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ABSTRACT:	Dame Margaret Drabble's <i>The Millstone</i> can profitably be read as shedding light on personal identity and moral development as well as how these connect to contemporary society, history, friendship, self-knowledge and self-deception in a way that ought to be of interest to classic perfectionist theories, <i>i.e.</i> ethical theories that develop an account of ethics informed by an account of the good human life understood in terms of the development of human nature. This essay deals with the role of literature in moral development, the benefits of first person narration, and Drabble's historicism and its consequences for moral development and the metaphysics of the person. Furthermore I provide an Aristotelian reading of the role that friendship plays in gaining self-knowledge in the narrative while taking into account the protagonist's self-deception, which, I argue, is of importance in understanding personal development that is approaching but not yet nearing self-realisation. This last part is again interpreted along Aristotelian lines by relating it to the virtue of magnanimity.
KEYWORDS:	Margaret Drabble; Moral Development; Friendship; Self-deception; Self-knowledge; Historicism
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## I

On the most general level of abstraction classic perfectionism—*i.e.* theories that develop an account of ethics informed by the good, or finally desirable, human life understood in terms of the development of human nature—aim to unite a *practical rationality component* (PRC) with a *telic component* (TC). Any such theory must explicate the relevant conception of practical rationality (*e.g.*, in terms of providing an account of virtue), provide at least a formal specification of our end, and specify the nature and strength of the supposed relation (R) between them.

The general formula can be approached from the left (by shaping our conception of our end via our conception of practical rationality), from the right (by beginning with a conception of our end and argue for an explication of practical rationality by reference to this conception) or by alternation.

	<i>Aristotle</i>
PRC	Virtues (understood as active states ( <i>hexis</i> ) involving deliberation and choice united in their relation to practical wisdom ( <i>phronesis</i> )—together with some necessary external goods.
TC	<i>Eudaimonia</i> (formal properties: being desired by everyone for its own sake, forming the resting place of desire, and hence also complete ( <i>teleios</i> ) and self-sufficient ( <i>autarketes</i> )).
R	Constitution.
Outline	'activity of the soul in accord with virtue' (NE1098 <sup>a</sup> 17-18).

Formal specification is not enough since ethics, being a practical science, does not seek theoretical knowledge—*i.e.* apprehension of principles—for its own sake but has the practical aim of good choices and appropriate passions for a fulfilled life in such a way that we also need to form a substantial conception of our end that is in an important sense our own.

Our end consists in activity and is thus dynamic rather than static; it is the matter of leading a life rather than just living it, and doing this involves reflecting on how our actions fit into the structured patterns of our lives generated by our long-term goals. At the 'entry point of ethical reflection' our end is 'the indeterminate notion of what I am aiming at in my life as a whole' and developing this cannot be achieved by imposing a ready-made plan from the outside, nor can it be just anything you want it to be since there are better and worse ways of organising one's life and any such plan must abide by the formal characterisation. We must thus work both on honing our capacities and with organising our goals and aims into an overall structure that amounts to a conception of our end.

## II

Forming a conception of our end requires proper appreciation and understanding of alternatives since no end is free of opportunity costs (thus giving rise to constraints if embraced), and because our own conception must be tested against alternatives with regard to its reasonableness. One strategy for substantial elucidation of alternative conceptions of our end, practical strategies for attaining it, and the what-it-is-likeness of such processes is to turn to (narrative) literature's ability to depict moral growth in a manner arguably superior to argumentative philosophical form.

Approach: Literature functions as (i) an illustration of concerns relating to classic perfectionism that are articulated beforehand, and, (ii) enrich our understanding of said concerns and the relations that hold between these as well as (iii) make us scrutinize—and realize the dangers of—said strategy thus raising methodological, moral, and philosophical issues.

Aim & Disp.: After discussing:

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- §III The plausibility of literary cognitivism.
- §IV The dangers of moral readings of literature.
- §V The unreliability of the narrative.

