I. OTHER: SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS/SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

The human self requires reciprocal dialectical relations with others to achieve proper maturity; my interest in the essay to follow is the self that develops more or less autonomously of others, the self of the autistic child. This self albeit limited and truncated is nevertheless a seat of virtualities and habitualities. Exploring the possibilities for the self without others permits us some insight into the genetic structures of human development.

I begin with the observation that in many theological, philosophical and psychological tellings, the structure of the self is trinitarian. Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Husserl, Tymieniecka, Ballard, among others, provide various descriptions of this tripartite structure that are mutually informative for looking at aspects of the process of ontopoiesis. In order that my interest in autism in this essay be contextualized, I turn to discussions of the structures involved in the ontopoiesis of the self and the essential conditions for its possibility.

The results of this analysis shall show that the other is necessarily implicated in the mature human self. Yet, before its dialectical engagement with the other, the self must engage itself. When the self fails in this self-engagement, we "see the character of autism as a specific modification of human existence." This human existence develops a kind of self; its divergencies and limitations characterize the founding level of consciousness.

In what follows, I shall focus on two philosophic analyses. First, I will be interested in the philosophical foundations of the self that is functioning well, i.e. living well. Next, I shall show the autistic moment of human existence as the genetic ground of the constitution of the other. I shall conclude with a note concerning the commerce between the happy person and his primordiality.

The late Edward G. Ballard was interested in the self in the three functions that Aristotle called making, being, and knowing (or doing). According to Ballard, these human powers exercise themselves in
“contact with other beings.” The exercise of these powers is the necessary although not sufficient condition for the creation of the human meaning of individuated life. The temporal unity of the self bridges: 1. the discovering self, in its protendings, the maker of meaning, 2. the acting “I,” that finds its being, “am,” in experience gathered up with its past, 3. the concretized “me” who made these products, these meanings. The unity of a human being, the integrity that Socrates and Plato take to be essential to human happiness, depends upon the reflection that provides the meaning which can unify the person as a whole being, aware of its fecund future that combines its past with its chosen virtualities.

The discovering self for Ballard, as the creating self for Tymieniecka, has three possibilities for engagement. The self can be pointed toward its creative acts, making meanings, toward grasping the meanings it has already made or toward its being, as meaning-making. Tymieniecka describes three movements of the soul. The first, “radical examination,” seeks for depth of meaning in its affections and passions; the second, recognition of finitude, “establishes its authentic existence,” while the third tends toward “transcending.”

If the self inclines towards discovering its being through uncovering the meanings it has bestowed, the self must objectify what it has been. What the self has been might be answered (albeit inconclusively) with a report of what the self has done or made, since creating or making objects makes its creator, as well. Simply said, the carpenter develops the hands of a carpenter; the philosopher, the soul of the philosopher. The senses that Tymieniecka refers to as moral, poetic, and intellectual dimensions of human life are hewn from making objects. Making them makes the creator as making music makes the person a musician. Knowing this or that about what (s)he has made subjects the maker who has been to cancellation. Oedipus cries, I have done this terrible deed, but now I disown it. It was me and it is not me. Oedipus rejects what he has made. He never wants to look upon the offspring of his union; the fruit of his body is now distasteful to him.

According to Ballard, human dramatic time, the temporality of ontopoiesis in the self-individuation of life, often displays the structure of tragedy. The protagonist chooses an identity (after first having chosen to quarrel with his fate), as the just king of Thebes, say. The protagonist takes up the burden of his decision and suffers through to the insight that he had misidentified himself. Such mistakes or misdeeds purify