culture to Work, Organizations, and Occupations.

If I were in charge of reconfiguring the discipline, however, I might not choose nouns. I would instead choose verbs, and more encompassing ones at that. Instead of Work, Organization, and Occupations, for example, we might use “Provisioning,” or the process of creating value. This kind of language shift accomplishes at least three things: (1) It rescues work researchers from a perennial problem of theirs, which is how to think usefully about both paid and unpaid work; (2) it helps researchers include what has been called “the social wage”—or

*Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*, by **Arne Kalleberg**. Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018. 242 pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9781509506507.

the kind of provisioning from the state; and (3) it also helps us see more clearly the causes and consequences of work—both the way it is organized and also its effects on people's lives. In my view, Kalleberg's *Precarious Lives* is about provisioning, because it focuses not just on job insecurity, but also economic insecurity, the social wage, and their broader impacts.

The book asks two primary questions: why has there been an increase in precarious work in rich democracies? And how does the experience and impact of precarious work vary in these countries? Kalleberg trains his analysis on six countries, which he divides into four diverse types of modern capitalism: social democratic nations (Denmark), coordinated market economies (Germany and Japan), “southern Mediterranean” nations (Spain), and liberal market economies (the United Kingdom and the United States). He defines precarious work as work that is uncertain, unstable, and insecure, and in which employees bear the risks of work and receive limited social benefits and statutory entitlements. He distinguishes in the book between subjective and objective job insecurity, as well as between kinds of precarious work, such as the high rates of temporary jobs found in Spain, where full-time work has a lot of protections, as opposed to the United States, where perhaps the full-time jobs are so tenuous employers do not need to resort to temp labor as much for their flexibility.

<sup>1</sup> The editorial team thanks Steven Vallas for organizing this symposium.

Although the first question sets up a puzzle—we might expect rich democracies to be able to ensure good jobs for their people—Kalleberg’s answer is relatively brief, pointing to a set of familiar causes, including increased international competition, political changes that worked to disempower workers, corporate restructuring, growing financialization of corporations, capital mobility, state austerity, privatization, and other trends that he wraps together and calls the neoliberal revolution.

Kalleberg—and I—are ultimately far more interested in the second question, which occupies about 200 more pages. As he writes, “fortunately, the negative consequences of precarious work are not inevitable. Labor market and social welfare protection institutions are subject to the control of political actors” (p. 5). Here is the engine of the book, the why-did-he-write-it. If the consequences of precarious work are not inevitable, then why are some countries better able than others to help their people weather it?

Kalleberg tells us that people who live in countries with more generous social safety nets are more secure both in their jobs and in their economic situation. He distinguishes between “active labor market policies” designed to help people get jobs and “employment protection” laws that make it harder for employers to dismiss people or use contingent labor. Underlying these country differences are the degree to which workers have any collective power and how much their collective power translates into political power by their alignment with political parties.

It is not until the third part of this book that Kalleberg gets into precarity’s broader impacts, which he considers economic insecurity, the transition to adulthood and family formation, and subjective well-being. The book’s nitty gritty take-home applies most clearly to economic insecurity and to subjective well-being: countries with a more robust labor market and social welfare protections have less inequality and less poverty, and their people are reportedly happier. The cause-and-effect is a little less obvious, however, with regard to the transition to adulthood and family formation, as all six countries have declining fertility and, in

most, there are increasing numbers of youth who are suffering from a failure to launch (i.e., “not in employment, education, or training”). Kalleberg concludes the book with a chapter about the politics of precarious work, both the social movements organizing to address it and the measures to collectivize risk, ensure greater access to lifelong education, and regulate labor required to meet its challenge, or what he calls the “new political and social contract.”

The book is thorough, careful, and clear. I appreciated its scope and rigor. I learned from it, but in the true sign of a generative text I also talked back to it, mostly about what else we might learn if we took culture, race and gender inequality, and technology more seriously.

First, how would this analysis change if it had a more robust vision of culture? What does culture help us see, and what does its absence occlude? There were certainly tidbits throughout the book that had my cultural antennae quivering. In the section on subjective well-being, for example, Kalleberg analyzes four countries—the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, and Denmark—before and after the Global Recession. As it turns out, perceived job insecurity is not all that related to perceived well-being in Spain and the United Kingdom, which have relatively higher levels of subjective job insecurity, while it is very much related to well-being in Germany and Denmark, countries where people are less likely to experience it.

Unfortunately, I think measurements of “happiness” or “satisfaction” don’t get us very far in thinking about this, and I’m glad that Kalleberg mentioned the power of expectations. In my own work, *The Tumbleweed Society* (2015), which compared insecure and stable workers in the United States, I found that expectations were vital in shaping how people interpreted their own experience and, perhaps more important, how they censored or amplified their own feelings according to what kind of emotions they thought were acceptable to have. In the United States, I noted, we do a lot of work to get over job insecurity—we talk about how job loss is a new opportunity, we say “I didn’t want to work there anyway,” we forcibly direct ourselves to move on.

We do this work because culture is not just about our own beliefs and practices, not just how we feel and think about things, it is about what we think *other people* feel and think about things. Culture is about the beliefs and practices that we think prevail around us. In the United States we perceive a culture of insecurity—we are surrounded by messages that say lower your expectations for a stable job, because workers are responsible for their own training and trajectory or, as Kalleberg dubs it, for the “risks of employment.”

Thinking about cultural expectations helped me understand Spain, whose people seemed inured to their relatively high economic and job insecurity, and Denmark, whose people anticipated more stability for themselves and others. To be clear, I’m suggesting that it is not just that people are reporting satisfaction or happiness, but instead that the satisfaction or happiness they feel is culturally sanctioned for people in their position, given the expectations they allow themselves—and, perhaps, whom they are allowed to blame—for stable or precarious work.

I think policy-focused non-culture scholars sometimes view culture as not helpful because it is not considered an easy lever for change; in this view, culture is more like a backdrop that helps us merely to interpret precarious work. Instead, I would argue we need culture in order to be smarter about the levers for change we propose or initiate. The issues of cultural expectations and blame, how these vary across countries, and their implications for policy and practice are beautifully explored in Caitlyn Collins’s new book *Making Motherhood Work* (2019).

The second question is related to the first in that I wonder what would happen to Kalleberg’s diagnoses of problem and solution if race and gender were more central to his analysis. For example, Kalleberg focuses on six rich democracies, and we know that work in the global South is very likely to be more insecure. But can we speak more comprehensively about why there are and are not robust social welfare protections in the various countries he did study? Most of those countries are far more monochromatic in racial/ethnic terms than the United States, and we can say their arrangements

reflect a gendered work-family system that assumes the state is there to solve the “problem” of women without men. I’ve already written elsewhere about how gender affects the book’s analysis of Japan, where precarious work is not just an impediment to men’s marriage, but also an escape hatch for women seeking to avoid sacrificial versions of motherhood. Yet while the same “problem” of women without men surely applies to the United States, scholars have documented that the lack of social welfare in the United States exists partly because the women that it was erroneously seen to be mostly supporting were Black and Brown (Gordon 1994; Quadagno 1994). Is the way forward toward a “new political and social contract” even possible without tackling the continuing legacies of gendered whiteness?

Finally, the book is missing much of a discussion of automation and artificial intelligence. At one point, Kalleberg calls technology and globalization “inexorable forces” (p. 5), which makes it sound like he does not think there is a politics to technology. I know many Silicon Valley engineers who would agree. As a result, their favorite policy option is often some form of Universal Basic Income, which—while it usefully broadens the notion of who or what is worth supporting—sometimes seems like a way of throwing up their hands about technology’s impact and instead just planning for a future in which (paid) work itself is a luxury good.

Kalleberg’s profound final call is compatible with this vision of the future: to help people thrive, he writes, “it is essential to decouple economic security from market work. We may need to reconceptualize not only the meaning of work but also the understanding of what constitutes value in a society”—in other words, provisioning (p. 198). I found myself thinking about the kind of work that is harder to automate: in-person humane labor whose value rests on connections between people. Women of color are disproportionately employed in low-wage caring work, and for now, that is work that looks less likely to be replaced by machines, although socio-emotional AI is burgeoning. A reconfiguring of what counts as valuable could start there: what do we get from other humans that is worth preserving? More particularly, how do AI

and automation shape what kind of work gets seen as precarious? What kind of political and cultural conditions affect the trajectory of technology and its impact on who gets to have work, who must work, and whose precarious lives depend on it? By adding culture, race and gender inequalities, and technology to the conversation, we can use *Precarious Lives* to think further about a future that is already here.

Kalleberg has written a comprehensive comparative analysis of precarious work and its effects that ripple out well beyond work and the workplace. It is important that we understand how countries have managed these effects and how institutional and cultural practices shape consequences for the well-being of people, their families, and communities. The book contributes to

a vital task, one that transcends the silos of sociology to expand our reckoning of important social trends: understanding the broader impacts of provisioning.

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## The Intersectionality of Precarity

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In *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*, Arne Kalleberg takes a comparative approach to precarious work in wealthy countries—considering social welfare and labor market institutions in Denmark, Germany, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States and making contributions not only to the sociology of work and organizations but also to political economy. Precarious work, for Kalleberg, means work that is “*uncertain, unstable, and insecure, and in which employees bear the risk of work* (as opposed to businesses or the government) and *receive limited social benefits and statutory entitlements*” (p. 3, emphasis original). Thus, precarious work means that workers experience a high risk of job loss and unpredictability, receive limited wages and benefits, and can rely on few protections and labor rights. Precarious work has been increasing among workers in wealthy countries—though precarity is nothing new, as Kalleberg states, and women, immigrants, and workers of color have

long experienced “uncertain, insecure, and risky work relations” (p. 18).

Taking a Polanyian (1944) approach to political economy, and building on power resource theory, Kalleberg argues that modern welfare states balance free and flexible markets with state-provided social protections. Unregulated markets lead to disaster—yet for reasons of culture as well as political and economic institutions, these countries have adopted different levels of social protection. State intervention includes social welfare spending and unemployment benefits, as well as active labor market policies aimed at helping workers transition to new jobs and employment protections. The book also describes change over time, as neoliberal reforms have led to greater reliance on market solutions and fewer and fewer protections for workers in all of these countries.

Exploring nonstandard employment relations, job insecurity, economic insecurity, challenges transitioning to adulthood, and

subjective well-being, Kalleberg demonstrates that the countries under study have adopted different approaches to precarious jobs. While Denmark adopts embedded flexibilization, which allows markets to be flexible while collectivizing risk, Germany, Spain, and Japan adopt dualization, which protects some workers and abandons other workers to precarity. The United States and the United Kingdom exemplify deregulatory liberalization, allowing markets even greater freedom, extending precarity, and leaving many, if not most, workers with very limited protections.

The argument is both clear and appropriately complex and provides an important perspective on how precarious jobs have become so common, the many negative outcomes that emanate from precarity, and, more hopefully, that it is possible to have both strong economies and labor protections. Kalleberg argues for three key policy changes: a stronger safety net, greater access to education and training, and more robust employment protections.

While I appreciate what Kalleberg has accomplished, future work should build on his foundation, to understand this shift to precarity as further reflecting gender and family dynamics as well as racial/ethnic and immigration diversity. These are two separate points, although they dovetail in a number of ways. We must recognize that precarity is not an equal-opportunity disaster.

Throughout the book, Kalleberg only tangentially recognizes gender and families. For example, the book points out that while men's tenure at jobs has been decreasing, women's tenure has been increasing, and it explains how precarious jobs have led to delays in family formation and family stability. Yet the book does not fully consider how economic transformations have led most families to rely on two, rather than one, wage earners or the attending impact on social reproduction. Precarity has fundamentally changed work patterns for men and women in wealthy countries.

Analyzing ethnicity and immigration is a challenge in comparative political economy, since many European surveys do not consistently collect data on ethnicity and migration data often does not differentiate

between migrants from within Western Europe and from elsewhere. Kalleberg occasionally refers to immigrants and particularly their access to education and training. Yet there are broad differences in ethnic diversity that may factor into the country variations that he points out. It would be important to know if the positive cases, like Denmark, have also protected their immigrant labor force.

Placing social reproduction more centrally at the heart of these questions might identify how changes in gender regimes are connected to growing precarity. Social reproduction refers to the ability of workers to reproduce themselves. Capitalism tasks workers with producing goods or services that owners can sell at a profit—over and above materials and labor costs. Yet those labor costs should include enough for workers to have families and produce the next generation of citizens and workers. If employers pay too little for workers to find housing, shelter, and food, they will not be able to work, much less reproduce. Historically, as Kalleberg points out, employers and the state may prioritize support for particular families, more likely to pay living wages to members of dominant racial and ethnic groups.

Much social reproduction occurs within families and is carried out by women, often relying on the labor of immigrant and racial-minority women, who provide care for the elderly, the sick, and children, as well as preparing food and other services employed families farm out. Gender, race, and nationality also intersect in how social reproduction occurs. For dominant groups and for some time periods, men were able to earn a "male breadwinner wage," which definitionally meant that they could provide for their families in ways that reflected an assumed gendered division of labor. In the current era, more women, including more women from dominant groups, are engaged in labor market activities—not simply because of their interest in participating in waged work, but also because employers expect that social reproduction occurs not through income from one worker but from incomes from two or more workers and, in places like the United States, three or more

jobs. This produces dramatic changes in the gender regime, particularly for families from dominant groups.

Women from certain groups are more likely to find themselves in part-time work—which may allow them to balance the unpaid work within the home that is necessary for social reproduction. Immigrant women and women of color are more likely to be in nonstandard care-work arrangements, earning very low wages for the critical work of social reproduction. Certain workers, by gender, race, and nationality, are also more likely to be employed in short-term, temporary positions with few protections. The precarity found in nonstandard employment relations reflects not only class, but also gender, race, and nationality. Employers may be more likely to consign workers to nonstandard employment relations when those workers are “others” or secondary wage earners. Drawing attention to *who* is affected by dualization and deregulatory liberalization is a crucial research agenda.

Understanding job insecurity also requires recognizing the meaning of men’s reduced job tenure while acknowledging the fact that women’s job tenure is increasing. It leads to analyzing *which* men’s jobs are more insecure, as well as *which* women’s jobs are more secure. This further relates to how gender, nationality, race, and class intersect in determining how precarity is affecting family formation. Highly educated workers are much more likely to be in secure jobs and marry other highly educated workers. Thus, household formation is magnifying economic insecurity for some groups and economic security for others.

As Kalleberg’s analysis shows, it is also not simply that wages are too low, but that jobs are insecure, so that workers have no real confidence that if they lose their jobs, they will be able to find something else that allows them to support their families. Thus, increasingly, families rely on many different household members and multiple jobs, in hopes of reducing their reliance on any one job or employer. Women, of course, bear a higher burden: necessary labor outside the home and much of the labor within the home.

Families also rely on the precarious work of other service workers, such as immigrant or racial-minority domestic and care workers. Precarity thus consistently generates not only class, but also gender, nationality, and race inequalities. Just as, for centuries, immigrants and communities of color have subsidized the better conditions enjoyed by members of dominant groups, in the twenty-first century, they continue to subsidize the profits of employers and owners even as members of dominant groups increasingly experience precarity.

The story about generalized precarity takes on a different cast when recognizing that Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom are not only the most insecure, but also the most racially and ethnically diverse, while Japan, Denmark, and Germany are significantly less diverse (Drazanova 2019). At the same time, families headed by single parents tend to be the most likely to experience economic insecurity, and these families are much more prevalent in the United Kingdom and the United States. The lack of social protections thus may reflect a somewhat more heterogeneous population and a lower commitment to ensuring the well-being of a diverse population.

Analyzing the transition to adulthood through a more consistent gender lens, as well as a focus on variations among subpopulations, might also be instructive. Young adults are more likely to live with their parents in the twenty-first century, but which parents are supporting adult children and which adult children are supporting their parents? While Kalleberg draws attention to how adult men find it difficult to find marriage partners if they are in precarious jobs, adult women may have the same problem, particularly in liberal, low-protection countries.