I will argue that Dame Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone*—the tale of protagonist-narrator Rosamund Stacey's journey through pregnancy (resulting from her single sexual experience, with a friend whom she assumed a homosexual)—sheds light on certain aspects of moral development, namely:

- §VI: How our social situatedness (in)forms the starting-point of inquiry.
- §VII: Friendship and its relation to external goods, self-sufficiency, and understanding of alternative points of view.
- §VIII: Pride's epistemic use and limits.

The novel might not immediately stand out as one of Drabble's most philosophically intriguing compared to her later works, and Susan Spitzer even argues that the novel fails as an agent of mature moral discovery since the truths that Rosamund arrives at are 'shabby, partial truths that only partially camouflage the more vital current of self-deception flowing through the novel.' Spitzer's mistake lies in her assumption that what is needed in order for the novel to succeed as a full-fledged articulation of the good life.

### III

Drabble has her heroine, upon recalling a planned sexual encounter with a fellow Cambridge student named Hamish at a hotel during her university years, assert:

We were well educated, the two of us, in the pitfalls of such occasions, having both of us read at one time in our lives a good deal of cheap fiction, and indeed we both carried ourselves with considerable aplomb (5).

While this can be taken to suggest the inadequacies of fiction, and thereby the novel itself, when it comes to supplying moral guidance, another plausible reading of the passage is as a warning against using bad fiction for such purposes, and above all doing so in an unreflective manner. In what follows I commit myself to a version of the thesis that literary fiction can provide non-adventitious knowledge, often called *literary cognitivism* (itself a sub-species of *aesthetic cognitivism*):

Some literary fictions contain or imply general (thematic) propositions about human life for which they give support and/or gainsay that must, as part of genuine appreciation of the work in question, be pondered and assessed as true or false, at least tentatively, as part of the work's afterlife—*i.e.* the period, marked by significant gaps and an indeterminate outer boundary, in which we formulate, interpret, and process these general propositions.<sup>1</sup>

### IV

Fictional portrayals can be dangerously deceptive and harmful; a skilled writer can make any human trait, activity, or world-view seem attractive and vice as well as virtue can be cultivated and refined.

It is therefore important that our engagement with literary fiction for the purposes of aiding moral inquiry and development be marked by vigilant scepticism concerning the credibility of the narrative, its psychological portrayals, and its purported ideals and convictions etcetera. We must become:

- Moral philosophers: we must also be prepared to scrutinize our own opinions, conceptions, and practices as well as those gathered from the literature we are engaging with and evaluate thematic propositions as theoretical possibilities.
- Literary critics: we must identify the general thematic propositions, evaluate the narrative, etcetera.
- Readers: we will have to live with these realisations and their effects upon our conceptions, our sense of self, and world-view.

This includes, but is not limited to, understanding of alternatives that we whole-heartedly reject. This is so since a proper and stable rejection of *e.g.*, fascism, can only be reached once we are acquainted with both

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<sup>1</sup> It is clear that Protagonist-narrator Rosamund is, or at least wants to be, an advocate of some kind of literary cognitivism. Upon realising that Dafoe's *The Plague Year* is a fictional and not a factual account and consequently 'that it wasn't, as they say, true' she is 'extremely put out', but 'even more put out that I was put out' since she has 'always maintained that I hold an Aristotelian and not a Platonic view of fact and fiction' (146).

the raw appeal of that doctrine (*i.e.* when portrayed as a natural self-assertive regulative order promising a sense of belonging in terms of strength, unity and security), and the horrors it embodies when viewed from a perspective that appropriately but unreflectively demonises it. Propagandistic portrayals might seem naïve in their one-sidedness but I believe that a proper understanding of the issue at hand requires familiarity with, and the informed rejection of, such brute appeal in order for our rejection to be truly secure. It is this basic realisation that ultimately tells against the all too familiar ideas that we are simply and straightforwardly to learn valuable lessons and find exemplary character-portrayals to imitate from literature.<sup>2</sup>

