



7 / A WALL

To show the universal character of the process of seeking a connection to the I, let me go to the simple example of an ordinary wall in California. Compared with many walls we may experience today, this wall is fatter, and lower, and heavier. You may say that it is so simple, it could hardly have opportunities in it for centers, or for the being nature. But this is not true.

Even in the most ordinary judgments about height, volume, mass, and overhang of a utilitarian wall, the same factors come into play, the same questions arise: whether it is connected to the self, or not, whether its individual centers are connected to the self, or not.

Let us begin with the height of the wall. The first idea was that it would be a wall for separating the property from surrounding land, yet of a height to sit on. Usually such a wall would be, say, about 16 inches high. But in this instance, I got some concrete blocks and placed a few of them to indicate a wall 16 inches high, and 16 inches wide. It was not enough. If I asked myself, then, did this fill me with the I of that place, did it create and strengthen a permanent relation between me and that land, the 16-inch wall was not substantial enough. I added some boards to find out what *would* be substantial enough. It became both higher, and a little fatter. At a certain stage, as increments of dimension were added, one could see the being of the wall existing like a bull in a field. I had made it in such a way that the wall would feel, as far as possible, related to me.

When I had the height fixed, then I went on to the width. I tried to imagine the wall of that height, having a width across the top that would be related to me as deeply as possible. Again I made experiments with my hands, with sticks, now also with cardboard — until the thickness of the wall took on substance and became, as far as I could make it so, related to me.

When it came to the actual making of the wall, once again I used the same process: I tried to find a way of making the substance of the wall so that I could feel a glimmering of I in it. I felt it had to be solid. So I chose to make the wall from a pallet or two of old cement sacks which had hardened and were going to waste. The dimension of the solid, useless sacks of cement was just about right for the thickness, and would make the wall beautifully solid, too. I physically stacked the cement sacks, to make the volume and profile I had decided on, following the contour of the land gently up and down. Then I shot the sides (covered the surface of the old concrete sacks with Gunite), so that the wall surface took on a rough and straightforward feeling. I used a Reed gun, with a small nozzle to get fairly fine control over the surface of the concrete — but not too fine.⁸

Once the body of the wall was shot, I went on to make the top. Most important, I had to fix the dimensions of the top — its thickness. I tried to settle on a thickness for this top, which would make the wall as deeply related to me as possible. I used scraps of wooden boards, propped or nailed in position, and stood back to judge them, and the volume of the top they made. I tried variations in the thickness of the top and the total width across the top (one-and-a-half to four inches for the thickness, and from seventeen to about twenty-two inches for the width.)

You may ask just how those judgments were to be made. The experiment is simple. As I have written in Book 1, there is a classic experiment, where we compare two things, A and B, and ask which of the two seems more a picture of my own eternal self.⁹ With a bit of concentration, and paying attention specifically to the *thickness* of the top (only), you can answer that question. If you *only* pay attention to the thickness of the top, nothing else, you will find it easier to make the judgment successfully. If it seems hard, you can also ask in

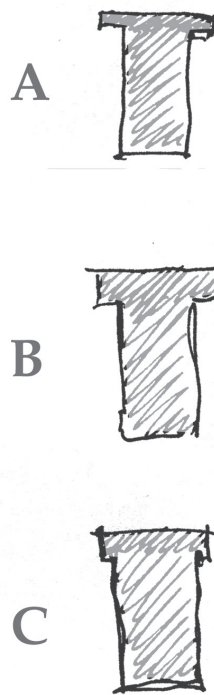


A wall that is simple and massive and contains, in each part, the self.

which of them the wall makes you feel more whole, in which the world seems more whole, which makes you more connected to the world, which of the two walls would make a better gift for God. All of these questions allow you to form a judgment and to decide whether A or B is more like the eternal I. You choose from *that* pair — say you choose A. Then you try another pair, A and C. Again you ask these questions. This time, C seems a little better. Next you compare C and D. C remains better. Now compare C against E. Still C seems better of the two. The reality of these questions is easily visible in the accompanying sketches. Among these three, and focusing on the thickness of the top in relation to the height, the bottom one of the three sketches has the greatest depth of feeling, and the most “I.”

But one has to go on, finer and finer, refining and refining. You compare C with F, something you had not thought of before, a minor variation of height or thickness. And again you ask of F and C, Which is the one which is better picture of your own eternal self? Again, C remains the stronger of the two. By now you have perhaps concluded that you cannot find a G, or an H which does better than the C. So the decision to make C is settled.

Then once that is done, you go to another question. For example, once having the thickness and height of the top, there is a remaining variable — the dimension of the overhang. Does the top hang over by one inch, or one-and-a-half inches, or two inches from the wall?



Three sketches of the wall cross-section, with different degrees of emotional weight.

Since the top is already set, this is a judgment about the position of the surface of the wall. Using the same question as before, you can now make *this* judgment. In this instance, yet another center is involved, the center that lies in the angle between the wall surface

and the overhanging top. As nearly as possible, you make that space positive, so make even *this* center which sits in the air next to the overhang as much a being as possible.

By the time you have done your best on each of these decisions, the wall begin to have the being nature — at least to some degree. It makes us all feel related to the I. Even though it is

an ordinary wall, made of old hardened cement sacks, it has a touch of the eternal I in it.

And to this day, people like that wall. They sit on it, drink beer on it, children run along the top of the wall. All of them love the wall, because the wall is related to them, and they feel related to it. It increases the relatedness which people feel in the world.



8 / CATCHING A BEING IN COLOR

In color, just as in form, the same process dominates. To make something which is really whole, we play and play, and try and try, until we catch a being shining through.

A painting of Fra Angelico's shows the being-nature very strongly. I will try to reconstruct a process that I believe he must have experienced in making it. The painting is Fra Angelico's *The Dream of Innocent*, a small panel at the bottom of *The Coronation of the Virgin*, now hanging in the Louvre. It is a beautiful example

of inner light — the clear sequence of colors, from the white to the grey to the pale blue to the black to the deep blue to the shimmering pale golden white, centering around the deep blue. Here we can see the being-nature very directly, and can, I think, even glimpse the way this being-nature appeared in the painting as it was created.

You remember the strange being-like “creature” I have been advising you, in chapter 4, to seek as you search for the I. Can you not see this



Fra Angelico: The Dream of Innocent