Similarly, making sense of how subjective well-being differs in each country—by not only job and economic insecurity, but also how these intersect with gender, race, and nationality—might deepen understanding about what these different groups expect—which workers expect less precarity, and which workers are resigned to precarity.

Thus gender, nationality, and race are implicated in nonstandard employment

relations, job insecurity, economic insecurity, and subjective well-being, as well as policy solutions to all of these, in ways that Kalleberg's analysis only hints at.

Connecting the current increase in precarity with historical patterns of precarity suggests changes in policy priorities. If both the state and employers view certain workers as "extra" workers who do not need to earn enough to support their families, this may lead to employers characterizing all workers as "extra" workers. When wages no longer support families, workers are expected to rely on their family members to "make up" the difference between a living wage and the actual wage. In these cases, state employment protections wither as families are tasked to solve the problems caused by the capitalist search for increasing profit margins and government support for private profit over public good.

The solutions to these challenges clearly lie in a stronger safety net, greater access to education and training, and more robust employment protections. Yet the design of these programs must be organized inclusively to ensure that women, immigrants, and racial and ethnic minorities also benefit. Kalleberg focuses on health insurance, retirement benefits, and unemployment insurance, as well as the possibility of universal basic income. In the United States, many of these systems have been organized to exclude certain groups. Designing inclusive social insurance programs is critical to creating a just, secure society.

As Kalleberg notes, retirement and unemployment have often been treated in a dualistic fashion, with only some workers benefiting. For example, care workers might be paid under the table—losing pension contributions and unemployment protections. Yet there are solutions, such as employers paying workers with vouchers, with the state taking out the appropriate contributions. Paying attention to who is excluded from existing programs may help design new programs that more effectively provide support to a diverse array of workers.

The safety net also needs to include work-family policies that provide support to working parents and other social programs aimed at addressing support for social reproduction. In some countries, like the United States, social reproduction has been

marketized (particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, as more of this work has been pushed back into the home), while in other countries, it has been handled more collectively by the state. Collective social reproduction is consistent with a reduction in precarity, regardless of employer behavior.

Political economists of the welfare state have increasingly emphasized work-family policies because there is an oncoming crisis due to lower fertility rates: if there are too few workers paying into the system, the welfare state cannot provide benefits (Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Hemerijck, and Myles 2002). Policies like universal childcare benefit all workers, but particularly the most vulnerable groups; state-provided leaves, including ones that push both fathers and mothers to care for children, can help solve some of the challenges of social reproduction and increase fertility.

Education, training, and skill development also need to be carefully targeted to ensure that everyone can access routes to better jobs. Men who are in vocational training are more likely to end up in better-paying jobs, but vocational training for women tends to lead to low-paying jobs such as childcare and other devalued and unprotected social reproduction work. At the same time, immigrants and racial-ethnic minorities need to access similar opportunities for education and training; whites remain overrepresented in career and technical education training in the United States (Center for Education Statistics 2019), while migrants are also underrepresented in vocational training in Germany and other European countries (Schuler 2018). Flexicurity systems, as in Denmark, also need to be alert in how their design provides opportunities to women and migrants.

Finally, while greater labor protections are undoubtedly necessary, it is critical to address how the move for labor protection has often come through labor movements that have privileged protecting dominant groups, including white men (Clawson 2003). Labor protections must be broad and universal; U.S. employment law and regulation regarding temporary and part-time work are as bad as they are in part because of the focus on greater protections for full-time workers.



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Kalleberg's book makes important contributions to understanding the political economy of precarious jobs. It also creates new opportunities for researchers who center their work around gender, race/ethnicity, and migration to build on the important foundation that he has laid.

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### Living Just in Time: Reflections on Arne L. Kalleberg, *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*

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*Precarious Lives* has many strengths. The book is impressive in scale and ambition. Arne Kalleberg makes an exceptional effort to define and conceptualize precarious, nonstandard, irregular work and analyze its prevalence and divergent consequences in six rich industrial democracies. Precarity isn't a thing in itself, Kalleberg argues, but a pattern of employment that takes shape differently depending on government social welfare systems and employers' labor relations policies. Moreover, the volume is sophisticated in its theoretical breadth, reaching from canonical varieties of capitalism and power resources theories to financialization arguments to ideas about liquid modernity. In addition, Kalleberg is acutely aware that the biggest consequence of precarious labor is that workers bear the risks, as opposed to employers and governments. This privatization of risk has, as he shows in an excellent Chapter Seven, dire consequences for the subjective sense of well-being for individuals and their families. But this is a book symposium, and I am supposed to be here for provocation, not praise. Let me turn to limitations, or perhaps better to say different emphases that I wish Kalleberg had pursued.

One, I would have liked to have seen more of an organizational emphasis. Kalleberg repeatedly observes that the post-World War II Fordist consensus was a golden era for only a minority of the labor force—white men working for large organizations. But he doesn't mention the boring conformity of that era. Arne and I are from the same generation, and surely he recoiled as much as I did at the thought of spending one's entire life working for the same company. The security we reminisce about today felt like prison with golden handcuffs back in the 1960s. This Fordist system was poised for overthrow. Piore and Sabel (1984) in their *Second Industrial Divide* showed how flexible specialization outflanked mass production, and Ben Harrison (1994) in his *Lean and Mean* analyzed how decentralized companies undercut slow moving behemoths. Labor historian Louis Hyman (2018) in his recent book *Temp* emphasizes how the risk-averse, loyal company man was ripe for picking. He focuses on two organizations, Manpower, the temporary staffing agency, and McKinsey, the global consulting firm. Manpower brought the outsourcing of personnel to American corporations in the 1970s and made it easy and legible. There

was no turning back. McKinsey and other elite consulting firms, with their own exhaustive and intensive internal up or out career ladders, basically destroyed the white-collar middle class by restructuring, layering, and eliminating multiple levels and units in corporate hierarchies. Temporary and flexible became organizational alternatives to permanent and rigid. Understanding the differential receptivity of organizations to these changes and how new organizations created in this century have embraced flexibility are crucial topics to explore.

Two, a cultural lens to studying precarity seems necessary. We have witnessed an ideological transformation, with entrepreneurship, startup businesses, social movements, and nonprofits celebrated at the expense of established organizations. This enshrinement of agency, of being a founder, of disrupting established entities and mindsets has now become baked into our zeitgeist. This cultural transformation in which things that were solid become liquid even remakes nonstandard work. Temporary work in response to changes in demand has become cutely labeled a side hustle. Instability and unpredictability produce ingenuity. Think of all the examples from the pandemic: craft brewers making sanitizers, knitting clubs producing masks, upscale restaurants turning to takeout, and neighborhood bodegas becoming pantry shelves. We marvel at the rapidity of this ability to repurpose and in so doing further enshrine an entrepreneurial ideology.

This culture shift in the United States to being entrepreneurial and adaptive is not entirely new. Twenty years ago, I wrote an essay asking whether work has come to resemble the challenges of gigging practiced by itinerant freelance musicians (Powell 2001). What is different now is that a mode of work that was formerly perceived by some as aberrant and others as a necessity is now venerated by many. Entrepreneurship has become the normative ideal for a neoliberal era. And one might suspect that the virtual, remote experiment we are currently living through will further erode connections between employees and employers and increase free agency. To be sure, there is resistance to this new era, by

both gig workers *and* high-tech workers (Vallas 2019), but protests against digital subjugation also signal how pervasive the credo of “move fast and break things” has become.

Three, one area where the book seems somewhat time stamped, to me at least, is in its consideration of technological change, most significantly how digital data and artificial intelligence are reshaping work. Perhaps nowhere is this more dramatic than in what we used to call the professions. In the previous century, it was common to say that a job is how you make money, a professional career is how you make your mark. But professional careers have been irrevocably altered, with nonstandard work now much more commonplace. The medical profession is a prime example. The patient in a hospital bed is now a placeholder for the real patient who is no longer in the bed, but in a computer. That virtual entity gets all the attention, and electronic health records have displaced living persons. Studies show that for every hour medical professionals spend with patients, two hours are spent with electronic health records. These records and the attention to them not only render medical care draining and soulless, they detach it from place. Records can be read from anywhere; work schedules become untethered from organizations.

Medical work teams are now assembled from across the country. We have seen vivid examples in the current pandemic, with emergency nurses and doctors rushing around the country to help in various hot spots. Back in 2018, which seems like decades ago, I had major back surgery. As we waited for the anesthesiologist to show up, I interviewed the twelve-person team, lying on the surgical gurney. Only my surgeon lived locally. Nine of the twelve participating staff lived out of state—in Alabama, Georgia, and Texas, near airports. They commuted to a Silicon Valley hospital for three days of intense twelve-hour shifts because, they said, of high pay, benefits, and better working conditions. Their schedules were produced two weeks in advance so as to permit just-in-time coordination. High-skill medicine, too, has become precarious, and these working conditions increase detachment and burnout.

When place and work become disconnected and work hours are routinely irregular, the damages to both the self and the civic fabric of communities are real. Kalleberg is sensitive to these issues in his opening chapter, discussing work by Beck, Bauman, and Standing. But the comparative discussions in this important book don't follow these arguments as closely. Only in his discussion of Japan, which he knows so well from his earlier work on Japanese workplaces, does he dwell on how precarity robs people of real contact with other humans. I wanted more on the effects that precarity has on attachments. Kalleberg is sensitive to how precarity reshapes lives and careers—young people living with their parents into their 30s, delaying family and children amid declining prospects of income security. I would have loved for him to go further and ask what the wider consequences are to community, to a sense of membership in organizations, to social bonds writ large. If technological change weakens the spatial relationship between work and the household, what are the second-order effects on friendships, associations, and investments in durable relationships?

We typically see fragments of the future distributed throughout the present. Organizational, cultural, and technological lenses come together in contentious debates today over the gig economy versus the sharing economy. I will use the less loaded term, "platform economy." We are in the midst of a reorganization of the economy in which the owners of the monopoly platforms are developing power that outreaches that of the factory owners in the early Industrial Revolution (Kenney and Zyman 2020; Vallas and Schor 2020). And just as the factory system remade the fabric of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century life, today's world is being reorganized around digital platforms, creating a world of work that parallels the nineteenth century putting-out system more than either the twentieth-century factory or bureaucracy. These online structures, whether public ones like Amazon or Etsy or Uber or Zoom or more private digital service tools provided by firms like Salesforce, enable and control an enormous array of human activities. Some pundits imagine a future of mini-entrepreneurs

working on flexible schedules and pursuing their own initiatives. That may be the case for a fortunate minority who will have successful, albeit precarious careers as app developers or YouTube stars. But for many others, the platform economy creates irregular work schedules and part-time work without employment-related benefits. What balance will there be among jobs as the digital wave flows through our society and economy, and who bears the costs as jobs are replaced or reconfigured? Even though the algorithmic revolution and cloud computing are the cornerstones of the platform economy, the contours of it can be shaped by national policies and investments and political will. How do we create a social safety net that cushions and meshes with the new economy of platforms and digitization, a program that addresses the costs of health care, housing, and education?

Kalleberg's thoughtful analysis points to Denmark and its policy of flexicurity as one advanced democracy that has mitigated some of the effects of precarity better than most countries. Danes are, indeed, among the world's happiest people, and for many good reasons. But Denmark is also a very homogeneous society averse to immigrants. Is it a model for larger, more heterogeneous countries? Portable social security, retirement benefits, and health care not tied to specific employment contracts are central aspects of the Danish system that could and should be adopted by others.

Building a political coalition in support of policies that mitigate employment insecurity is a considerable challenge. A universal basic income was not on many people's radar screens when this book was written. But cities from Stockton, California to Helsinki, Finland have experimented with it, and a variety of scholars studying how to create a new social ethics in an era of AI now take UBI very seriously. The pandemic has given many displaced workers and their families a type of experience with it. Whatever its limitations, it carries the term universal, and it opens discussion of a social wage, as opposed to a market wage. This impressive book enlarges the conversation about how six countries are coping with the harsh winds of precarity. But nothing is preordained about how precarity remakes work and lives:

its consequences will be the result of organizational, legal, and political choices that societies must make.

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## Sociology of Work Meets Cultural Sociology: Thoughts on Arne Kalleberg's *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*

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Arne Kalleberg has a well-earned reputation as an insightful social scientist. As one of the first American sociologists to raise awareness of the rise of contingent work in the United States, his steadiness is remarkable; he always delivers high-quality scholarship, and his most recent book, *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*, is no exception. The topic was already hot nine years ago, when his first award-winning book on the topic, *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* (2011), was released. But it is even more urgent now, nine months into the pandemic, when so many low-skilled workers, including domestic workers and people who work for tips, have seen their market positions deteriorate dramatically in the context of the pandemic. Today, at a time when essential workers are celebrated, and their work conditions deplored, more Americans, particularly young Americans, are joining the "fight for fifteen." This was suggested in interviews Lamont conducted this summer with labor leaders such as Ai-jen Poo and Saru Jayaraman, who spoke about the current hopes and increased dynamism of the labor movement under COVID. The crisis is exacerbating the internal contradictions of

capitalism. We have read Kalleberg's book in the context of this crisis.

Drawing on comparative sociology, in *Precarious Lives*, Kalleberg gives us the analytical tools needed to better make sense of the connection between well-being (at the micro level), precarious work (at the meso level), and worker power resources, state redistribution, and other social policies (at the macro level). "Context matters" is the crux of his argument, as is often the case in sociology. But of course, "context" is one of the most polysemic concepts of all of the social sciences. So what does he mean by this?

In *Precarious Lives*, Kalleberg pushes forward the agenda of his 2011 book, which focused only on the United States, by comparing this case with five other advanced industrial societies—Denmark, Germany, Japan, Spain, and the United Kingdom—to determine how precarious work varies across countries and what shapes it. Drawing on the "varieties of capitalism" paradigm (Hall and Soskice 2001) and on power resources theory, as extended by comparativists such as Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990), he offers a general theoretical model that we find attractive despite its cultural blind

spots. Perhaps not surprisingly, this will be our main criticism.

In this book, the macro level is largely captured by social welfare protections and labor market institutions, although Kalleberg also briefly discusses variations in social norms and values, as well as demography. The six countries he focuses on are frequently used in the literature as examples of the kinds of capitalism (social democratic, coordinated, or liberal) that vary in terms of their industrial relations systems, corporate governance, vocational training and education, and more (p. 36). In this model (described in Figure 1.1, p. 26), the meso level (referring to job precarity/insecurity) is explained by these macro characteristics of society. Precarious work, in turn, affects the micro level, which is captured by various measures of well-being—namely, economic insecurity, transitions to adulthood, and subjective well-being.

As our first point, it would have been useful to have a fuller justification for the country selection beyond the author's desire to extend these important research traditions. Kalleberg explains his selection of countries by his goal to focus on "a relatively privileged set of countries" (p. 18) that lost protections in recent years under the influence of neoliberalism. This explanation opens the question of how *change in level of insecurity* may be experienced as compared with *continuity in level of insecurity*, both across countries and at the intra-national level. The present is measured against the past, against periods of prosperity, which have varied considerably across the set of countries under consideration. Similarly, different groups of citizens within each country have doubtless differentially experienced insecurity as diminishing, increasing, or continuing, with variation by race, gender, or class. This is a dimension of the problem that is not sufficiently addressed.

Our main critiques revolve around the value of a cultural sociology analysis, which would foreground the experiences and perceptions of the people affected by the job insecurity foregrounded in this book.

First and foremost, Kalleberg's primary focus on job insecurity, with economic insecurity described as one of its consequences, provokes the question of how these two

concepts are connected, particularly in people's experiences. What are the risks of job insecurity (defined based on Kalleberg's analysis) that are *disconnected* from *economic* insecurity (defined as low wages, volatility in earnings, and the related inability to purchase necessary goods)? How are the two related? We posit that most of the risks of employment precarity are in increasing the effects of economic insecurity (e.g., the delay in the transition to adulthood). But to fully capture this relationship, researchers would need to systematically compare each country in terms of employment precarity, low wages, debt (particularly student loan debt), and other factors that might shape economic insecurity, such as high cost of living (including housing). These in turn should be analyzed in terms of the broader economic context in which people live.