## V

*The Millstone* is a tale of personal development written in the first person<sup>3</sup>, in the fluent and clear but still stiffly awkward voice of Rosamund Stacey. The strangeness of the narrator's voice is striking; frequent quotations and literary allusions betray Rosamund's status as an upper-middleclass academic, and her fondness of the distancing pronoun 'one' suggests there is still work to be done for the heroine when it comes to internalising her experiences. Still, Rosamund's tendency towards checks and shifts—in line with her academic tone—lends the voice a spoken character that adds immediacy as well as urgency to the narrative.

Pamela S. Bromberg argues that 'Rosamund's solipsistic first-person narrative creates uncertainty about authorial distance, preventing the reader from reliably evaluating the teller and the tale' producing 'three levels of inescapable uncertainty for the reader': unreliability of the narrator, the lack of a clear perspective from which to judge development, and, Drabble's own problematic relation to the narrative.

First-person narration seems suited for expounding experiential, psychological and phenomenological aspects of morality but the above features seem—like the explicit warning not to rely too heavily on narrative literature as a guide to life—to suggest that we should be careful when trying to learn something from the particular in the form of personal narratives. Rosamund states:

Confidence, not cowardice, is the part of myself which I admire, after all (5).

Yet, uncertainty and ineptitude plagues the novel, but there is afterthought in the voice also; Rosamund's narration bears the mark of someone that is speaking self-consciously and with a plan as well as a point. It is the voice of someone consciously and conscientiously trying, albeit not necessarily succeeding entirely, to learn from past experiences.

## VI

*The Millstone*, like most of Drabble's work, concerns contemporary English society and how it informs its individual members. The characters are as much shaped by social and economic class, politics, liberal agendas and conservative restrictions as they through conscious or unconscious efforts make up and sustain them. Two levels:

- (i) Frequent internal reflective monologues of Drabble's characters concern their *personal narratives*. Personal history, setting (pre-swinging London), and changing times constitute much more than a backdrop as Rosamund frequently muses over the spirit of the times, childhood memories, and the more distant past.
- (ii) A concern for *master narratives* and their effect on individuals as well as larger collectives. Class identity—signalled by peculiar formality of tone and investigated through encounters with friends and family that function as snapshots caricaturing class segmented Britain<sup>4</sup>—is portrayed as something Rosamund is acutely aware of and is at pains justifying. Social status also comes with codes of politeness, which are reinforced by the period's mingling of formality and informality as well as the contrast between her friends' easy permissiveness and the stigmatization of unmarried mothers (most notably by the medical establishment).

The central concern in *The Millstone* as far as historicism is concerned is with the narrative self and its relation to genetic and social heritage as well as privilege in terms of social class. Rosamund is, in sharp

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Duran remarks that 'Drabble assumes a certain sort of reader; she assumes someone who, like herself, finds ordinary life fraught with difficulty and problematic enough.' While this certainly, at times, makes for difficult reading it also underscores the fact that if any engagement with literature *qua* literature is to be philosophically rewarding it must be so through the engagement with the literary work that is marked by the kind of scepticism.

<sup>3</sup> The novel, with its linear narrative and first person semi-autobiographical voice, predates what can, for want of a better term, be called Drabble's post-modern turn.

