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Higher Ground: From Utopianism to Realism in American Feminist Thought and Theory (Women in Culture and Society)

Sally L. Kitch

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Many feminists love a utopia—the idea of restarting humanity from scratch or transforming human nature in order to achieve a prescribed future based on feminist visions. Some scholars argue that feminist utopian fiction can be used as a template for creating such a future. However, Sally L. Kitch argues that associating feminist thought with utopianism is a mistake.

Drawing on the history of utopian thought, as well as on her own research on utopian communities, Kitch defines utopian thinking, explores the pitfalls of pursuing social change based on utopian ideas, and argues for a "higher ground" —a contrasting approach she calls realism. Replacing utopianism with realism helps to eliminate self-defeating notions in feminist theory, such as false generalization, idealization, and unnecessary dichotomies. Realistic thought, however, allows feminist theory to respond to changing circumstances, acknowledge sameness as well as difference, value the past and the present, and respect ideological give-and-take.

An important critique of feminist thought, Kitch concludes with a clear, exciting vision for a feminist future without utopia.

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