Kalleberg gestures toward this question when he highlights how perceived economic insecurity has a far stronger negative impact on subjective well-being than perceived job insecurity does (p. 159). But he does not fully develop this analysis since he omits dimensions that are intrinsic to economic insecurity, such as the cost of living or of higher education, that vary enormously across countries and affect the fate of workers. An important item for a future agenda will be to study the varied dimensions of insecurity in comparative perspective more systematically, beyond purely job-centered aspects, such as average job tenure or transitions from temporary to permanent employment (which Kalleberg does consider). This broadening of the study of (job) insecurity to equally foreground elements that are connected, but not specifically employment-based, is important because it is more closely aligned with people's *experiences* of insecurity.

Along these lines, the book could have done more to contrast ways of experiencing insecurity in the different countries. Although Kalleberg clearly distinguished differences in job insecurity on various dimensions throughout the book, he could have more clearly described how these dimensions interconnect. For example, the author could have compared how the experiences of a worker in Spain, where unemployment and involuntary part-time employment are extremely high but where

collective bargaining is prominent and welfare expenditure has soared (all measures that Kalleberg includes in his analysis), differ from those of his or her counterpart in the United States, where the risks of unemployment and involuntary part-time employment are much lower (at least before the pandemic!) but collective bargaining and welfare expenditure are comparatively low and the quasi absence of redistribution and income compensation makes workers more vulnerable to becoming homeless and being hungry. Such an analysis would capture how experiences of job insecurity take different hues due to the macro structural characteristics of each society. This would have helped us understand how the various dimensions of insecurity and countervailing resources (such as unemployment compensation and welfare support but also family support and the existence of charitable NGOs that can provide aid when needed) worked *together* to differentially increase or limit the negative impact of insecurity on subjective well-being across contexts.

The close of Kalleberg's book also does not consider the experiences of workers in sufficient detail. He ends his book by describing possible futures—offering both optimistic and pessimistic scenarios and focusing on how social scientists and policy-makers might correct ongoing problems. But the analysis bypasses another important future-related question—how do the people who are experiencing job insecurity imagine *their own* futures? What pathways do they see as possible? How do they connect them to the various dimensions of job insecurity analyzed by Kalleberg, such as union density or welfare generosity? And how do these projected futures affect strategies of resistance? Addressing these questions would help us make sense of the responses of workers to encroaching precarity, including their involvement in social and political movements (such as Occupy, discussed in Chapter 8), as well as less collective action.

These critiques all foreground the importance of subjective job insecurity and the experiences of workers. While Kalleberg discusses differences between objective measures of job security (like job tenure or labor market insecurity) and more subjective

measures (such as perceived job insecurity), there is also a need to think more deeply and inductively about objective and subjective insecurity and how they are connected to each other and to workers' experiences. Again, how do workers understand and shape their lives to lessen the anxiety they experience? How are their responses tied to the broader cultural contexts in which they live? These contexts are shaped by different national cultural repertoires (Lamont and Thevenot 2000). They also include different scripts about national identity (is their country in a downward spiral or not?), political leadership (do they have an insane political leader?), their economic situation (is it declining or prospering?), and whether the countries are in "institutional crisis mode." How can such widely circulating scripts influence how individuals experience their market positions? These are questions that Kalleberg sets aside.

This choice is not altogether surprising given that American literature on workers has long had a strong social structural focus, coming out of the industrial relations and Marxist traditions. In a paper Lamont co-published in 2011 with Caitlin Daniel and Eleni Arzoglou titled "European Workers: Meaning-Making Beings" (2011), we pointed to the cultural blind spot of this literature and argued that experts should consider (1) the meaning that operates in situations; (2) how meaning contributes to social processes; and (3) how meaning can help explain why situations lead to specific outcomes (p. 293). A next step could be to systematically address these questions, so as to connect Kalleberg's agenda to cultural questions that would allow us to develop a multidimensional analysis of social and cultural processes. Joining forces in this endeavor may be necessary—no one sociologist can do everything, and reality is truly multidimensional and complex, involving both cultural and social processes (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014).

It is in this cultural focus and concern for workers' experiences that the work of cultural sociologists, including Ayala-Hurtado's dissertation, will complement Kalleberg's agenda. Ayala-Hurtado's research focuses on young college graduates in the United States and Spain who have had difficulty gaining

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a footing in the labor market; more specifically it focuses on how they are experiencing changes in their social trajectories as the economic value of their college degrees declines while the costs of university education and housing continue to rise. She is concerned with how these young graduates manage their identities, imagine their futures, and perceive possibilities of individual or collective action, topics that are marginal to Kalleberg's analysis, except in the penultimate chapter where he briefly considers how workers engage in "voice, exit, and loyalty" in response to their situation. Like Kalleberg, Ayala-Hurtado shows that configurations of insecurity in each country vary widely, but she also examines in depth how a specific group of young adults makes sense of them, redefines their identities in the process, and seeks solutions.

Despite the criticisms we have formulated, we believe Kalleberg's book is certain to become the definitive comparative study of job insecurity from the perspective of access to resources and the labor market—the resources that ground workers' market position. It is destined to be the "go-to" text to understand what precarity and

insecurity are. As such, it will be generative for a great many social scientists.

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### *Precarious Lives: Filling the Gaps*

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In *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*, I sought to explain the recent rise in precarious work in rich democracies and how this affects peoples' experiences of job and economic insecurity, their transition to adulthood, and their subjective well-being in countries with dissimilar institutions and cultures. I examined these questions by studying six countries that differed in their labor market and social welfare protection institutions. I also outlined some of the policies needed to address some of the major challenges related to precarious work and lives. These are big and complex questions, which is reflected in the diversity of issues raised by the contributors to this symposium.

I thank Steve Vallas for organizing the symposium and the first-rate scholars who have weighed in on various topics raised by the book. These scholars have identified some of the gaps in my arguments that need to be fleshed out in order to reach a fuller understanding of how people in the different countries have responded to the challenges created by the recent rise of precarious work. Their insightful comments form an agenda for future research on work, inequality, and social welfare and point to themes that should be included in any sequel to *Precarious Lives*. Here, I expand on four general themes raised by these authors: gender and race differences in precarious work; the role of culture in shaping

the experience and meaning of precarious work; precarious work and technological and organizational changes; and public policies to address precarious work.

### Overview of *Precarious Lives*

My analysis of precarious work and lives was based on six rich democracies: Denmark, Germany, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These represent different types of employment and production regimes that are identified by theories of the varieties of capitalism and power resources. These countries display the institutional variations that differentiate political economies and shape the organization of work and how it is experienced by groups and individuals. My research design represents a compromise between studies of specific countries or regions (which limits generality) and large numbers of countries, sometimes represented by typologies (which hinders a deeper understanding of country dynamics). My choice of these six countries was also influenced by my previous knowledge and experience; I could of course have made other choices, such as including other interesting cases such as France, or, for example, substituting Italy for Spain, or South Korea for Japan. My focus on precarious work as the main source of insecurity also reflects my longstanding emphasis on the centrality of *paid* work to individuals, families, and societies. This is not to downplay other sources of risk and insecurity in these societies that have not been at the forefront of my analysis, however, such as precarious housing, political turmoil, climate change, and so on.

I supported empirically my cross-national, multi-level arguments about institutions and precarious work and lives by quantitative data obtained from surveys of individuals and statistical indicators of country-level spending on labor market and welfare policies and of worker power. This empirical approach enabled me to compare countries on key dimensions of their political economies. Cultural influences figured in the argument indirectly through ideologies such as neoliberalism or gender divisions of labor. Nevertheless, the subjective understandings of workers received short shrift

in my analysis, as survey questions are limited in illuminating workers' experiences and expectations, which are better approached by in-depth information obtained from individuals in particular settings.

### Gender and Race Differences in *Precarious Lives*

My theoretical argument, grounded in the political economy of these countries, focuses more on the structure of *paid work* than on *workers*. The liberalization of labor markets and the rise of precarious work has been particularly dramatic for (white, native) men, who were the main beneficiaries of labor protections in the post-World War II era and thus have experienced the biggest loss in privilege as these labor protections have been eroded. Women and workers of color have always been in a more precarious position, though they too of course have suffered from a dramatic growth of insecurity.

A gender lens offers a more complete understanding of the recent rise of precarious work and its impact on individuals and families; precarious work affects men and women differently, as Joya Misra and Allison Pugh point out. Looking at precarious work through a gender lens puts families and social reproduction at the center of the analysis and expands the focus to unpaid as well as paid work. Thus, welfare protection systems have provided more collective support for social reproduction in some countries than others, through parental leave and other flexible working arrangements (e.g., Denmark). Some countries (e.g., Denmark, Japan, Germany) have incentivized part-time work for women more than others, facilitating their balancing work and family.

Race matters more in some countries than others (e.g., Blacks and Whites in the United States), depending in part on the racial diversity and history of race relations in the country. But all countries are faced with labor force issues related to ethnicity, and especially immigration, making the distinction between natives and the foreign-born especially relevant. For example, Denmark and Japan are fairly unwelcoming to the integration of immigrants into the labor force. The United States and the United Kingdom are the most ethnically diverse



countries and have higher fertility rates due to greater numbers of immigrants.

### Culture, Precarious Work, and Well-Being

My narrative focuses more on the structure of paid work than on the cultures of work in the different countries. I touched on culture indirectly in various ways—for example, when discussing gender ideologies and patriarchal arrangements. Culture is also important to my discussions of the transition to adulthood and family formation and of subjective well-being.

Nevertheless, a more robust conception of culture than I have presented would illuminate how people experience precarious work and lives, as Elena Ayala-Hurtado and Michèle Lamont, Allison Pugh, and Woody Powell point out. Expectations are vital to more deeply understand workers' subjective experiences of job and economic insecurity and how they define their futures. A cultural lens that emphasizes the voices of workers and their families would provide a richer appreciation of what people understand to be possible. For example, people in the United States are likely to have relatively low expectations about having a secure job and so may be relatively satisfied with their quality of life regardless of their objective level of job insecurity.

Cultural shifts also help to explain how people have adapted to how work is organized in various periods. As Powell points out, our enthusiasm for the "Golden Age" of capitalism in the three decades after World War II is dampened somewhat when we recall that the standard employment relationship of that era was exemplified by the idea of the conforming "organization man." By contrast, the current excitement and celebrations of entrepreneurship represent a cultural shift that supports emerging forms of relations between individuals and organizations, such as independent contractors who work for gig economy platforms.

### Technological and Organizational Changes and Precarious Work

Technological changes are an important part of the explanation for changes in the

nature and arrangements of work. I argued that digitalization facilitates the kinds of global connections among countries and organizations that create greater pressures on employers to compete in global markets by cutting costs and obtaining greater efficiencies. I said relatively little, however, about precarious work and topics related to technology moving forward, such as automation or artificial intelligence. While technological advances and innovation are inexorable, the form technologies take and the uses to which they are put involve choices made by employers, workers, and political actors.

How automation and digitalization will affect precarious work depends on the organizational contexts within which these technologies are used. This underscores the utility of looking at precarious work through an organizational lens, as Powell points out. My discussion made a number of assumptions about organizations at the meso level of analysis, such as how employers responded to the liberalization of labor markets. But I did not analyze these organizational differences explicitly, a gap that could be filled by exploiting the increasing number of matched employer-employee data sets that are now becoming available for many countries.

Recently, attention has focused on the emergence of the platform economy, which provides a governance mechanism for organizing work that is different from markets, hierarchies, or networks (for a review, see Vallas and Schor 2020). This organizational form is fairly recent but has grown rapidly and illustrates the application of digital technologies to the control of "independent contractors" who are only loosely tied to organizations. The platform economy provides numerous advantages for employers, while having both advantages and drawbacks for workers. These mixed outcomes are reflected in the varieties of cultural discourse about the pros and cons of the platform economy and the many unanswered questions about its future, which Powell ably summarizes.

An organizational lens also helps to anticipate new ways in which precarious workers may be able to acquire power and greater security. For example, SMart-Belgium is

a cooperative that was established over 20 years ago to support freelance artists but has been extended to those in other occupations, and it is part of the global Platform Cooperative Movement (Charles, Ferreras, and Lamine 2020). This organizational form seeks to increase earners' autonomy and job and economic security.

### Precarious Lives and Public Policies

The most fundamental policy implication of my arguments is the imperative to decouple economic security from one's labor market activity and the type of work arrangement one has, whether employed by a "good" organization or self-employed. This is essential in order to help workers navigate the increasingly uncertain landscape of work in the future as well as to be able to expand our conception of work beyond paid market work.

An old idea that has recently received increased attention is the Universal Basic Income (UBI) for all legal residents of a country. The idea behind this policy is the provision of a universal, unconditional, regular, government-funded income that would provide a basic level of economic security. UBI's appeal has been enhanced by fears that automation will eliminate many jobs as well as the high unemployment rate due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, it is controversial for economic, political, and cultural reasons, and it is unclear how it would work on a large scale. Objections to the UBI are that it redistributes value that has already been created in society, that it may be an excuse to cut back on other forms of social welfare protections, and that it may alleviate pressures to regulate employers and the quality of work. While the idea of universality is appealing, one wonders whether the design of policy programs such as this should be tweaked for different groups within the population. A means test based on income, for example, might target funds to those who most need it rather than to those who are already economically secure.

### Conclusions

The rise of precarious work has created uncertainty and insecurity for large portions of the workforce in all countries. The

extent to which precarious work translates into precarious lives depends largely on the social and legal protections that are linked to particular work arrangements. My account in *Precarious Lives* of the liberalization of labor markets in six rich democracies emphasized how this differed depending on how employers organized production and on labor's power resources. My multi-level argument sought to link macro features of countries to the meso-level organization of work and ultimately to outcomes at the individual, micro level. Given the complexity of these connections, it is not surprising that there were gaps in my narrative. I am grateful to the contributors to this symposium for identifying and elaborating on some of the key next steps in studying precarious lives.

First, we need to understand how precarious work affects men and women differently and the implications of this for families and social reproduction. Second, more of a cultural lens would enhance our appreciation of how structures and cultures interact to produce differences in both the objective and subjective nature of work. More in-depth studies of organizations and workers would provide more insight into the expectations and experiences of workers. Third, we need more of an organizational lens, a meso perspective to complement the macro perspective I presented. This offers a fruitful area of research, as there is increasing availability of multinational linked employer-employee data as well as opportunities for numerous deep dives into particular organizations and their members. Finally, we need to figure out ways to decommodify workers, so as to separate the nature of the work arrangement from basic social protections such as health care, unemployment insurance, retirement benefits, and other social welfare protections.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has magnified precarious lives. High rates of unemployment and insecure work have strained countries' finances and threatened the social welfare protections people need more than ever. Enhancing job and economic security constitutes an even greater, more central challenge for countries now than when the book was written.

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# Max Weber: 1864–1920

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## Max Weber's Living Legacy

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June 14, 2020 was the hundred-year anniversary of Max Weber's death. He died in Munich at age 56 after most likely contracting the Spanish flu. He is often considered one of the founding fathers of sociology next to Marx and Durkheim, despite Weber resisting this label. Given Weber's worldwide reception, his enduring relevance for sociology and beyond is unbroken, even though he left a huge unfinished work not intended as a conventional sociological grand theory but as a historical-comparative attempt to understand how humans interact within their social environment and how they construct a social reality of their own making.

Weber's popularity waxed and waned with the rise of positivism in the second half of the twentieth century. The current trend to critically judge hypothesis-testing as the supreme method to unlock law-like cause-and-effect social relationships now seems to be giving Weberian thought a new lifeline. The commemoration of Max Weber's death during another pandemic coincides with the publication of his Complete Edition (*Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* [MWG]) in 47 volumes. The MWG provides, for the first time, "a definitive historical-critical edition of the entire range of his thinking and engagements, not only a basis for a comprehensive account of his life and work but also a resource for moving beyond textual reconstruction and interpretation to new applications and possible extensions of . . . [his] ideas" (Hanke, Scaff, and Whimster 2019:3).

