

Maarten Keune and Amparo Serrano (eds.) (2014), *Deconstructing Flexicurity and Developing Alternative Approaches: Towards new concepts and approaches for employment and social policy*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, £95.00, pp. 204, hbk.  
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This edited collection brings together nine chapters that critically examine flexicurity (a combination of flexibility and security) as a concept and (potential) policy practice in the European Union. In the 2000s this concept has gradually become EU policy orthodoxy. The Europe 2020 strategy embeds a ‘flexicurity’ approach as the means to deliver ‘more and better’ jobs in a competitive, dynamic market economy. The flexicurity discourse promises labour market policies that work for both labour and capital through teaming flexibilised labour markets with commitments to income security. Ostensibly this breaks with the de-regulatory approach favoured during the 1990s. The labour activation practice of states such as Denmark are held up as examples of how it is possible to combine strong social protection, high employment levels and labour market inclusion with weak employment protection legislation. Flexicurity is seemingly an enticing prospect for social democrats and policymakers seeking to resolve (and sell) potential trade-offs between income security, inclusion and economic growth. This collection therefore provides a timely intervention that foregrounds the conceptual and practical problems with flexicurity and proposes some alternatives.

The collection loosely coheres around a ‘problem–solution’ structure. Chapter One (Keune and Serrano) deconstructs flexicurity, identifying it as a contested, contingent and malleable concept whose form and meaning varies within and between states as various labour market actors struggle to impose their preferred interpretation. The different combinations of policy that flexicurity encompasses undermine its usefulness as an analytical concept. Yet, this ambiguity and plasticity increase its attraction for policymakers, not least within an EU, seeking to co-ordinate disparate labour market policies of member states and reconcile (competing) labour market interests (see also Méda, Chapter Nine).

Chapters Two (Crouch), Three (Prieto) and Four (Jepsen) suggest such reconciliation has not been achieved. Crouch, analysing OECD data to examine class relations and the relative strength of labour and capital, questions whether flexicurity outside the more social democratic states can protect (empower) labour. Similarly, Prieto, in Chapter Three, uses a case study of Spain’s ‘Social Employment Regime’ (relationships between mode of production; labour relations, societal hierarchies; social norms and corporate policy) to argue that the comparable weakness of labour and unsupportive social and institutional contexts imply that a positive sum trade-off is unlikely without broader transformation of Spain’s SER. In Chapter Four Jepsen considers the implications of flexicurity for gendered patterns of employment and care. In the absence of the employment opportunities facilitated in Denmark by comprehensive public care services and a supportive taxation and social protection system Jepsen concludes that flexicurity will mainly serve to reinforce gendered labour market segmentation and broader social divisions of labour. These chapters pose the question as to what might be an alternative and the remaining chapters suggest some possibilities.

Chapters Five (Schmid), Six (Salais), Seven (Zimmerman) and Eight (Dean) seek to ground reform in a reconceptualization of ‘work’ (beyond paid employment). Informed by Sen’s Capabilities approach, the first three also share an interest in promoting positive freedom as the lodestar of labour market reform. To simplify somewhat, these chapters argue for enhancing citizens’ (individually and collectively) voice and choice. Policy should provide people with the capability and opportunity to exercise autonomy over their preferred ‘work’ path, within and without the labour market. Schmid, favours an approach termed ‘active securities’. This could involve new mechanisms such as employment insurance funds to enable choice over

how and when to transition between jobs, careers and/or into and out of the labour market over the life course. In turn Salais foregrounds the need to recognise our interdependence alongside autonomy by suggesting that greater democracy and participation within/beyond the workplace would foster the collective deliberation necessary to embed and manage fluid labour market transitions.

In Chapter Seven, Zimmerman argues that flexicurity be imported from the policy sphere into the operational activity of the firm through committing employers to invest in staff capability. This is viewed as a means of improving both intra and intercompany labour market flexibility and enhancing worker autonomy within the labour market. Dean in Chapter Eight focuses on how welfare reform might be re-imagined and reframed through a 'life first' discourse that recognises mutual interdependence and prioritises people's capacity to lead a good life over securing paid employment. Work remains as a necessary and desirable life activity but the collapsing of work into paid formal employment and the link to income security is rejected, whilst responsibility is shifted from the individual towards the state. The broader conceptualisation (and valuing) of what desirable work is meanwhile implies a break with productivism and erosion of labour market segmentation and exclusion. Decent work also features in Chapter Nine (Méda), which explicates the role of the OECD in popularising flexicurity, particularly the Danish flexicurity 'welfare imaginary'. The suggestion is that the Danish model functions as a means by which proponents of labour market flexibility have been able to disarm opponents of reform, incorporate them as advocates of labour market flexibility and obfuscate how such reforms are rarely accompanied by the income security found in Nordic welfare states.

The strength of the collection is its willingness to foreground the contingent nature of flexicurity and how it (re)produces unequal relations of power and domination. The inclusion of a distinct set of chapters that propose possible policy alternatives provide a valuable jumping off point for further research and is a reminder of the value to be found in exploring different social policy imaginaries. If I have one criticism it is that the collection does not include a specific discourse analytic contribution that could have offered a deep insight into how flexicurity is discursively constructed by EU institutions and member states and/or different labour actors. Overall though the collection provides a timely, empirically grounded and theoretically informed critical analysis of flexicurity, its rise to prominence, its (problematic) assumptions and outlines a number of alternative paths for labour market reform.

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Rob White (2014), *Environmental Harm: An eco-justice perspective*, Bristol: Policy Press, £24.99, pp. 216, pbk.  
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Rob White's book is an excellent introduction to and further analysis of the concept of 'environmental harm'. It successfully achieves its aim to establish a moral basis for intervention and action to eradicate such harm. As the author points out, harm is ubiquitous and ingrained in structures; not always intentional, sometimes arising from omission and indifference; preventable; often lawful and/or perceived to be legitimate. For me, this is exemplified in the findings of a recent report by the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2016) which found that outdoor air pollution causes at least 40,000 deaths a