Strävan mot Unselfing
En pedagogisk studie om bildningstanken hos Iris Murdoch

av

Anna-Lova Olsson

Akademisk avhandling

Avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i pedagogik, som kommer att försvaras offentligt fredag den 30 oktober 2015 kl. 13.15, Hörsal F, Örebro universitet

Opponent: Bosse Bergstedt
Lunds universitet
Lund

Örebro universitet
Institutionen för humaniora, utbildnings- och samhällsvetenskap
701 82 ÖREBRO
Abstract


This dissertation is a study in philosophy of education and focuses on the moral dimensions of an individual’s formation, and on how reading fictional literature can contribute to the process of formation. The point of departure is the notion that education contains – or should contain – moral dimensions and thus contributes to the formation of individual life and a life shared with others. The study revolves around the philosophical works of Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) and what she calls “moral transformation” - a task and a striving towards realism and unselfishness. The study is concluded by a discussion of how Murdoch’s thinking contributes to the understanding of formation within philosophy of education.

It is argued that Murdoch’s ideas about moral transformation can be summarised in four theses and that these show that transformation is a process of profound individual change. The theses are in short: 1) imagination supports moral transformation by allowing the individual to understand the world in a more realistic way, 2) attention supports transformation by directing the individual towards the good, 3) unselfing is a moral state of consciousness and a transformative process that leads towards unselfishness. The ego is subdued and the individual opens up to the influence of his or her surroundings, 4) reading fictional literature supports the moral transformation of the individual if the text has a quality of imagination.

The study shows that Murdoch’s work can make an important contribution to the understanding of formation within the philosophy of education: With the idea of moral transformation as a point of departure the study develops questions of the individual’s formation by highlighting individuality and imagination. Moral transformation means gaining a deeper presence in one’s relationships, and it is a continuous process of discovering the world that the individual needs to endeavour to maintain. It is a striving towards unselfing.

Keywords: Education, formation, fictional literature, imagination, attention, unselfing, Iris Murdoch.

Anna-Lova Olsson, humanities, Education and social Sciences, Örebro University, SE – 701 82 Örebro, Sweden, Anna-lova.olsson@oru.se