The anniversary and the publication of the MWG provide a good reason to reassess Weber's contribution and living legacy to sociology and the social sciences. In this short essay, I do not ask if Weber is still relevant (he is). Instead, I argue that it is his openness to interpretation, illustrated by the emergence of *Weberology* and *Weberianism*, that has made his work last for so many decades. Toward this end, I will examine the influence of his conceptual and methodological innovations and how they were absorbed, contextualized, revised, reinterpreted, and applied in the last 100 years. Then I will evaluate Weber's universal influence through translations and publications and his influence on the teaching of sociology. Next, I review the trivialization, exploitation, and abuse of Weber's prestige and authority for often contrary purposes, an outcome that is often ignored. The conclusion summarizes Weber's continuing relevance.

## Scholarly Impact

Weber's scholarly contribution to the discipline is not in doubt since he dealt with the big questions of his and our times: the emergence and challenges of modern capitalist societies in comparative and historical perspective. He not only moved sociology into new territory but also broke new ground in anthropology, economy, history, political science, religion, law, media, and cultural

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## Combating Labor Precarity Is Hard Work

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“All that is solid melts into air,” wrote Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, at a time when labor was becoming increasingly precarious. The experience of workplace precarity and the broader feeling of insecurity it engenders are certainly not new; they are as old as capitalism. Even so, precarious labor as a concept is enjoying quite a boom these days. Gerry Rodgers and Janine Rodgers’s (1989) introduction of the term to a broad English-speaking audience did not immediately catch fire, but the 2000s brought a new wave of research seeking to characterize labor precarity in the United States, Europe, and Canada (Kalleberg 2011; Standing 2011; Vosko 2006).

The four books reviewed here represent high points of an analytically richer second wave that probes precarity as process, not just status. Collectively, they examine the determinants of employment precarity, its more distal consequences, the mechanisms at work, precarious workers’ lived experiences, and their forms of resistance to precarity. Individually, each takes a particular slice through the problem, contributing a vital perspective. Adam Reich and Peter Bearman’s *Working for Respect: Community and Conflict at Walmart* particularly explores the many ways that precarious work relates to various forms of community. Arne Kalleberg, in *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*, analyzes how varying national institutional environments shape precarious labor and how precarity’s implications differ across these contexts. Shannon Gleeson’s *Precarious Claims: The Promise and Failure of Workplace Protections in the United States* focuses on individual resistance to precarity via the process of making legal claims. Finally, Edward Webster, Akua Britwum, and the late Sharit Bhowmik gather a set of accounts of collective resistance by precarious workers in their *Crossing the Divide: Precarious Work and the Future of Labour*.

*Working for Respect: Community and Conflict at Walmart*, by **Adam Reich** and **Peter Bearman**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. 332 pp. \$30.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780231188425.

*Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*, by **Arne L. Kalleberg**. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2018. 242 pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9781509506507.

*Precarious Claims: The Promise and Failure of Workplace Protections in the United States*, by **Shannon Gleeson**. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016. 177 pp. \$34.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520288782.

*Crossing the Divide: Precarious Work and the Future of Labour*, edited by **Edward Webster**, **Akua O. Britwum**, and **Sharit Bhowmik**. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. 260 pp. \$24.95. ISBN: 9781869143534.

These works are not in direct dialogue with each other. Reich and Bearman and Gleeson study the United States—the former through one gigantic corporation, the latter through fieldwork in one region (Northern California). Kalleberg compares six wealthy countries of the global North; Webster, Britwum, and Bhowmik draw cases from three countries of the global South. Gleeson and the contributors to *Crossing the Divide* adopt solidly qualitative methodologies; Kalleberg’s take is based on secondary quantitative data; Reich and Bearman draw on a dizzying mix of methods. Despite a lack of empirical and conceptual synchronization, the four books do complement each other in ways I will return to at the end of this review. First, however, a word on each of the books.

Reich and Bearman's look at Walmart is analytically exhilarating in how it stitches together varied questions, processes, voices, and data sources, constantly pushing to theorize as well as observe. The authors placed twenty undergraduates with OUR Walmart, a grassroots organization of Walmart workers, in five locations across the United States for the summer. They draw on the students' interviews and observations, their own conversations with workers at Walmarts where they "shopped" across the country, textual analyses of masses of data scraped from OUR Walmart's social network, network analyses of store-level organizing processes, and more, even fMRI brain scans of the student participants before and after the summer project.

Reich and Bearman describe their goal as examining "the way in which social ties both inhibit and make possible [the] achievement" of "freedom in the contemporary American workplace" (p. 12), and the book excels at probing varied types of community. The backdrop of the entire work is the artificial community constructed by Walmart's corporate strategy. At the store level, workers and customers create real communities. But a worker's place in such communities is precarious, above all because of management's arbitrary power, which is described in lacerating detail in the words of current and former employees. And the store-based community is starkly unequal by race, gender, job status, and the distinction between the customer (who is "always right") and worker (who by default is wrong in any dispute). The authors also examine communities created in OUR Walmart's organizing process: store-scale networks of supporters, the group's national online community, the mini-communities of student organizers. Despite their admiration for OUR Walmart, they conclude that given the corporation's numerous structural advantages, neither online nor in-person organizing has yet yielded a strategy capable of building worker power at scale.

Likewise fascinating, though less fully realized, is the volume's analysis of the nature and basis of despotic management at Walmart. Reich and Bearman emphasize the inherent unpredictability of a server system like a store that must respond instantly

to changes in customer flows. They argue that Walmart's solution is to allow managers wide discretion, underpinned by worker surveillance facilitated by technology and by customers themselves. One painfully common result is that one manager in a store will punish a worker for following the instructions of a different manager. They also point to Walmart's monopsony power as one of a few large employers (in some cases the only one) accessible to workers with limited skills in a given area. And they note the company's pernicious ideological hegemony: most workers interviewed believe that since they could quit any time, any abuse or exploitation experienced is their own choice. (Workers of color, who most often feel the sharp end of Walmart's disciplinary stick, are less captive to this rationalization—often using metaphors like "slavery" or "jail" to describe their jobs.) And, not surprisingly, workers' evaluation of a Walmart job depends on their frame of reference: women fleeing domestic abuse or simply domestic boredom, or persons coming from equally precarious work with no promotion opportunities, view Walmart employment more favorably.

Inevitably the broad and diverse reach of the volume leaves most subjects only partially explored and the varied themes only partially synthesized. Given the breadth of the work, the lessons are more about many small things than a small number of big things. Still, this ambitious book, so much of it speaking through the voices of Walmart workers, sets a new standard for company-focused labor case studies.

Kalleberg's book is in one sense also stretched thin, compiling data from six countries (Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Denmark, in addition to the United States). But by grounding himself in comparable quantitative data and relentlessly focusing on the nature and experience of precarious work and its life consequences, Kalleberg delivers a text that, while less pyrotechnic, is more coherent. This is a comprehensive text on labor precarity in wealthy democracies and how its incidence, traits, and implications differ decisively based on national institutions. Kalleberg is a pragmatic and eclectic theorizer, defining precarity via "a range of factors" (p. 14), explaining

the shift to more precarious work as likewise resulting from many different forces, and positing the determinants of precarious status as multiplex. Despite these multiple causal pathways, he does emphasize two particular institutional factors: the social safety net and labor market institutions (particularly labor relations systems). Thus, insecure employment is a very different experience in Denmark, with an encompassing welfare state and high levels of union coverage that ensure similar conditions in successive jobs, than it is in Japan, where the social safety net has been primarily based on male lifetime employment with large corporations, leaving no backup system as those earlier guarantees have eroded.

*Precarious Lives* is admirably inclusive in its well-being measures. Kalleberg reviews evidence on the incidence of nonstandard work and of objective and subjective measures of job insecurity, broader earnings and income measures (including an OECD “earnings quality measure” that combines data on average earnings levels with the degree of earnings inequality), young people’s transition to steady employment and household formation, and general measures of life satisfaction and perceived well-being. Though Kalleberg leans heavily on quantitative indices, the empirics supporting the causal argument linking National Institutions → Precarity → Well-Being are actually qualitative: essentially, he presents a comparison of six country case studies showing that differences in institutions generally line up with differences in measures of precarity, which generally line up with differences in well-being parameters. The book’s most powerful graph shows the estimated contributions of self-reported *job* insecurity and *economic* insecurity to a subjective well-being scale for the four European countries (alas, comparable U.S. and Japanese data do not exist), from individual-level regressions with controls (p. 159). Underscoring Kalleberg’s point about the impact of the safety net, the coefficients on job insecurity are uniformly small (and do not achieve standard significance levels in two of the countries), whereas the estimated relationships with economic security are uniformly large and highly significant.

Overall, *Precarious Lives* provides a remarkably thorough comparative overview of precarious labor in particular and work in general, and their apparent relationship with well-being—all in a remarkably concise form. The book is not packaged as a comparative text on labor regimes, but it does as good a job as many such texts, all the while invoking precarity as the organizing principle and motivation for the globe-trotting empirical journey.

While Kalleberg focuses on social welfare and labor relations systems, Gleeson examines another apparatus: the employment claims system, the principal resource for individuals wronged on the job in the United States. Her lens is the experience of vulnerable low-wage workers, immigrants in particular and especially undocumented ones. She draws on multiple data sources from fieldwork in Northern California: a large survey of people attending workers’-rights clinics (plus follow-up interviews with a subset); interviews with injured workers filing workers’ compensation claims; participant observation as a legal aid clinic volunteer; and supplementary interviews with lawyers, agency staff, and workers. In her main data set, the large survey plus interviews, three-quarters of the sample is foreign-born, with about half that percentage undocumented. As with Reich and Bearman’s X-ray of work at Walmart, Gleeson delivers her diagnosis of the flaws of the U.S. labor standards system chiefly through workers’ voices.

Gleeson uses her very rich collection of testimonies to answer three questions. First, to what extent are employment statutes being enforced and to what extent are they even enforceable under the current system? Second, how well do these laws align with generally held norms of what is right or fair—as expressed by the interviewees in terms most readers would agree with? Finally, how do workers experience the process of navigating the claims system?

Her conclusions are grim, though not surprising to those familiar with the front lines of low-wage work in the United States. Fundamentally, “the current system of workers’ rights institutionalizes precarity” (p. 23). Using claims-driven enforcement is grossly inadequate to drive compliance with law or

even win restitution with any degree of reliability, with the corollary that adding more laws to the books will not on its own remedy this gap between legal principles and workplace outcomes. Pursuing a complaint is complex, confusing, littered with obstacles including the risk of employer retaliation, and virtually impossible to navigate without access to an advocate; but advocates are in short supply—the pro bono programs serving low-wage workers must do hard-nosed triage, selecting the most winnable cases. Even unions representing these workers are often unhelpful and sometimes actively obstructive. Though workers typically only initiate a complaint when mistreatment reaches an intolerable level and when they themselves think the case is strong, most end up having a negative experience. Given these limitations, though undocumented status is a “precarity multiplier” (p. 133), immigration reform is necessary but not sufficient to achieve more positive outcomes; reform of the claims system itself is essential.

Complementing Gleeson’s in-depth analysis of individual resistance, Webster, Britwum, and Bhowmik compile case studies of collective mobilization. The cases come from the three editors’ countries: South Africa, Ghana, and India, respectively. Despite name-checking precarious work in the title, the authors affirm that informality is a more useful concept in these countries of the global South. The table of contents also signals South-North differences: it includes four agricultural cases along with six urban ones, and three of the urban studies analyze waste scavengers.

Webster, Britwum, and Bhowmik organized the collaborative research project that gave rise to the volume around a “power resources” framework on labor organizing. They supplement Erik Wright’s (2000) formulations of structural power (due to workers’ strategic location in the production process) and associational power (due to workers’ joint action) with concepts of societal power (ability of organized workers to rally support from broader allies and the public) and institutional power (conferred on an organization by accumulated laws and labor relations systems). The cases examine relations between informal workers and trade unions—and find them quite

various, ranging from full identification with a union to tenuous or tense relations.

As is often the case with loosely coupled multi-national, multi-investigator research projects, the research products do not quite match the initial vision. After the introductory chapter, the power resources framework only makes an appearance in the empirical chapter coauthored by Webster (even the chapters authored by Britwum and Bhowmik do not adopt the terminology); two chapters introduce still other taxonomies of power. Without a strong shared framework across the chapters, one reads the book unsure of how to put the pieces together, and the Introduction’s brief synthetic discussion of commonalities and differences across the cases does not completely fill the gap.

But the pieces of *Crossing the Divide* are themselves powerful, making the collection a landmark in fine-grained analysis of informal workers’ struggles against precarity. The first half of the Introduction provides a highly insightful conceptualization of precarity, informality, and worker power in the global South. The empirical chapters add much to the growing body of research on informal worker organizing. Most attention-grabbing are a few stunning success stories, like Jesse Wilderman’s riveting account of the agricultural worker uprising in South Africa’s Western Cape that mobilized tens of thousands in a months-long community-based general strike in 2012 and 2013, winning key demands; or Malati Gadgil and Melanie Samson’s excellent chapter on the informal waste pickers’ movement in Pune, India that achieved an institutionalized role in municipal waste disposal.

The challenges, limits, and at times outright failures of these movements are even more informative. The Western Cape revolt’s victory, for example, turned out to be transitory. Wilderman’s analysis: “power mismatch,” in that workers are able to control the terrain on the street; but street-based power is of limited use in negotiating with farm owners. As one farmworker observes, “You can lose your job when you join the union, but it is easy to throw stones at the police” (p. 90). This shortfall is just one in a long list, including ethnic and caste divisions and informal workers’ lack of urban

(as opposed to national) citizenship and thus access to the vote and social services. Particularly thought-provoking are the problematic sequelae of success: home-based worker organizations in India's Maharashtra state thrive but remain dependent on sponsors for funding and technical support (in Indira Gartenberg's chapter); Pune waste recyclers find that the state's embrace, creating a cooperative open to non-union-members and staffed by an administration whose capacity exceeds that of the volunteer-powered union, undermines grassroots worker organizing. The lessons of the collection are remarkably relevant, not just to informal workers in the global South, but to the precariat in the North. The reader encounters echoes of Walmart's racially and ethnically divided workforce, the risks facing undocumented workers in the United States, and Janice Fine's (2006) concern that U.S. worker centers depend excessively on liberal foundation funding.

Indeed, on closer examination, this quartet of books raises a chorus of complementary voices. The master narrative is one of the fragmentation and disconnectedness propagated by precarity and informality. Thus all these works show how enterprises have shifted to less-inclusive forms of employment. Gleeson documents how coworkers—even family members—decline to testify on behalf of workers seeking redress because of fears for their own jobs. The most powerful antidote, then, is community in multiple senses: propinquity, shared identity, solidarity. I already noted the varied forms of community that permeate *Working for Respect*. Residential communities form the basis for organizing in most of *Crossing the Divide's* cases. Kalleberg emphasizes inclusiveness and solidarity at

the level of systems of social welfare and labor relations.

But each of these big processes spawns opposing dynamics, for better or worse. Wilderman's farmers shed costs by downgrading workers to casual status and shutting down company-provided housing, but (in an arc reminiscent of Marx) these changes fray paternalistic ties, leave workers with less to lose, and concentrate them in town-based communities, creating the basis for a mass uprising. Community is the building block of OUR Walmart's organizing, but community ties also create worker loyalties to managers and regular customers.

These books all conclude that combating labor precarity is indeed hard work. But, to their credit, they also show us strategies and policies that make a difference and point the way toward further possibilities.

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Chapters 4–7 represent the main part of the study, in which Han presents his analysis of different groups of internet users and their online activities, emphasizing how varied their opinions about and attitudes toward Chinese government authorities are. Additionally, he discusses and explains many of the terms and phrases created by Chinese internet users, from slang terms or abbreviations to words used to avoid being censored. He convincingly shows how different groupings organize themselves, are organized, or are just loosely connected to talk about political issues. The data for this part were collected on online forums and reports about internet events, and the presentation offers an interesting overview over the different groupings with links to some of the more important events in which they were involved, but it is also very static in its presentation of internet users and the development of the Chinese internet.

The author divides Chinese internet users into four groups: playful netizens, outspoken government critics, state-sponsored commentators, and voluntary defenders of the government. This division allows for a nuanced discussion of online debates and how they develop beyond a simplistic government versus civil society framework. It contains many good examples of online debates.