<sup>4</sup> Here too the voice matters. This is perhaps most obvious in how the different character's different sociolects—from Lydia's 'would-be modest middle-class voice' (11) via Rosamund's stiff academic awkwardness to George's received pronunciation (he works as an announcer on BBC radio)—mirror their background.

contrast to her optimistic socialist parents, well aware of being moulded by her historical and social situatedness emanating in a kind of puritanical morality which she tends to construe in terms of determinism, social or otherwise:

Sometimes I wonder whether it is not my parents who are to blame, totally to blame, for my inability to see anything in human terms of like and dislike, love and hate: but only in terms of justice, guilt and innocence. Life is not fair: it is a lesson that I took in with my Kellogg's cornflakes at our family home in Putney. It is unfair at every score and every count and in every particular, and those who, like my parents, attempt to level it out are doomed to failure. Though when I would say this to them, fierce, argumentative, tragic, over the cornflakes, driven almost to tears at times by their hopeless innocence and aspirations, they would smile peaceably and say, Yes, dear, nothing can be done about inequality of brains and beauty, but that's no reason why we shouldn't try to do something about economics, is it? (84)

The passage seems to suggest that the truth of the matter is to be found midway between Rosamund's socio-genetic determinism and her parents' pragmatic bracketing of genetics and optimistic reduction of social and personal change to a matter of 'economics'. Drabble thus seems to suggest that a sensible position is to hold that while things such as community membership, socioeconomic background, and the like do inform individual identity we should not conclude (as Rosamund at times seems to do) that fixed, unchangeable identities follow or that predictable individual life-narratives follow from such inevitable background conditions. Class-segmentation is, initially at least, interpreted terms of determinism:

What a pity it was that resentments should breed so near the cradle, that people should have had it from birth (90).

Susanna Roxman sees the world of *The Millstone* as 'essentially a static one, where it is nearly impossible to leave one's original social class' and while this certainly is an in many ways apt depiction of 1960's England the personal narrative is far from static. In connection to this we must not forget that Rosamund's recollection points to another part of Drabblean historicism. Jane Duran writes: 'part of Drabble's take on the malleability of history is that we see it differently in different contexts. Our personal slants are the products of the very situations in which we find ourselves as we interpret historical moments'. Later, primarily through the birth of and bonding with her daughter but also through her interactions with her acquaintance Lydia, Rosamund acquires the necessary perspectives to begin to question her upbringing and its accompanying puritanism.

This questioning is—as is usual in Drabble's work—never seen to an end. To see this as somehow disappointing is, however, a mistake. It is an important, perhaps for the purposes of moral philosophy *the* most important, aspect of the work that it portrays with tact and attention to detail what partial moral development can be like from the vantage point of the agent.

## VII

One of the main themes of *The Millstone* is friendship. the progression in Rosamund and Lydia's friendship and Rosamund's relation to her daughter Octavia corresponds to Aristotle's distinction between three main types of friendship; friendships of advantage, friendship for pleasure, and complete friendship found between virtuous people.

Octavia: Rosamund progresses further in her relationship to her daughter than with any other character in the novel<sup>5</sup> and in her relation to her daughter she can sense the possibility of what Aristotle calls 'living together', or 'sharing one's life' (*to suzēn*). A natural and influential reading of Aristotelian friendship is to see friendship as an extension, or even redefinition, of an individual's life in terms of the introduction of new or redefined boundaries so that this individual's happiness (*eudaimonia*) comes to include the happiness of others. This reading emphasises the help we can get from our loved ones in better understanding the nature of human happiness and its attainment.

Lydia: Rosamund's dealings with her friend Lydia who is in many ways (*e.g.* through her creative spontaneity, sociality and lower social standing) Rosamund's opposite (12) are less dramatic. Still, their evolving relation is significant for the narrative. Lydia is initially part of a loose circle of friends that belong to 'a raffish seedy literary milieu' (20) but becomes decidedly more involved when her economic predicaments combined with Rosamund's need of assistance makes it convenient for them to share lodgings at Rosamund's parents' spacious flat. The relationship that evolves between Rosamund and Lydia thus progresses from pleasurable but distanced acquaintances to the utility of shared living arrangements and mutual support. It falls short,

<sup>5</sup> The voice changes accordingly into being initially collective but quickly reverting to the singular while the preoccupation is still with her daughter (*e.g.* 'when we got back home and settled in, Octavia and I, I found that my initial relief was quickly replaced by new anxieties' (142)).

however, of genuine friendship. Their story not being of the unmitigated success variety thus mirrors Rosamund's personal development.

