

The goal of my contribution is to examine how we, as feminist philosophers, can gain new insights into issues of social justice by engaging with feminist utopias. The proviso is that these works fulfil the criteria of creative world-building and radical inquiry which I will lay out in my talk. I will look at works of proto-feminists such as de Pizan, Cavendish or Moderata Fonte, works of feminist science fiction, e.g. by Perkins Gilman, Tepper or Lessing, and feminist scenario building, e.g. by McCorduck and Ramsey. I further will point out how they meet these demands and how they are relevant for feminist political philosophy.

My thesis is that the study of this body of literature helps us in fulfilling a central and ancient role of philosophy – that of radical inquiry into human life and social relations. I shall present two arguments to support my thesis: first, in a methodological examination, I point out that feminist utopian fiction works best for philosophical inquiry if it constructs a complex, consistent and detailed scenario – a whole world, so to speak. It replaces experience by imagination, because we do not have the former when it comes to gender equality and other issues of fundamental social change. Building a utopia shows us what we have not experienced yet, namely different, potential circumstances of justice, new social structures, new forms of living together etc.

My second argument is related to the first, but has normative implications. Alternative worlds do not depict idealistic goals of social justice. Social justice is not transcendental, but should be comparative, as Amartya Sen has put it. I argue that we should use utopias to replace the often uncomplex thought experiments in political philosophy as a source of inspiration to envision something radically unknown to custom and develop novel ideas for social justice. It can thus be vital for progressing in political philosophy about the future (in general, not only in feminism).