Chapter 8 provides a summary of the issues raised in the book and attempts to draw some conclusions. In sharp contrast to the preceding chapters, the framework is again a dichotomous one between the government and the netizens, and the author expresses surprise “that many netizens support or passively tolerate a regime that is nondemocratic and suppressive” (p. 185). The chapter (and the book) end on a very disappointing note with first a quote by Premier Wen Jiabao—who has been out of office since March 2013—and a section on China and the world that ignores the important developments around the Chinese internet and its impact on the world since 2012, such as the four Wuzhen World Internet Conferences, the numerous internet regulations and laws promulgated between 2014 and 2016, or the rise of Chinese internet companies.

In summary, the book represents a very good study of political debates on Chinese online forums under the reign of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao (2002–12) and provides rich data in its discussion but falls far short of its claim to provide an up-to-date “holistic and balanced view . . . to explain the coexistence of the liberalizing Internet and authoritarianism in China” (p. xiii).

*Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies.* By Arne L. Kalleberg. Medford, Mass.: Polity Press, 2018. Pp. x+242. \$69.95 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

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In the past two decades, precarious work has migrated from the periphery to the center stage of the sociology of work, labor, and inequality. A prevailing

and age-old phenomenon in the developing world, “precariousness” has only recently gained academic traction largely because it now afflicts the advanced industrialized world as well. Arne Kalleberg is a central figure in this field, not least because he had the prescient sociological imagination to study what in the past was simply called “nonstandard employment.” Now a litany of terms—the precariats, precarization, and flexploitation—has been coined to signal the novelty of the phenomenon not captured by the classical Marxian trope of the proletariat, proletarianization, and exploitation.

In many ways, this book is vintage Kalleberg, and a worthy sequel to his *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* (2011). Whereas the earlier book focuses only on the United States, *Precarious Lives* expands the scope of analysis to include Denmark, Germany, Japan, Spain, and the United Kingdom alongside the United States. This sample of countries represents diverse models of capitalism—social democratic, coordinated market economy, and liberal market economy. The substantive chapters (3–7) of the book integrate a large amount of survey data to argue that national social welfare regimes and labor market policies determine national variations in key features of precarious employment relations and microlevel outcomes of individual and family well-being. The book paints an overall picture of precarity as a growing trend in all advanced rich democracies—nonstandard jobs (temp, part-time, or own-account employment) account for 60% of all new jobs created between 2007 and 2013 and one-third of all jobs in OECD countries. And quite predictably, the book confirms our general impression that economic insecurity is lowest in Denmark and Germany and highest in the United Kingdom and United States.

Using national-level statistics, Kalleberg carefully unpacks the complexity of precarious work and lives. For instance, he usefully shows that the prevalence of temporary employment itself does not accurately reflect the degree of labor precariousness, because political economic contexts matter. A part-time job in Germany is very different from one in the United States and the United Kingdom, because the former has enacted legislation mandating equal treatment of part-time and full-time workers in matters of dismissal, whereas in the latter two countries, part-time workers find themselves in “zero-hours” arrangements, that is, being on call without any assurance of hours. Denmark’s active labor market policy to facilitate job training and placement and generous unemployment benefits make unemployment a much less insecure experience, objectively and subjectively, than in the United States and United Kingdom. Labor market dualism in Spain and Japan produces a wide generational divide between older and younger workers, such that precarious work poses more salient hurdles for young workers to make life course transitions such as forming an independent household, finding marriage partners, and having children. Finally, even individuals’ subjective well-being depends less on individual-level variables and more on security due to unemployment income replacements, generosity of welfare spending, and low level of income inequality.

If the data-dense chapters tell a coherent and compelling story of national differences in precarious work, the theory and politics/policy chapters that

bookend them are less seamlessly integrated. The theory chapter includes a broadly gauged discussion of the usual theoretical suspects as the causes of the rise of precarity in rich democracies since the '70s—international competition, neoliberalism, technological change, mobility of capital, spatial reorganization of production, financialization, and deindustrialization. But these are presented as backdrops rather than as competing hypotheses to Kalleberg's national-level, neoinstitutionalist approach to the "varieties of capitalism." Hence the main theoretical refrain throughout the book is that in countries with more social protection legislation and inclusive labor market policies, workers and work are less precarious. Yes, of course, but to say "more protection = less precariousness" smacks of tautological thinking that does not amount to an explanation. More importantly, in adopting a theoretical perspective that emphasizes national configurations of institutional complementarity, the study ignores the effects of transnational processes and power dynamics that contribute to uneven precarity. For example, is precarity in Spain unrelated to Germany's political and financial domination in Europe, and its policies toward Spain during the 2008 crisis? What about the rise and centrality of finance capital and platform capital in inducing more insecurity than industrial and agrarian capital, because they are more capable of escaping national regulations? Using the nation-state as the unit of comparison, as Kalleberg has done in the book, obscures the sectoral distribution of insecurity that cuts across national boundaries. To establish the causal priority of national institutions over transnational forces, we need to think in terms of varieties of capital (as opposed to varieties of capitalism) and a robust comparison of national and sectoral distribution of precariousness.

The second theoretical inspiration for Kalleberg is Polanyi's pendulum metaphor, that is, the ebbs and flows of precarity over time are due to the swing between commodification and countermovement. But Polanyi's thesis is more a heuristic device than a theory specifying conditions and mechanisms. Polanyi does not tell us *how* commodification leads to countermovement, and so in this book Kalleberg also cannot explain how the national institutions in his sample varieties of capitalism lead to the varieties of countermovements. His quick overview of the antiprecarity and antiausterity social movements and left- and right-wing party resurgence in Europe and the United States is totally unhinged from the theoretical framework of the previous chapters. This reflects a theoretical lacuna in Polanyi that he inherits and leaves us to wonder how his idealistic policy proposal of collaboration among employer, labor, and state—reminiscent of the obsolete International Labor Organization model of tripartite coordination—could be realized. To go beyond Polanyi's metaphor, and beyond static institutional mapping of social protection and precariousness, we might do well to compare and theorize the coevolution of national political dynamics among state, capital, labor, and civil society on the one hand and the rise and decline of different varieties of capital within global capitalism on the other.



Article

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# Varieties of Precarity: How Insecure Work Manifests Itself, Affects Well-Being, and Is Shaped by Social Welfare Institutions and Labor Market Policies

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## Abstract

*Precarious Lives* addresses one of the most important developments in employment relations in the neoliberal era: increase in labor precarity and the subsequent decline in employee well-being. Drawing on data on social welfare institutions and labor market policies in six rich democracies, the author shows that work is less precarious, and workers are happier,

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when institutions and policies provide job protection, and put in place support systems to buffer job loss.

**Keywords**

job insecurity, subjective well-being, social insurance, active labor market policies, employment protection

Arne L. Kalleberg. (2018). *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*. Medford, MA: Polity Press. 248 pp. \$24.95 (paperback).

In his groundbreaking 2011 book *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs*, Arne Kalleberg examined how American jobs fared in terms of wages, fringe benefits, job control, and schedule flexibility. Bad jobs, he defined, are those that pay low wages and do not lead to higher wages over time, do not offer fringe benefits such as health insurance, do not enable workers to exert control over their work activities, and do not provide workers with flexibility to deal with nonwork issues. In *Precarious Lives*, Kalleberg turns to precarious work—that is, employment forms that are insecure and uncertain, have limited access to economic and social benefits, and have limited access to statutory entitlements (2018, p. 15)—and extends the scope of analysis to five additional rich democracies that represent different models of capitalism.

*Precarious Lives* addresses one of the most important developments in employment relations in the neoliberal era: a worldwide increase in labor precarity and the subsequent decline in employee well-being. Kalleberg maintains that a set of political, macroeconomic, and sociological factors—globalization and increased international competition, deregulation of employment relations, the rise of neoliberal ideology, financialization of corporations, increased female labor force participation, expansion of the service sector, and influx of unskilled immigrant labor, to name a few—have led to a rise of precarious work in industrialized countries. However, these factors have not affected every country in the same way. Precarious work has manifested itself differently across countries due to the variation in their welfare state institutions and labor market policies. Kalleberg's main argument in *Precarious Lives* is that the degree to which work is precarious in a nation depends on institutions and policies, which, in turn, determine country differences in individual well-being.

Chapter 2 sets the institutional scene. Through the lens of two influential neo-institutional theories—Varieties of Capitalism and Power Resources Theory—Kalleberg identifies a set of social welfare institutions and labor market policies. He then describes how these institutions and policies differ across the six countries that characterize different employment regimes. The United Kingdom, along with the United States, represent liberal market economies; Germany, Japan, and Spain represent the coordinated market economies illustrated by a dualistic employment system that comprises protected workers at the core and precarious workers at the periphery; and Denmark illustrates the social democratic model characterized by an inclusive employment system. For instance, Germany, Japan, and Spain spend relatively more generously on social insurance and active labor market policies—policies that aim to help working-age people obtain jobs and transition from unemployment to employment—whereas these expenditures are relatively low in Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Workers with regular contracts enjoy higher employment protection in Germany, Denmark, and Spain than in Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. At the same time, Germany and Japan are characterized by low restrictions on the use of temporary contracts.

Part II of the book, which includes two of the five analytical chapters, unpacks what Kalleberg calls the manifestations of precarious work. Here, Kalleberg successfully brings together concepts from the literature on nonstandard employment relations and job insecurity such as temporary work, part-time work, job stability, and perceived risk of job loss. After systematically presenting national-level statistics on the prevalence and evolution of these phenomena, Kalleberg makes the case that these categories do not necessarily entail labor precarity. In fact, the level of precarity experienced by these categories of workers is determined by the labor market policies and social welfare systems in place. For example, he argues that one indicator of precarity for temporary contract status is whether the worker receives employer-sponsored work-related training, which would then lead to transition into permanent jobs. Spain scores the lowest in the likelihood of a temporary worker receiving training relative to a permanent worker, which underscores his or her precariousness. Similarly, Kalleberg shows that whether part-time work is precarious depends on the extent to which it is involuntary—meaning someone would rather work full-time but cannot find full-time work—and legislations for part-time work. Moreover, different forms of nonstandard employment might co-occur. For example, “zero-hour” workers in the United Kingdom and “on-call” workers

in the United States—a growing type of part-time work with temporary contract status—need to be available to work when required but are not assured a fixed number of hours or regular schedules per day, week, or month. Therefore, these workers are highly vulnerable. In contrast, a recent German legislation mandates equal treatment of part-time and full-time contractually, which is associated with a decline in part-time work performed involuntarily.

Apart from the contract status and hours worked, another manifestation of precarious work is the level of experienced—or perceived—job insecurity, which is closely related to physical and psychological ill-health. Here, Kalleberg uses both objective and subjective indicators that capture job insecurity from multiple dimensions to illustrate not only how it is linked to precarity but also how experience of it differs depending on the institutional context. The components of insecurity discussed include *job stability*, measured as average job tenure with the same employer; *labor market insecurity*, the combination of risk of unemployment and amount of income support received if unemployed; *cognitive job insecurity*, a person's perceived probability of losing his or her job; and *affective job insecurity*, concerns related to losing a job.

With compelling cross-national statistics from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2014), as well as results from social surveys that contain detailed information on people's subjective evaluations of their job security, Kalleberg points to a great deal of variation between countries in the degree to which jobs are insecure and the degree to which job insecurity is problematic for workers. Denmark and Spain represent the two ends of the spectrum. Danish workers score lowest on both objective and subjective measures of job insecurity. Kalleberg convincingly argues this is due to the breadth of active labor market policies that support those who lose their jobs by ensuring they receive services that facilitate their reentry into employment as well as the generosity of unemployment insurance that buffers, to the very least, economic consequences of job loss. Spanish workers, on the contrary, are the most worried about losing their jobs. Kalleberg admits the reason why Spain ranks at the top in terms of perceived job insecurity is not clear, given that Spain remarkably increased its expenditure on active labor market policies and welfare spending, but then adds that these policy changes came as a response to a surge in unemployment rates after the economic crisis in 2008.

If, by this point in the book, the reader is not convinced that precarity is detrimental and institutions, at least partly, play an important role, Part III accomplishes this by focusing on three major components

of well-being that are connected to precarious work. Specifically, the premise of this part (Chapters 3–5) is to examine diverse consequences for people’s lives resulting from precarious work and how institutional factors account for country differences in these well-being outcomes. Similar to his approach to precarious work, Kalleberg conceptualizes well-being in both objective and subjective terms and brings together interesting data on outcomes ranging from earnings inequality to self-reported economic difficulties, from youth disconnection to marriage, from life satisfaction to happiness. For instance, as one would expect, Danes and Germans experience the lowest levels of economic insecurity because of their generous systems of social protection; meanwhile, Americans and Brits experience the highest levels of insecurity. One noteworthy institutional difference between the United States and the United Kingdom is the latter’s universal health insurance system, which Kalleberg argues is essential in diminishing the impact of precarious work on economic insecurity. Youth in Spain and Japan face the greatest challenge among the six countries in terms of gaining a foothold in the labor force, which then prevents them from establishing an independent household and getting married. The dual labor market systems in these countries, Kalleberg argues, have created a generational divide, in which older workers benefit from extensive employment protection whereas younger workers are trapped in the periphery, often moving from one temporary job to another. Not surprisingly, data that Kalleberg presents indicate cross-country differences in subjective well-being—people’s assessment of how happy and satisfied they are with their lives—as well. Danes, who famously embrace the practices of *hygge*, which Oxford dictionary defines as high-quality social interactions, score highest in subjective well-being, followed by Germans, which is consistent with the patterns in precarious work and generosity and effectiveness of welfare and labor market institutions.

The causal mechanisms that link precarity to well-being are convincing enough. For instance, the lack of stable or high income leads to economic difficulty, stress, and inability to plan for the future due to uncertainty and insecurity. Together, these pose challenges to family formation and deteriorate subjective well-being. One important mechanism, however, goes underemphasized in *Precarious Lives*: Poor intrinsic job quality, some aspects of which Kalleberg examined in *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs*, associated with precarious work is also detrimental for employee well-being. A 2014 OECD report showed that temporary workers are more likely to be exposed to physical health risk factors at work and workplace intimidation, have less job control and learning



opportunities, and receive less support from colleagues. These factors lead these workers to experience more job strain—a strong predictor of poor subjective well-being—than permanent workers. The same report also indicates large cross-country variation in intrinsic job quality, with Denmark on average having the highest job quality and Spain the lowest. In what would be the third book in the series, Kalleberg is uniquely positioned to explore the overlap between precarity and poor intrinsic job quality and investigate the extent to which institutions derive these overlaps between precarity and poor job quality and buffer their impact on well-being.

One major issue that lingers in a reader's mind throughout the chapters is a remark that Kalleberg makes at the beginning of the book, while explaining the emergence of precarious work and its entry to the central stage in sociology of work:

While women and racial/ethnic minorities have always been exposed to precarious work . . . , job insecurity and risks of work have now spread to formerly advantaged men. . . . There has been a redistribution of precarious work, such that native men now work in insecure and risky work along with everyone else, creating a sense of relative deprivation among them. (p. 24)

Whether precarious work has been redistributed or instead spread from the periphery to the core is debatable. Yet, it is clear that precarious forms of work have turned into what Kalleberg calls the “normative form of employment relations between employers and employees” (p. 175) and a “discursive practice that serves as an action framework by political organizing” (p. 168)—manifesting itself as social movements (such as Occupy in the United States, *Los Indignados* movement in Spain, and freeters in Japan) and emerging left-wing and far-right-wing political parties—mainly because of the challenges young white men increasingly face in employment. In that sense, perhaps a shortcoming of *Precarious Lives* is its limited supporting evidence and discussion on trends in precarious work and well-being outcomes by gender and race/ethnicity. One notable exception is the discussion on family formation and how, in the example of Japan, the negative effect of precarious work on marriage is smaller for women than men.