*Self-sufficiency & External Goods*

- (i) Just as it is for Aristotle, it is primarily the necessary but externally dependant good of friendship that reveals to Rosamund the tensions inherent in the ideal of self-sufficiency. Prior to the actualisation of issues having to do with the relation to others Rosamund appears as a parody of puritanical independence by *e.g.* engaging in solitary work, keeping her own family and the baby's father in the dark regarding her pregnancy, and her almost manic reluctance to seek assistance.<sup>6</sup>
- (ii) Friendship also serves to reintroduce other external goods that by the beginning of the novel are—partly due to Rosamund's privileged social position—of no concern (e.g. appearance, hygiene, cash flow) into her deliberative process via her subsequent need to understand Lydia and care for Octavia.

*Friendship & Understanding*

- Understanding: That their need for understanding is reciprocal becomes evident when Rosamund discovers that Lydia's book manuscript, which 'she had started shortly after moving in [...] and which she had been working on, intermittently, ever since' (92), is in actuality a thinly veiled account of Rosamund's 'life story, with a few alterations here and there, and a few interesting false assumptions among the alterations' (93). These false assumptions are primarily due to Lydia's inability to fully comprehend Rosamund's reasons (based primarily in her high regard for self-sufficiency) for not including, or accepting financial assistance from the father.
- Self-Sufficiency: Rosamund is initially rather flattered by the portrayal of the heroine as 'independent, strong-willed, and very worldly and *au fait* with sexual problems' (93) but annoyed and upset at the way in which 'the Rosamund character's obsession with scholarly detail and discovery was nothing more nor less than an escape route, an attempt to evade the personal crises of her life and the realities of life in general' (94).
- Life of study: Here Rosamund seems to be on the brink of realising something of importance concerning her professional pride, the nature of her work, and the latter's insufficiency as a sole source of life satisfaction. She stops short of drawing out the consequences of this (partial) realisation however, reverting instead to distinguishing between scholarly ability and the motivation behind it:

I did not think this view of scholarship at all justifiable: I could not produce my reasons for believing in its value, but in a way I was all the surer for that, for I knew it for a fact. Scholarship is a skill and I am good at it, and even if one rated it no higher than that it is still worth doing. Whether I used it as an escape or not was a different matter, and did not seem to me to be as relevant. (94).

What Lydia, and perhaps Drabble and the work as such seem to suggest is that scholarship on its own cannot serve as the basis for a good life, or, somewhat weaker, if it is to so serve it cannot be pursued in Rosamund's characteristically detached manner.

The episode in its entirety offers a meta-reflection on a par with the reflection on (bad) narrative literature as a guide to life discussed in §III and Lydia's partial understanding of Rosamund as well as their inability to communicate are highlighted. On the way to the hospital Rosamund reflects on others' perception of her:

On the way to the hospital I thought how unnerving it is, suddenly to see oneself for a moment as others see one, like a glimpse of unexpected profile in an unfamiliar combination of mirrors. I think I know myself better than anyone can know me, and I think this even in cold blood, for to much knowing is my vice; and yet one cannot account for the angles of others. Once at a party I met a boy whom I had known at school, and not seen since; we both had known that the other would be present and I had recognized him at once, but when we met and talked he confessed that when looking out for me he had taken another girl to be me (97).

Rosamund here seems to observe that we often do not perceive our lives directly. Rather, we do this through other activities in a way such that a part becomes a representation of the whole, what Irene Liu

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<sup>6</sup> Rosamund is, through her privileged social status, able to deal with single parenthood in a manner that does not reduce her baby Octavia to anything like the millstone of the title.<sup>6</sup> Her maintained self-sufficiency, Rosamund observes, is only possible due to her social status; 'I would not recommend my course of action to anyone with a shade less advantage in the world than myself' (112). The novel thus examines the ideal of self-sufficiency and our dependence upon external goods, friendship and the self-knowledge that can be gathered from interacting with those close to us thereby highlighting and describing in great and believable detail the self-deception that one often encounters in moral development.

terms *synecdochic activities* (so named after the poetic device). This goes for the way we perceive the lives of friends as well for how we enjoy our friend's good activities as our own (*oikeios*) in a pleasurable way. Moreover this special perception (*sunaitbêsis*) of the friend's life is mutual and reciprocal, friends perceive each other.

