

Introduction to the new Nordic Yearbook and to the thematic section on eighteenth-century philosophy

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This volume of *Sjuttonbundratat* ('The Eighteenth Century' in Swedish) is the result of a proposal by the Swedish Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies to extend their Yearbook – published since 2004 – into a pan-Nordic journal. It has been edited by editors nominated by the Swedish and Finnish Societies and has also been contributed to by Norwegian reviewers and referees. It was released at the bicentennial of the division of the Swedish realm, commemorated at the third Nordic Conference for Eighteenth-Century Studies in Turku, Finland, on 2 October 2009.

As befits an international and interdisciplinary yearbook, this volume contains articles in several fields of current academic enquiry. They have been written in the spirit of multilingualism, a feature that the Yearbook will continue to nurture. An extensive review section exploring recent Scandinavian literature is also included. The team of editors hopes that the volume will find interested subscribers and readers not only among the members of the Swedish and Finnish Societies but also among other Scandinavian and international eighteenth-century scholars. We aim at developing the international character of the Yearbook by recruiting more Danish, Icelandic and Norwegian as well as non-Nordic editors, contributors and readers. In the review process, experts from outside Scandinavia will be used whenever possible.

The international series of *Sjuttonbundratat* opens with a thematic section discussing eighteenth-century philosophy from a variety of interconnected points of view: the interaction between social theory and literary genre; the Enlightenment debate on natural man; the interrelation between myth, religion and the Enlightenment; and the possibilities of mathematical reasoning leading to atheistic conclusions.

Kristina Fjelkestam's essay on comparative literature sets out to prove an argument on the political aspects of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century sentimental novel. Fjelkestam argues that the women heroines who sacrificed their lives in novels by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Germaine de Staël were victims of an ethical dilemma that resulted from contradictory bourgeois-liberal demands for individual liberty and

the common good. In searching for virtue through self-sacrifice, the women were fighting for the right of citizenship in a modern national state dominated by men.

Ville Lähde's essay on Rousseau's concept of natural man also shows how Rousseau saw the bourgeois as both independent and dependent. Analysing the structure of the argumentation in Rousseau's classic text on the origin of inequality, Lähde suggests that Rousseau did not use the seemingly contradictory concept of the ignorant natural man – a creature lacking society, language and reason and thus hardly capable of development – to make a particular philosophical claim. He rather used it as a literary device that enabled him to challenge previous philosophical justifications of political institutions as 'natural' and to view contemporary urban societies critically.

Much eighteenth-century philosophy also focused on the question of the nature of religion. Liisa Steinby's article introduces us to debates on the relations between myth, religion, poetry and reason. Steinby demonstrates how Johann Gottfried Herder reconciled the Enlightenment emphasis on reason and the religious writings of the Old Testament, thus creating an evolutionary transition to Romanticism. Rather than rejecting rationalism, Herder interpreted religion through the medium of human reason, suggesting that religious texts should be seen as poetry originating in a particular Israelite context. Indeed, their content could be seen as consistent with both pantheistic philosophy and contemporary forms of government.

Finally, Timo Kaitaro's analysis of Pierre Dancicourt's metaphysical system illustrates how it was possible to draw quite different conclusions about the reconcilability of reason and religion. Kaitaro shows how early eighteenth-century commentators were uneasy with Dancicourt's suggestion – based on mathematical reasoning – that the original matter of the universe was 'nothingness'. Despite Dancicourt's claims that his system combined revelation and reason, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz saw it as encroaching on the area of theology and potentially leading to dangerous conclusions in favour of materialism.

While literature and philosophy were dominant subjects in the articles submitted and accepted this year, the Yearbook will remain open to all eighteenth-century scholars irrespective of discipline and native country. Let us together make the Yearbook a leading organ of eighteenth-century studies in the North of Europe. One way to achieve this goal is to actively submit articles and book reviews for publication. Another is to subscribe to *Sjuttonbundratal* and to recommend it to your home university library.

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