Nonetheless, Kalleberg's call for a new political and social contract (Chapter 8) includes resolutions not only for empowering the native-born/white male precariat but also the female, immigrant, and racial/ethnic minority precariat. Some of these proposals are broader,

macrolevel policy reforms such as states' role in extending social protections to vulnerable populations who are otherwise deprived of a safety net and configuring flexicurity strategies appropriate to each state's institutions and employment history. Others are more actionable and specific. For instance, providing extensive, high-quality early child care and education not only will provide foundational skills and abilities that are crucial to acquire additional skills in later life, but will also provide jobs mostly for women—assuming high-quality care means decent wages and employment protection—and free mothers to work or work more hours. Similarly, given the drastic decline in unions and increase in precarious work in the service sector, workers can be organized around and protected by worker advocacy groups or worker centers that support, for example, immigrants or working families.

None of these proposals, however, seem to offer a clear agenda or set of action points to combat rising precarity. Perhaps, unless employers—the key actors in any efforts improve the quality of employment relationships—step in, it seems unlikely that real change will take place. Kalleberg points to a “bottom-up” approach to get employers to step in. Because states' power to regulate employer behavior has declined remarkably, the responsibility falls onto consumers and workers who can organize and enforce their concerns and claims for fair treatment of precarious work in order to help shape the societal and community norms that govern the behavior of the business.

How institutions influence employment insecurity and people's well-being is a long-standing, central issue in sociology of work and political economy. *Precarious Lives* meticulously investigates the role of key welfare regime institutions and labor market policies and explains, quite convincingly, how these institutions and policies affect the ways in which precarious work influences people's well-being. It is well-written, strikes a great balance between quantitative and qualitative analysis, and provides big-picture cross-country comparisons while offering detailed accounts for each country at the same time. *Precarious Lives* stands to be the most comprehensive book on employment precarity and its consequences for people beyond the workplace. It is an essential resource for academic and nonacademic readers alike who are interested in the changing employment relations in the neoliberal era.

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**Hande Inanc** is a researcher at the Education and Employment Division at Mathematica. Her research examines the inequalities in the labor market and at workplace, with a special focus on the determinants of employment insecurity and its impact on employee outcomes.

## Book Review

# Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies

By Arne L. Kalleberg

Wiley, 2018. 248 Pages. <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Precarious+Lives%3A+Job+Insecurity+and+Well+Being+in+Rich+Democracies-p-9781509506507>

**Reviewer:** Allison J. Pugh, *University of Virginia*

From the doyen of precarious work research comes this comprehensive volume comparing the prevalence and consequences of job insecurity in six affluent democracies. More than 20 years ago, Kalleberg, already a noted work scholar, turned his attention to nonstandard work in the United States and beyond, a seam he has mined prodigiously ever since; in this effort, he tackles the task of tracing and accounting for its broader, nonwork impacts. Kalleberg argues that labor market institutions and social welfare protection policies shape not just the incidence of precarious work, but also its effects on families and well-being.

The book begins with two questions: why has there been an increase in precarious work in rich democracies, with their high standards of living and relatively privileged economic position? And how does the experience and impact of precarious work vary in these countries, which diverge in their cultures and institutions?

Both of these are good questions, but other than seven pages in which he elaborates upon the factors ushering in “the new age of precarious work” (increased international competition, weakening worker power, corporate restructuring, and financialization), Kalleberg does not spend much time answering the first. Instead, he devotes the bulk of this work to analyzing the consequential differences in shaping what precarious work feels like—such as labor relations, social policies, demography, and culture—among six nations: Denmark, Germany, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These six were chosen as representatives of four diverse types of modern capitalism: social democratic nations (Denmark), coordinated market economies (Germany and Japan), “southern Mediterranean” nations (Spain), and liberal market economies (UK and United States).

Mostly drawing from existing published work (much of it authored or co-authored by him), Kalleberg documents how precarious work affects economic insecurity, youth transitions to adulthood, family formation and subjective well-being in each of these countries. He concludes with a chapter that reviews how

social movements and electoral politics have reacted to the challenges of increased job insecurity in each country, before outlining potential policy responses and the particular social and political changes that would have to take place to make their adoption plausible. One of the major hallmarks of precarious work has been “the shifting of the risks of work from employers and governments to workers,” Kalleberg argues forcefully (176), but the impact of that shifting is far from inevitable; countries differ in the degree to which they ease the shift with active labor market policies designed to help people get jobs and regulations to protect the jobs they already have, as well as the relative generosity of their social wage, or welfare provisioning.

The book is thorough, systematic and clear. Wherever prior research is dense or contradictory, Kalleberg is there to provide us a path through the thicket—he nicely summarizes the scholarship, for example, on varieties of welfare states (of which there are plenty of very-similar-but-not-identical typologies at hand); what makes work precarious (unpredictability, either of employment or the job itself; limited benefits; and few protections); and the several dimensions of job insecurity (job tenure; the duration and costs of unemployment; and subjective measures both cognitive and emotional). The policy chapter, for example, is a careful albeit brief discussion of the myriad options—from nontraditional labor organizations to universal basic income—that countries have to address the “basic problem” they all face, “balancing flexibility for employers and security for workers” (176).

Methodical, painstaking, *Precarious Lives* is nonetheless missing a more substantive discussion of some important themes. I would have liked to see a more serious approach to gender, whose variable meanings suffuse the kind of labor and the kind of families these countries have recognized and protected. Notions of gender surely undergird Denmark’s embrace of work-family support, as well as dual labor markets such as those in Germany and Japan, where women have long been unprotected workers (although it sounds like their ranks now include more men, particularly younger men). Kalleberg points to precarious work as a major cause of fertility drops in Japan and Spain, as it has impeded men’s breadwinning, yet notes that educational and employment opportunities for women have improved, “allowing them to forego marriage altogether” (143). The vast majority of these women have not been incorporated into the ranks of the protected senior workers who benefit from long-term careers; it is precarious work, then, that allows women to forego marriage—and the particularly sacrificial versions of motherhood that prevail in Japan and Spain. When considering the impact of job insecurity on family formation, its impediments to men’s breadwinning tell but a partial story.

The book also pays scant attention to some topics that have consumed scholars and policymakers in recent years, such as the impact of artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and automation, digital platforms, or schedule unpredictability. Kalleberg writes, ruefully and gracefully, that “it is relatively easy to envision a variety of dystopian futures, as here one must only extrapolate from current trends” (197). Some suggest AI’s effect on the future of work might be more than incremental, however; it would have been compelling indeed to read the

Kalleberg take on how different market economies might absorb its impact, for example.

*Precarious Lives* is a meticulous investigation of precarious work in rich democracies, usefully helping us expand the scholarly conversation about job insecurity beyond the workplace, to consider how it shapes family lives and well-being. Well-written and orderly, the book is aptly aimed at an advanced undergraduate or graduate student audience, who would benefit from its systematic comparative approach.



## BOOK REVIEWS



*Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies.* By Arne L. Kalleberg. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, forthcoming in 2018. 248 pp. ISBN 978-15095-0649-1, \$90.95 (Cloth); ISBN 978-15095-0650-7, \$29.95 (Paperback).

DOI: 10.1177/0019793918765707

Sociologist Arne Kalleberg has probably done more than anyone else to popularize the notion of precarious work in the US academy: I count two books (not including this one) and eight scholarly articles since 2009 with “precarious” in their titles on his CV. But this past oeuvre, along with most research on precarious work, focuses on one country at a time. (His valuable co-edited special issue and book on precarious labor in Asia are collections of single-country analyses.) So *Precarious Lives*, a comparison of labor precarity in six wealthy countries, marks a welcome advance. Kalleberg compares work in Denmark, Germany, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, examining the extent and forms of precariousness along with its *consequences* for workers, their families, and society. The author’s main argument is that context matters, or as he more artfully puts it, “The extent and consequences of precarious work depend on social contexts such as a country’s social, legal, and welfare social protections.”

Precarious work is by construction a relative concept (precarious compared to some standard), and *Precarious Lives* is a model and a guide of how to think about this concept across countries, which in turn helps us to use it more analytically in any one country. Kalleberg’s analysis shines in the five empirical chapters that form the core of the book, in which he characterizes the employment systems of each country (Chapter 2), lays out the major indicators of job precarity (Chapters 3 to 4), and explores the broader impacts of precarious work on people’s lives (Chapters 5 to 7). Comparing six countries in depth can be a bit like juggling chainsaws, but he deftly identifies the main features of each country, keeps descriptions brief, and fashions a narrative that is brisk and lucid (aided by extensive use of charts). For those with a more technical bent, Kalleberg does provide difference-in-means tests and a small number of regression results, but he presents those results in chart format digestible by a general readership so that they become an aid rather than an obstacle to the book’s flow.

This discussion succeeds both in spotlighting important contrasts and in painting a big picture of how work is changing across the global North. Often, the spotlight’s targets make total sense once Kalleberg explains them. For example, it is not surprising—once pointed out to us—that the United States and the United Kingdom have lower rates of temporary agency employment than do the other countries, precisely because in those two countries, job security in the vast bulk of jobs is minimal, giving employers an avenue for flexibility without hiring temps. Or, that the collateral life damage from precarious work is far less in Denmark, whose “flexicurity” system combines less stable jobs with a sturdy safety net, than in other countries—especially Japan, where the main social security system has historically been long-term employment with a single employer. At the same time, on the big-picture end of the spectrum, the book’s portraits of the six countries offer a very useful general introduction to the employment relations and social welfare systems of each country, which I know I will be referring back to even when my interest is unrelated to labor precarity itself. Note that the comparisons in these chapters link those institutional differences to varying objective employment outcomes and also link both institutions and employment outcomes to broader life outcomes (such as young people’s ability to build independent lives and form families) and to *subjective* perceptions of economic security and well-being.

The first and last substantive chapters likewise have numerous merits yet, in my view, run into more problems—conceptual in Chapter 1, editorial in Chapter 8. Chapter 1 theorizes

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precarious work and offers a multifactor explanation of the rise of precarity in rich countries in recent decades. Kalleberg rightly points out that what he calls labor precarity was the norm worldwide for most of capitalism's lifetime, that it has remained the norm in countries outside the North, and that even when a section of the working class escaped precarious work in a subset of countries, other workers in those same countries remained marginalized in precarity. Even so, the renewed expansion of precarious work in countries such as the six in *Precarious Lives* is a momentous reversal. In the Introduction, the author's criteria for precarity specify "work that is uncertain, unstable, and insecure," in which "employees bear the risks of work . . . and receive limited social benefits and statutory entitlements," a widely shared definition. So far so good. But the definition becomes less clear as the book proceeds. In Chapter 1, precarious work expands to include "work that provides limited *economic* and social benefits" (emphasis added). Thus, when Chapter 5, "Economic Insecurity," discusses wage levels, it is not obvious whether Kalleberg is presenting low wages as a defining characteristic of precarity, a common characteristic of precarious work defined otherwise, or an additional contextual element in describing work in the six countries. Including this element does not diminish the value of his empirical comparisons, but a sharper definition could have more effectively distinguished precarious work from a broader conception of "bad jobs"—a distinction Kalleberg endorses in Chapter 1.

Chapter 8 offers a discussion of the politics surrounding precarity and the policies to address precarious work. Every part of this chapter makes valuable points—particularly relevant to this US reader is the observation that growing precarity is felt most acutely by groups of workers who were previously most protected, notably prime-age, native-born males from the most favored ethnic groups. The empirical chapters that precede this one are taut and fast-moving, yet this chapter runs long and feels long, distracting from the chapter's insights. In addition, Kalleberg's even-handed presentation of how the left and right have responded to precarious labor across the six countries leaves unanswered the question of the likely economic and employment effects of the left's social democratic proposals as opposed to the right's nationalist, protectionist, and often openly racist policies.

Despite my criticisms, I am convinced that *Precarious Lives* should become, and will become, the leading monographic analysis of precarious work. It achieves significant conceptual advances over Kalleberg's 2011 *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs*, itself a groundbreaking book on work in the United States in particular and that introduced many US readers to the notion of precarious work. The six-country comparative frame makes it clear that shifts such as neoliberalism, financialization, and globalization pushed work in a precarious direction across a wide range of wealthy countries. But even more important, the comparison allows Kalleberg to demonstrate that across varied aspects of work, the extent, forms, and consequences of labor precarity vary systematically depending on the country's employment and social welfare institutions. This set of analyses provides us with tools to understand what is distinctive about each country's experience, what policy leverage points hold promise for addressing precarity, and what possibilities exist for political movements to achieve policy changes. Though Kalleberg acknowledges in his Conclusion that given today's economic and political landscape "it is relatively easy to envision a variety of dystopian [employment] futures," he ends the book on a note that, even if not fully optimistic, urges us to use what we have learned to build a more optimistic future for work.

Chris Tilly  
Professor of Urban Planning and Sociology  
University of California, Los Angeles

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*The Marketization of Employment Services: The Dilemmas of Europe's Work-First Welfare States.* By Ian Greer, Karen N. Breidahl, Matthias Knuth, and Flemming Larsen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 192 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-878544-6, \$80 (Cloth).

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Employment services perform an important function within the welfare system because they aim at integrating unemployed and underemployed people into the labor market. Many policymakers and academics have praised the investment in employment services as





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## Book Reviews

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### Precarious Lives<sup>1</sup>

Alexandrea J. Ravenelle<sup>2</sup>

**Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies**, Arne L. Kalleberg, Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018.

Reading Arne Kalleberg's work is like having a one-on-one conversation with a good graduate advisor: everything that seemed confusing becomes clear, and anything that was already well-understood is put into context. In the area of precarious and non-standard work, where numerous concepts overlap, this type of clarity is especially useful.

Kalleberg's newest book, *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*, takes the discussion of precarious work to the next level by providing a comparative view of precarious work in six rich democracies: Denmark, Germany, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. By examining these six countries, which differ in their employment and social welfare systems, Kalleberg demonstrates the impact that social welfare protections and labor market institutions can have on the lives of precarious workers.

While Kalleberg cautions that the book is not intended to provide detailed empirical analyses of the issues, *Precarious Lives* offers a fairly comprehensive overview of the diversity associated with precarious work, its consequences, and the key policy interventions needed to address such work. Kalleberg opens the book by noting that his work draws on two main theoretical foundations. One perspective, common among economic and organizational behavior sociologists, defines precarious work as including activities (that may not be especially novel) but that are redefined by employers in such a way as to "cheapen the cost of labor, increase employers' flexibility, reduce the permanent workforce, shift employment risks to workers, and... reduce labor's capacity for organization" (12). This perspective provides the basis for analyzing the impact of economic and political factors that have led to the

<sup>1</sup> *Book Editor's Note:* Professor Ravenelle has recently accepted a position in Professor Kalleberg's department. In light of this fact, *Sociological Forum* wishes to make clear that this review was assigned long before that position was advertised and the review was accepted by the journal well before Professor Ravenelle was interviewed. Further, Professor Kalleberg had no knowledge of the review when the position was offered to Professor Ravenelle. The fact that the review did not appear earlier was due to my decision to publish it along with other reviews on the changing world of precarious labor as well as the inevitable lag time that happens in a quarterly journal.

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growth of precarious work. A second theoretical view of precarious work draws on a contemporary view of precarity as a “new phase of capitalism characterized by a lack of predictability or security” that results from globalization, technological advances, privatization and deregulation (15). This somewhat more abstract view draws attention to the impact of precarious work on individuals and society.

Utilizing varieties of capitalism theory and power resources theory, Kalleberg argues that active labor market policies (used to help people find jobs) and employment protection laws are affected by the political dynamics within each country, with significant impact on workers. Kalleberg outlines the role of social welfare protections, noting that workers are more likely to experience security in their jobs and economic situations in countries with more generous social welfare benefits.

Having provided the theoretical basis for his argument, Kalleberg then provides an overview of common indicators of precarious work including such non-standard work arrangements as temporary and involuntary part-time work. While nonstandard work is often seen as precarious, Kalleberg argues that the degree of precarity differs by country and is affected by labor market, employment, and social welfare protection systems. For instance, in Spain, where employers provide little training for temporary workers, fewer workers transition into regular jobs. By comparison, in the US and UK, temporary work is used to screen applicants, allows workers to try new fields, and is more likely to serve as a stepping stone.