**Perfectionism:** Our life as a whole—the central organizing concern of classic perfectionism—is thus made available to us through the life together with friends. The joint perception of these synecdochic activities makes self-awareness of life as a whole (both our own and those of friends) possible in such a way that we see the structure of our lives and can organise them accordingly. As such, joint perception is to be regarded as an indispensable tool for organising life, but it is also an expression of solidarity with one's friends and a necessary component of genuine friendship in that it makes it possible for us to truly see and enjoy the good lives of friends and share in them in such a way that we go beyond the lesser forms of friendship and share in each other's lives as ends in themselves. Our relation to others can thus plausibly serve as a (partial) guide to moral development by helping us see the structural elements of our lives, by recasting our values, and by broadening, strengthening, and deepening our understanding of happiness.

**Ethical theory:** Such descriptions are useful both from the vantage point of ethical theory—as means to filling out the substantial content of our end—and for us as aspiring moral agents in that they bring with them an understanding of the process of moral development making us prepared for the journey ahead. Furthermore, I believe substantial specification in moral theory and personal moral development to be two different but related tasks. Any substantial specification given ought to have implications for what strategies (therapeutic or otherwise) are reasonable to employ in our search for self-realisation and the progress made with regards to our character, it seems reasonable to assume, will effect how we specify and conceptualise our end.

*The Millstone* draws our attention to how this conceptualisation is not (wholly nor perhaps primarily) a solitary affair in two different ways:

- (i) Firstly the novel draws our attention, as was argued in §VI, to the way in which society grounds our 'entry point of ethical reflection', *i.e.* the vantage-point from which the central Socratic question 'How ought I to live?' is asked by ordinary people.<sup>7</sup>
- (ii) Secondly the novel emphasises how this conceptualisation, even after the initial Socratic question is asked, continues to be informed by our relations to others. Rosamund gathers some insights through reading Lydia's manuscript but the interactive nature of such self-realisation is further underscored when later in the novel Octavia, in an unguarded moment, chews parts of the manuscript to bits (146-147).

It seemed so absurd, to have this small living extension of myself, so dangerous, so vulnerable, for whose injuries and crimes I alone had to suffer. It was truly a case of the right hand not seeing what the left hand was doing, for both good and ill. [...] It really was a terrible thing, I realized this, especially as by constant nattering I had at last persuaded Lydia of the necessity for keeping her door shut: and yet in comparison with Octavia being so sweet and so alive it did not seem so very terrible (147).

## VIII

At times<sup>8</sup> Rosamund corrects herself when distorting elements of the narrative in a way that makes the link to magnanimity evident. Magnanimity (the traditional Latinized form of *megalopsuchia*), or (appropriate) 'pride'—as opposed to both undue, or excessive pride (*hyperephanos*) and diffidence (*mikropsuchia*)—is, according to Aristotle, a virtue concerned with 'honour' (*timē*) in its various aspects, *i.e.* (i) how and for what an agent esteems herself; (ii) what she expect others to honour her for; (iii) which other agents she honours in what way and for what; and (iv) which other people she wants to honour her. Let us distinguish between 'honour' and 'honours' where the former concerns (i) and (iii) above whereas the latter concerns (ii) and (iv). So understood honour differs little from how the other virtues connect to what is right (*dein*), noble (*kalon*), and honourable whereas honours—to be the kind the virtuous person cares about—must be those that are well deserved as well as of the proper kind and amount given by the right people in the right way and so on.