While the explanations of precarious work and the theories underpinning the work are comprehensive and easy to understand, the true strength of the book lies in its comparison of the six countries on economic insecurity, transition to adulthood, and subjective well-being. Readers will be unsurprised to see that Denmark’s generous system of social protections, partnered with generally inclusive labor market institutions, results in lower levels of economic insecurity, especially when compared to the U.S. or U.K. However, the statistics on labor market insecurity in Spain are strikingly large, especially after the Great Recession, an increase that Kalleberg links to a bursting of the country’s real estate bubble and decline in unemployment insurance generosity and coverage.

Precarious work may have the most pernicious effect on young workers, who are attempting to establish careers, form families, and (at least in the U.S.) pay off considerable student loans. Drawing on work by Shanahan (2000), Kalleberg defines the transition to adulthood as including five markers: leaving school, starting a full-time job, leaving one’s parental home, forming a first union or marriage, and becoming a parent.

In regards to the transition to adulthood and well-being, Kalleberg notes that workers in Spain and Japan have an especially difficult time on this measure, and points to this challenge as contributing to fairly low scores regarding life satisfaction in Japan. However, Kalleberg also notes that the definition of adulthood is gradually shifting from the accomplishment of concrete events into a psychological sense of “feeling like an adult,” a shift that may only grow as more workers find themselves engaged in precarious work.

If there are two criticisms of the book, it is perhaps that the sheer quantity of information provided can be overwhelming. Kalleberg helpfully provides a page of commonly used abbreviations, and readers who are new to precarious work may

find it helpful to bookmark said page for easy reference. The second criticism is that some figures, such as those dealing with perceived job insecurity (100 and 103) and perceived economic insecurity (127) only include European countries. There's an easy explanation for the omission – data for these figures comes from the European Social Survey, and the same measures may not be so easily tracked or available for the U.S. or Japan – but it would be interesting to see how all six countries compare.

In general, the book provides a more than sufficient overview of precarious work, job insecurity and well-being. One could easily envision various chapters utilized by a graduate student seeking to brush up on concepts in advance of comprehensive exams, a US-focused researcher desiring a more detailed understanding of comparative research, or a policymaker seeking information on the impact of employment policies on workers and their well-being.

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## Realities of the Sharing Economy

Steven Vallas<sup>1</sup>

**Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Sharing Economy.** *Alexandrea Ravenelle*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019.

The last few years have seen a torrent of research on what has variously been called the “sharing,” “platform,” or “on-demand” economy—the emergence of app-based systems for the mediation of transactions between consumers and providers of goods and labor services.

Provoking much of this research is the widely shared sense that machine learning, artificial intelligence, and powerful mobile devices are rapidly transforming the nature of work and economic activity across much of the advanced capitalist world. In spite of this outpouring of interest, social scientific analysis and public policy have found it difficult to keep up with the rapid (and seemingly accelerating) speed at which the digital revolution tends to move. Although a number of books have provided careful, fine-grained studies of single platforms such as Uber (Rosenblat 2018) or Amazon Mechanical Turk (Gray and Suri 2019), few studies have used research designs that enable us to detect important differences across distinct types

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## Uncertain jobs, uncertain futures

As headlines around the globe reference rising rates of income inequality, pervasive feelings of economic insecurity, growing tensions around gig employment, the increasing influence of populist movements, and widespread youth disaffection, Arne Kalleberg's *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies* could not be timelier.

Precarious work is not a new phenomenon, but Kalleberg convincingly demonstrates that over the past three decades, rich democratic nations have experienced a profound upsurge in “work that is uncertain, unstable, and insecure ... in which employees bear the risks of work ... and receive limited social benefits and statutory entitlements.” As he explores this shift and the negative consequences that flow from it, Kalleberg makes three key contributions.



Reviewer **Phoebe Strom** is a doctoral candidate in the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

First, Kalleberg highlights the elements that are unique to today's incarnation of labor precarity. For instance, he points to the spread of precarious work to previously privileged classes of workers: native-born men in high-status occupations are now experiencing precarious employment, leading to “a sense of relative deprivation” that fuels poor social and political outcomes (especially in countries with highly gendered divisions of labor such as Japan and Spain).

Second, Kalleberg's ambitious six-country comparison emphasizes the degree to which labor precarity has become a common and detrimental feature of neoliberal economies, touching even highly personal aspects of individuals' lives, such as their decision of whether or not to have children. He explains the rise of precarious work as the result of common international trends — including globalization, immigration, technological innovation, female participation in the workforce, and the expansion of the service sector.

However, the final, most powerful contribution of *Precarious Lives* is its complication of this general narrative. Detailing the specific manifestations of labor precarity in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Spain, and Denmark reveals that

Precarious  
Lives

Job Insecurity  
and  
Well-Being  
in Rich  
Democracies

Arne L.  
Kalleberg

“its incidence and consequences differ depending on the countries' social welfare protections and labor market institutions.”

The book is centered around eight dense, yet eminently readable, chapters that showcase how countries vary in social welfare and labor market institutions (chapter 2); link this variation to indicators of precarious work, such as the prevalence of nonstandard work arrangements (chapter 3) and job insecurity (chapter 4); and connect precarious work to outcomes such as economic insecurity (chapter 5), inability to start a family (chapter 6), and reduced perceptions of well-being (chapter 7).

**Kalleberg's ambitious six-country comparison emphasizes the degree to which labor precarity has become a common and detrimental feature of neoliberal economies.**

These nuanced comparative chapters are preceded by Kalleberg's conceptualization of precarious work and an overview of the factors underlying its recent growth (chapter 1). Kalleberg's extensive expertise on the subject shines through, as he synthesizes theoretical approaches to labor precarity and develops a multilevel analytical framework in which national-level differences shape the emergence of precarious work at the employer level and therefore the impact on the employee level.

Following from this framework, then, chapter 2 describes the differences in employment regimes across the



Author **Arne Kalleberg** is the Kenan Distinguished Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

nations studied. Kalleberg's impeccable organization prevents this chapter from overwhelming the reader, enabling a discussion of employment systems that is impressive in both depth and breadth. What is especially compelling is how Kalleberg underscores the importance of worker power. A decline in worker power vis-à-vis employers has characterized the rise of precarious work across countries. Likewise, the distinct manifestation of labor precarity in each individual country is related to its balance of worker-employer power.

In chapters 3 through 7, Kalleberg lays out the connection between institutions and experiences of precarious work. Institutional context matters not only in terms of the number of individuals engaged in precarious work but also dictates the extent to which precarious work leads to "precarious lives." For example, to the former: involuntary part-time work in Germany decreased when policies mandating equivalent regulation for part-time and full-time jobs were instituted, while employment protections that favor older workers in Spain have created an underclass of young workers restricted to precarious employment. To the latter, the consequences of economic insecurity stemming from precarious work are more severe in the United States than in the United Kingdom due to the lack of institutionalized social support, most notably a universal health care system.

The cross-national comparison in these chapters affirms the complexity of

defining labor precarity. For instance, a focus on temporary employees would minimize the level of labor precarity in the United States and the United Kingdom since temporary employment is relatively low; due to overall weak employment protections rendering "regular" jobs more precarious, employers have less incentive to utilize temporary workers to maintain flexibility. Similarly, a high risk of imminent unemployment may not equate to precarity if a nation has active labor market policies that support the unemployed and help them obtain new jobs.

For his concluding chapter, Kalleberg embarks on a sweeping tour of the political responses to precarious work, social movements arising from the "bottom-up" as well as "top-down" policy reform efforts (chapter 8). While the content remains incredibly rich, this chapter is the first that proves difficult to navigate, perhaps because there is no one-size-fits-all, straightforward policy agenda to combat rising labor precarity, a fact that Kalleberg himself acknowledges.

Given that workers and their organizations increasingly utilize consumer boycotts to pressure companies or to obtain political gains, a more developed analysis of labor precarity's impacts

on consumers seems warranted here. By linking the rise of labor precarity to the expanding service sector, *Precarious Lives* suggests that precarious work structures the consumer-employee, and thus the consumer-employer, relationship. Particularly in contexts such as health care, the ramifications of a largely precarious workforce — under stress, receiving minimal training, prone to

turnover, and psychologically detached from their employers — for consumer outcomes may be dramatic. This is not to say that the social consequences of worker precarity are unimportant in and of themselves, just that extending the analysis into the day-to-day workplace interactions between employees and consumers would likely provide further insight.

Minor criticisms aside, *Precarious Lives* constitutes perhaps the most comprehensive book to date on labor precarity, its evolution, and its consequences. By outlining how experiences of precarity are contingent upon social welfare and labor market policies, this book moves us significantly closer to answering the challenges posed by precarious work. ■

*Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*, by Arne L. Kalleberg (Polity, 2018).

***Precarious Lives* constitutes perhaps the most comprehensive book to date on labor precarity, its evolution, and its consequences.**

rentiels vécus par ces individus constituent de nouveaux territoires d'études.

En conclusion, *Les discriminations au travail* peut être utilisé tant pour approfondir la question de la discrimination, ses impacts économiques et la situation dans la société française, que pour consulter une synthèse des résultats concernant les discriminations par coût et statistiques dans les relations industrielles. Bien que les pratiques discriminantes soient condamnées par le *Code du travail français*, l'application des sanctions demeure trop marginale. Les mécanismes juridiques issus du droit pénal comme civil imposent aux victimes la charge de démontrer la faute commise à leur endroit par l'entreprise ou l'employeur. Ces procédures découragent la dénonciation et participent à la reconduction des comportements discriminants. Ce faisant, sans contredire le bien-fondé et la nécessité du *Code du travail*, Carcillo et Valfort soulignent avec justesse les limites de l'approche punitive et les bénéfices des mesures préventives et correctrices.

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### **Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies**

By Arne L. Kalleberg (2018) Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 242 pages. ISBN: 978-1-5095-0649-1 or 0650-7 (for pb).

*Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies* is an informative and thought-provoking book written to answer the question: 'Why there has been a rise in precarious work in rich democracies, with their high standards of living and privileged positions in the world economy?' (p. 4) The book examines the issues of how and why people experience precariousness differently in countries that have dissimilar institutions and cultures. It addresses these issues by describing and

explaining how institutions and politics shape precarious work and its impacts on individuals and their families. The focus of the book is on six countries, that are named as 'rich democracies': Denmark, Germany, Japan, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States. These countries are provided as examples of diverse models of capitalism: Denmark represents social democratic nations, while Germany and Japan represent coordinated market economies; Spain is a representative of Southern Mediterranean economies, and United Kingdom and United States are representatives of the liberal market economies. The author argues that, while the growth of precarious work is the common thread in these countries, its incidence and consequences differ depending on the countries' social welfare protections and labour market institutions. The variations in the experience of precarious work are due to relations between the state and markets, which in turn, affect the employment conditions. A country's political dynamics and the power resources, and relations among the state, capital, labour, and other civil society actors and advocacy groups, such as non-governmental organizations, shape the employment relationships and the degree that workers and their families are protected from the risks associated with precarious work in flexible labour markets. The author provides a comprehensive examination of the topic by also including in the analysis the demography of a country's labour force, such as its age distribution and immigration patterns.

The book is divided into four parts. Part one provides the theoretical foundations for explaining precarious work and presents the major differences in the social welfare and labour market institutions and policies in the six countries selected to study here. The second part of the book provides the common indicators of precarious work: nonstandard work arrangements such as temporary and involuntary part-time work, and subjective and objective indicators of

job insecurity. Country differences in the manifestations of the precarious work are provided in this part of the book. In the third part of the book, country dissimilarities in three dimensions of well-being are examined: economic insecurity; the transition to adulthood and family formation; and subjective well-being. This is one of the most interesting parts of the book. In this section, we see how the variations in social welfare protection institutions and policies play a major role in differences in economic insecurity in rich capitalist economies. The effects of these protections and policies (or their lack of) on individuals are examined for young workers in establishing their work and personal lives, careers and families. Lastly this section examines the country differences in subjective well-being, which is an overall indicator of the quality of life. How the generosity of social welfare protections, along with strong active labour market policies enhances subjective well-being in a country is presented in this part. The final part of the book discusses how workers, social movements, and governments responded to the rise of precarious work. The author also outlines the elements of a political and social contract between workers, their employers, and governments that have the potential to collectivize the risks of precarious work. The author also provides suggested actions needed to implement such a contract. The conclusion section summarizes main findings of the book and provides possible future scenarios for employment relationships.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the literature on employment relationships. By focusing on countries that have similar, that is, capitalist, political and economic foundations, the author shows how different responses to precarious work are provided based on the country's institutions and policies, that is, their cultural foundations, and how the relationships between actors in the economic, political and social system are established. The

different responses to precarious work in the country, then show why the effect of precariousness is different on individuals and their families in the countries studied. The author argues that, though the rise and persistence of precarious work is creating anxiety and uncertainty for individual workers, organizations, and governments, this challenge could be responded to with policies and practices that promote both economic growth and workers' well-being.

The book should be of interest to a broad international audience of industrial relations and human resource management specialists, economists, sociologists, political scientists, as well as legal scholars. I would strongly recommend this book to the readers of *R/IR* who are interested in precarious work, flexibility, workplace changes, and the role of institutions and policies in these changes.

**Isik Urla Zeytinoglu**

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**Handbook on In-Work Poverty**

Edited by Henning Lohmann  
and Ive Marx (2018) Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 508 pages.  
ISBN: 978-1-78471-562-5.

Henning Lohmann is Professor of Sociology at the University of Hamburg, Germany. Ive Marx is Professor of Socio-Economic Sciences at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. Each of these two authors have published a substantial number of studies on low-paid work and/or in-work poverty, income inequality, and related labour market and public policy issues. Thus, they make a formidable pair of editors for this compilation.

In their introductory chapter, these two authors and editors articulate the purposes of this book. They sought to explore the growing and prevalent worldwide phenomenon of in-work poverty (IWP), and to do

## Book Reviews

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Arne L. Kalleberg, **Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies**, Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018, pp. 248.

**Reviewed by:** Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, *University of Iceland*  
DOI: 10.1177/0001699319886731

In the book *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*, Arne L. Kalleberg examines how precarious work is leading to precarious lives in six advanced democracies representing diverse models of capitalism, namely the United States of America (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, Japan, Spain and Denmark. Kalleberg defines precarious work as “work that is *uncertain, unstable, and insecure* and in which *employees bear the risk* of work (as opposed to businesses or the government) and *receive limited social benefits and statutory entitlements*” (p. 3).

The book explores the impact of the liberalisation of labour markets and welfare systems on the growth of precarious work and job insecurity, using various indicators of well-being for the countries in question. Kalleberg demonstrates how differences in social welfare protection and labour market institutions and policies affect both precarious work and well-being by combining “in-depth discussions of the labour market and social welfare contexts of these countries with quantitative empirical information on the extent of precarious work and indicators of well-being” (p. 6).

The increase in precariousness departs from the state of affairs during the three decades following World War II, which were characterised by relative stability, high economic growth and standard employment relations. Even though the post-war period was characterised by labour market discrimination, that particularly affected women and minority groups, Kalleberg shows how the new age of precarious work represents a fundamental shift towards widespread uncertainty and insecurity. The upsurge in precarious work in rich democracies began in the mid-to-late 1970s and 1980s and was exacerbated by the global economic crisis of 2008. As a case in point: according to the Global Economic Policy Uncertainty Index, the relative frequency of news coverage related to economic uncertainty was higher in January 2017 than in the previous two decades.

Kalleberg illustrates some of the consequences of precariousness by referring to recent alarming facts pertaining to work and workers in the six countries. For instance, more than 40% of young people in Europe are caught in a vicious cycle of low-paying, temporary jobs, which engender feelings of exclusion, stress, depression and persistent self-doubt. He also mentions that an increasing number of young people live with their parents, as they cannot afford to live on their own.

Throughout the book, Kalleberg aims to identify key policy interventions needed to address precarious work and seeks to contribute to the discussion on how political, economic and social institutions affect labour market outcomes and inequality. Thus, he raises pressing political and policy issues that constitute a call to action for governments, businesses and workers.

Based on robust cross-national analysis, Kalleberg argues that while the growth of precarious work is widespread, its incidence and consequences differ considerably depending on countries’ social welfare protections and labour market institutions.



As labour market and social welfare protection institutions are subject to the control of political actors, some of the countries have been able to address the consequences of precarious work more successfully than others. The respective countries have expanded social safety nets, managed labour market transitions and implemented social and economic reforms targeted at the needs and wants of increasingly diverse labour forces. Thus, even though all the six countries have liberalised labour markets and restructured social welfare protections to cope with the growth of precarious work, the measures have differed, depending on the countries' political context. The measures range from the deregulation of markets and implementation of social protection in institutions (the UK and the US) and dualism (Germany, Japan and Spain) to a more collective sharing of risk (Denmark). The generosity of social welfare protections and high levels of active labour market policies are associated with greater subjective well-being in a country. Moreover, cultural variations in social norms and values, such as those underlying gender equality, and the importance placed on general social equality and the desirability of collective as opposed to individual solutions to social and economic problems also help to generate and legitimise a country's institutions and practices.

Kalleberg outlines the elements of what he sees as a social-political contract that has the potential to address some of the major challenges raised by the current growth of precarious work. "The implementation of such a new social contract – with its expanded and portable safety net, better-managed labour market transitions, and appreciation for the needs of a diverse labour force – ultimately requires, of course, an associated political contract among the state, business, and labour that seeks to balance the needs for flexibility and security" (pp. 196–197). He further points out that securing such a new social-political contract constitutes one of the great challenges of the first part of the twenty-first century. Finally, he presents what he sees as both the dystopian and utopian futures of precarious work but leaves the reader with an open question on future developments.

Precariousness and job insecurity are major issues in the modern global labour market. Clearly, Kalleberg does not cover all manifestations of these issues in the book. For instance, he does not mention that employees are increasingly being (illegally) replaced by young volunteers and so-called interns, who do not get any wages. Thus, their recruitment is a breach of labour market regulations. Without doubt, it can look like an attractive opportunity for young unemployed people to move around and work for free, as it can improve their CVs and give them an opportunity to travel. This, however, can also be akin to modern slavery and misuse of the young people's weak labour market situation.

All in all, *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies* effectively deals with the relevant social issues that sociology needs to address in relation to the upsurge of precarious work. The book is also well-organised and accessible to all those who wish to gain a theoretical and practical understanding of the issue of precarious work and its implications. It is a welcome addition to the sociological literature on work and welfare.

Giorgos Kallis, **Limits: Why Malthus Was Wrong and Why Environmentalists Should Care**, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019, pp.154.

**Reviewed by:** Wiebren J. Boonstra, *Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University*  
DOI: 10.1177/0001699320902676

For much of sociology's history, few of its scholars have cared about Robert Malthus (1766–1834), and his principle that the human desire to procreate will always outstrip what nature can provide. Early interest (cf. Alexis de Tocqueville or Karl Marx; see Drolet, 2003) waned when increases in food supply during the 20th century seemed to prove Malthus wrong. But when the extent of environmental problems

## BOOK REVIEWS



*Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies.* By Arne L. Kalleberg. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018. 248 pp. ISBN 9781509506491, \$69.95 (hardcover); ISBN 9781509506507, \$24.95 (paperback).

DOI: 10.1177/0019793919880850

*Precarious Lives* addresses one of the most significant developments in the labor market; namely, the worldwide increase in precarious employment, which leads to precarious living conditions and a decline in subjective well-being or even a “destructuring of existence” (p. 90). An international comparison of six countries constitutes the book’s empirical base. The national differences in the incidence of precarious work and the protection against risks are intended to make it clear that labor market risks are not an irrevocable fate but can be mitigated or even prevented by political interventions. Six countries are compared with one another and, in the tradition of the varieties of capitalism literature, assigned to various types of employment and welfare systems. Denmark is regarded as an inclusive employment system characterized by “embedded flexibilisation,” which cushions the risks of new employment forms by means of an active labor market policy and a high level of coverage by collective bargaining. Despite the considerable differences between them, Germany, Spain, and Japan are included among the dualistic systems, which offer security only to core workers. The United Kingdom and the United States, finally, are examples of deregulatory liberalization.

Arne Kalleberg characterizes as precarious those employment forms that are insecure and uncertain, that offer only limited access to decent wages and social security, and that provide only inadequate legal protection and rights of participation (p. 15). The benchmark for precarious employment remains the standard employment relationship (SER), based on open-ended, full-time contracts, which in many developed industrialized countries was the dominant employment in the postwar period. In the United States and the United Kingdom, the SER’s protective rights, such as coverage by collective bargaining or dismissal protection, have now been weakened to the point that the differences between a permanent full-time job from which a worker can be dismissed at any time and a fixed-term contract have become fluid. As a result, the share of fixed-term employment is not as high as in the dualistic employment systems, where the core is still well protected (p. 78).

The causes of the considerable differences between the countries—that is, the usual suspects such as globalization, the expansion of the service sector and the ensuing demands for flexibility, technological change and the widening of the gap between low- and high-skill workers, immigration, and so forth—do not go unmentioned. They are seen as the drivers of employers’ growing dissatisfaction with the “considerable fixed costs” (p. 75) of a well-protected SER. However, making labor costs variable and the consequent shift of employment risks on to workers can only succeed if workers’ power resources are weakened and the welfare state and dismissal protection are dismantled. Neither Denmark’s embedded flexibilization nor the good jobs in the primary segments of the labor market in the dualistic employment systems are conceivable without strong trade unions (pp. 43–48). Differences in the countries’ social expenditures, including active labor market policy, are also striking. Undoubtedly worthy of note is the Danish flexicurity model, which combines low levels of dismissal protection, even for core employees, with high levels of support for the unemployed and a good offer of state-funded further vocational training. It is unfortunate that the book underplays one of the pillars of this model, namely, high coverage by collective bargaining. Since virtually all Danish workers are paid according to an industry-level col-

lective agreement and the wage differences between large and small firms and between the various sectors of the economy are low, Danish workers have relatively few misgivings about changing jobs.

The sections on “welfare generosity” (pp. 54–58) and “labour market policies” (pp. 63–69) lead one to doubt the wisdom of placing Germany, Spain, and Japan in the same category. Germany and Spain have invested considerably more than Japan in the welfare state and labor market policy. The European Social Fund has also made significant contributions in the former two countries. In addition, important European directives on equal pay, for which there is no equivalent in either the United States or Japan, apply to precarious workers. Moreover, most precarious workers in the European Union (EU) have access to free health insurance. Even though the EU social model is in need of improvement, it contains a number of inclusive regulations for precarious workers and EU-wide support programs that are an essential part of any political reform agenda aimed at improving precarious employees’ working and employment conditions.

As proof of the overall increase in job insecurity, Kalleberg cites the decline in all the countries between 1992 and 2014 in average job tenure for men aged between 30 and 50 (p. 94). A wider comparison would have been desirable here. It is known from the literature that over the same period women’s job tenure actually rose in several countries. Finally, the effects on various dimensions of well-being are investigated. Comparison of the national scores on Lars Osberg and Andrew Sharpe’s Index of Economic Well-Being, for example, puts Denmark and Germany in pole position, despite the latter’s larger than average low-wage sector. The German scores show that the welfare state can partially compensate for the negative effects of a dualistic labor market by means of inclusive regulations, which the less well-developed Spanish welfare state is clearly unable to do as successfully. The United States and the United Kingdom perform much less well on this index; however, the United Kingdom fares the best when the cost of illness is compared. This finding is obviously attributable to the comprehensive National Health Service (NHS), which pays the cost of necessary medical treatment for all citizens. The existence of the NHS and the European directives on equal pay for precarious workers constitute fundamental differences between the two types of deregulatory liberalization.

A frictionless transition for young people into their working lives and the period of family formation can be jeopardized by unemployment and precarious employment. In this respect, precarity can give rise to particular “problems of generations” (p. 134). In all of the countries, the share of young people in fixed-term employment is greater than that of older workers. Throughout the world, fixed-term employment contracts are used as extended probationary periods for young people, who thus constitute a reserve of flexibility for employers. Nevertheless, in some countries, notably Denmark and Germany, fixed-term jobs tend to facilitate transitions into permanent employment after a certain period of difficulty. In other countries, this difficult waiting period drags on well into adulthood, notably in Spain, which is the worst performer in this respect. One of the consequences of this is a rise in the age of first marriage for precarious workers, as is evidenced by figures from Japan and Spain. Germany and Denmark both have a highly developed dual vocational training system, in which employers also take responsibility for the training of the next generation of young talent. The extensive literature on the school-to-work transition has demonstrated most convincingly that this is the most important reason for the low level of youth employment in these countries. Why the otherwise so objective author describes the German vocational training system as “rigid, “discriminatory” and “highly specialized” (p. 141), despite its obvious successes, remains a mystery. The German occupational profiles, which have been modernized on several occasions, now form broadly based basic occupations that prepare young people for team work in flexible forms of work organization.

The final chapter focuses on the possibilities for political action. A wide range of measures is proposed, ranging from strengthening of the social safety net through improved labor market regulations to an active labor market policy. Unfortunately, the proposals are strung together somewhat haphazardly and are insufficiently derived from the country analyses, although an interesting instrument box has been opened here from which a selection can be made.

Drawing on the example of six countries, the book gives an excellent insight into the development and structuring of precarious employment and the various forms it takes. The most important takeaway for readers is the realization that we do not have to accept

growing job insecurity as an ineluctable fate. Social risks can be avoided or their consequences mitigated by means of a strong welfare state and an inclusive employment system. One critical observation is that the examples of well-designed systems have not been developed into a coherent proposal for reform.

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*The Politics of Social Inclusion and Labor Representation: Immigrants and Trade Unions in the European Context.* By Heather Connolly, Stefania Marino, and Miguel Martínez Lucio. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press/ILR Press, 2019. 222 pp. ISBN 9781501736575, \$55 (hardcover).

DOI: 10.1177/0019793919880853

The relationship between populism and anti-immigrant sentiment is a drumbeat in much press coverage of European politics. In the wake of the recent ascension of right-wing nationalist parties to the European Parliament in May, the ongoing debate about immigration levels and border permeability within the European Union has once again been brought to the fore.

This debate is also a burgeoning area of research for labor relations scholars: Macroeconomic changes resulting from globalization and liberalization have spurred unprecedented levels of immigration, and the implications for workers, political and social institutions, and the economy are not yet fully understood. This dynamic environment provides a fruitful setting for examining existing industrial relations paradigms and creating frameworks to explain new developments in global labor markets. In this context of rapid change, how will unions—institutions with a tendency toward inflexibility—adapt? What strategies will they employ to combat precarity for an increasingly mobile workforce and bring immigrant workers into the fold? How do these strategies differ at the national level? Heather Connolly, Stefania Marino, and Miguel Martínez Lucio seek to answer these questions in their new book, *The Politics of Social Inclusion and Labor Representation: Immigrants and Trade Unions in the European Context*. Using in-depth case studies from the United Kingdom, Spain, and the Netherlands, as well as pan-European initiatives, the authors foreground the role played by historic contextual factors to explain divergent strategies adopted by the unions in each country.

The authors begin their book by surveying the nascent sub-literature within industrial relations scholarship on union engagement with immigrant workers. While acknowledging the significant progress made in recent years, they argue that existing frameworks are insufficient to capture the interplay between institutional, political, and social factors that recursively shape a union's framing of race, class, and citizenship in relation to the worker experience. The policies adopted by unions in response to immigrant workers are determined by what the authors refer to as *logics of action*, which are developed over a union's life course and are shaped by environmental and institutional factors. The three logics of action and associated strategies they identify are *class*, in which the union emphasizes organizing and worker participation; *social rights*, in which the union engages with governmental and regulatory bodies to produce favorable regulation; and *race*, involving union work with specific racial or ethnic communities and community organizations.

Before delving into their data, the authors conduct a historical overview of immigration policy and employment relations in each country case. These fascinating vignettes provide helpful background for readers uninitiated in the literature and underscore the volatility that has characterized political responses to immigration in Europe from post-World War II to the present. Although the influences of Europeanization and market liberalization are evident in all three countries, what stands out are the divergent social and political responses to a growing immigrant labor force. It is clear that these unique historical trajectories would affect the development of union narratives about immigrant workers, which provides support

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# **BREAKINGVIEWS-Review:**

# **The uncertain new world of labour**

by Reuters

Friday, 7 December 2018 14:21 GMT

(The author is a Reuters Breakingviews columnist. The opinions expressed are his own.)

By Edward Hadas

LONDON, Dec 7 (Reuters Breakingviews) - In 1997, Pierre Bourdieu argued that the "precariousness" of modern work was a big problem. The French intellectual claimed that the decline of secure jobs and clear career paths led to "the destruction of existence ... to the degradation of every relationship with the world, time, and space". Everyone, he said, was affected, because no one could escape the fear of being rendered precarious.

Cultural critics have been kicking this big bad idea around since then. It is easy to find articles with titles like, "Precarity and Social Disintegration: A Relational Concept", not to mention "Modern

architecture, spatial precarity and the female body in the domestic spaces in Iran". Stripped of some rhetorical excess, a serious accusation is being made. Labour markets have gone badly wrong, leaving too many people either currently unable to earn a decent living or afraid of being thrown into that scrap heap of economic failure.

The accusation is serious, but is it justified? Could the existence of a precariat be a fervid fantasy of left-wing malcontents? Arne Kalleberg, a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, has studied the phenomenon for years. His latest book, "Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies", combines a magisterial collection of the statistical evidence with a summary of the many theories which purport to explain what is going on.

His conclusions are less definitive than Bourdieu, who died in 2002, might have liked. While it is hard to measure the fear in people's hearts, there is little evidence of widespread or increasing unhappiness among workers. Between 2004 and 2010, the average level of "perceived subjective well-being" actually increased in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Kalleberg focuses on those three countries, plus Denmark, the United States and Japan. Each nation has its own history, approach and peculiarities, but he finds a nearly universal pattern: less clear job paths and less protective labour laws. However, some caution is needed. Almost all of the changes have been more marginal than

dramatic, and many are reasonable responses to big social shifts, most notably the decline of traditional "male breadwinner, female homemaker" households.

While precariousness does not shine brightly in the numbers, it is not an empty concept. Work life is indeed very difficult for at least two groups of workers in most developed economies. The first is people living at the margins: migrants, former prisoners, the poorly educated and socially detached. They often get stuck with below-subsistence wages and inadequate help from welfare states.

It is not clear whether the plight of these social losers has worsened in all developed countries. In the United States, though, the decline is clear. The interaction of weak welfare provisions, high private payments for healthcare and low job protection has created a large precariat – people who rightly feel close to the edge of economic disaster.

The other struggling group is closer to the top end of the social spectrum. The expansion of university education has not been matched by an expansion of attractive entry-level professional positions. Kalleberg theorises that the slow start to solid careers helps explain the increasing age at which young adults leave their parents' homes and start their own families.

That might be attaching too much importance to economic factors. There are many reasons for the changes in family formation and structure, presumably starting with the changing social role and

expectations of women. More generally, precarious labour may be as much the effect as the cause of less stable social relations.

As far as the economy is concerned, though, "Precarious Lives" leaves the reader with one general conclusion: a well-designed and well-funded welfare state can help limit precarity. The Danish government's "flexicurity" model, which combines flexibility for employers with income security and help finding new jobs for employees, puts it at the bottom of almost every index of insecurity. The United States is mostly close to the top.

Despite the clear virtues of welfare states, Denmark has few imitators. On the contrary, the trend in developed economies is towards declining protection of workers. With that background, Kalleberg is pessimistic about the future of labour practices. He calls for a renewed effort by governments and employers, and a renewed spirit of solidarity among workers.

Bourdieu would have scoffed at such hopes. He had no doubts about what was going on. Strong welfare systems get in the way of what he called "flexploitation": the use of flexible labour contracts to "constrain workers to ... accept exploitation". So all-powerful capitalists naturally undermine them.

That sounds like an extreme diagnosis. Still, it would be nice if leaders of business and society worked to prove him clearly wrong.

On Twitter <https://twitter.com/edwardhadas>

CONTEXT NEWS




- "Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies" by Arne L. Kalleberg was published by Polity Press in June 2018.

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