<sup>7</sup> Many are obviously 'too unreflective, or too satisfied with convention, or just too busy, to pose the question'—of average intellect with a 'modicum of leisure' reflecting on their lives against the background of a set of values and commitments already (tacitly or explicitly) embraced.

<sup>8</sup> *e.g.*, 'the name of the boy, if I remember rightly, was Hamish. I do remember rightly. I really must try not to be deprecating.' (5).

Pride is one of the most controversial of the Aristotelian virtues often thought to stand in conflict with the Christian virtue of humility, constituting an artefact of a by-gone aristocratic age, and, as W. D. Ross would have it, betraying 'somewhat nakedly the self-absorption which is the bad side of Aristotle's ethics'. If the distinction between honour and honours is tenable it would seem that while pride in the sense of honour is perhaps not unproblematic it is the emphasis on honours that is the most puzzling; why should the virtuous agent be so concerned with how she is perceived by others?

Epistemic role: If we assume that the concept/conception distinction is applicable to the notion of our *telos* as it is conceived in the Aristotelian ethical tradition one candidate answer is that the role of honours is epistemic: By taking heed of the way she is perceived by others the virtuous agent can make sure (provided that the honours received come from people that are to some significant degree dependable) that her conception of the good life, and thereby her understanding of the virtues, does not go off track.<sup>9</sup>

Rosamund, with her emphasis on self-sufficiency, seems at times a parody of Aristotelian virtue. Upon finding Lydia's manuscript the protagonist is initially angered but this subsides when she realises that the incident cements the reciprocal usefulness of the relationship between her and Lydia and even makes her come out as the one least benefitted as this underscores her self-sufficiency:

In fact, lately I had even come to think of myself slightly in her debt, despite the disadvantageous rent situation: and here, at least, in those pages of typescript had been proof that I was still the donor, she still the recipient. More than ever now I had the upper hand; she had got her moneys worth out of me. Do not think I resented this: on the contrary, looking at our relationship in this light, I felt much happier, for I saw that we had maintained a basis of mutual profit (95).

This is clearly reminiscent of Aristotle's characterisation of the 'great-soled' (*megalopsuchos*) as people who 'seem to remember the good they do, but not what they receive, since the recipient is inferior to the giver, and the magnanimous person wishes to be superior. And they seem to find pleasure in hearing of the good they do, and none in hearing of what they receive'.

I believe that rather than seeing this as parody it is more fruitful to read Drabble's careful treatment of pride and friendship in *The Millstone* as providing us with a way of understanding both as having an epistemic value that at the same time highlights, from a first person perspective, the difficulties inherent in the formal demands placed upon our *telos* in the ancient tradition. On this reading Drabble manages to give us a believable treatment of the tension between self-sufficiency and external goods that informs and elucidates ethical theory while at the same time providing valuable insight into the developmental process.

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<sup>9</sup>This input is obviously more valuable to the less than fully virtuous than it is to those close to or even embodying the ideal and since Aristotle tends to frame his discussion in terms of the exemplar this might go some way towards explaining why this epistemic aspect is not dwelt on in the ethical works. In the case of the fully virtuous this input is obviously less valuable but, it seems to me, if we accept a qualified pluralism concerning *eudaimonia*, i.e. the thesis that a range of different lives can constitute human fulfilment and that different conceptions of this central concept are allowed then such input could still have a valuable role to play in allowing the virtuous person to navigate the limits of this pluralism. This reading also has the benefit of providing a neat explanation of an apparent contradiction on Aristotle's behalf. The phrase 'the greatest external good' occurs twice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, once applied to friendship, and once to honour. This apparent contradiction, giving two goods priority in the ordering, is on this reading to be expected since the two goods (at least in part) fulfil the same function of providing, in the positive case, assurance that our search for the good life is on the right track, and in the negative instance providing information that can serve as the basis for correction.