SELF-GUIDANCE
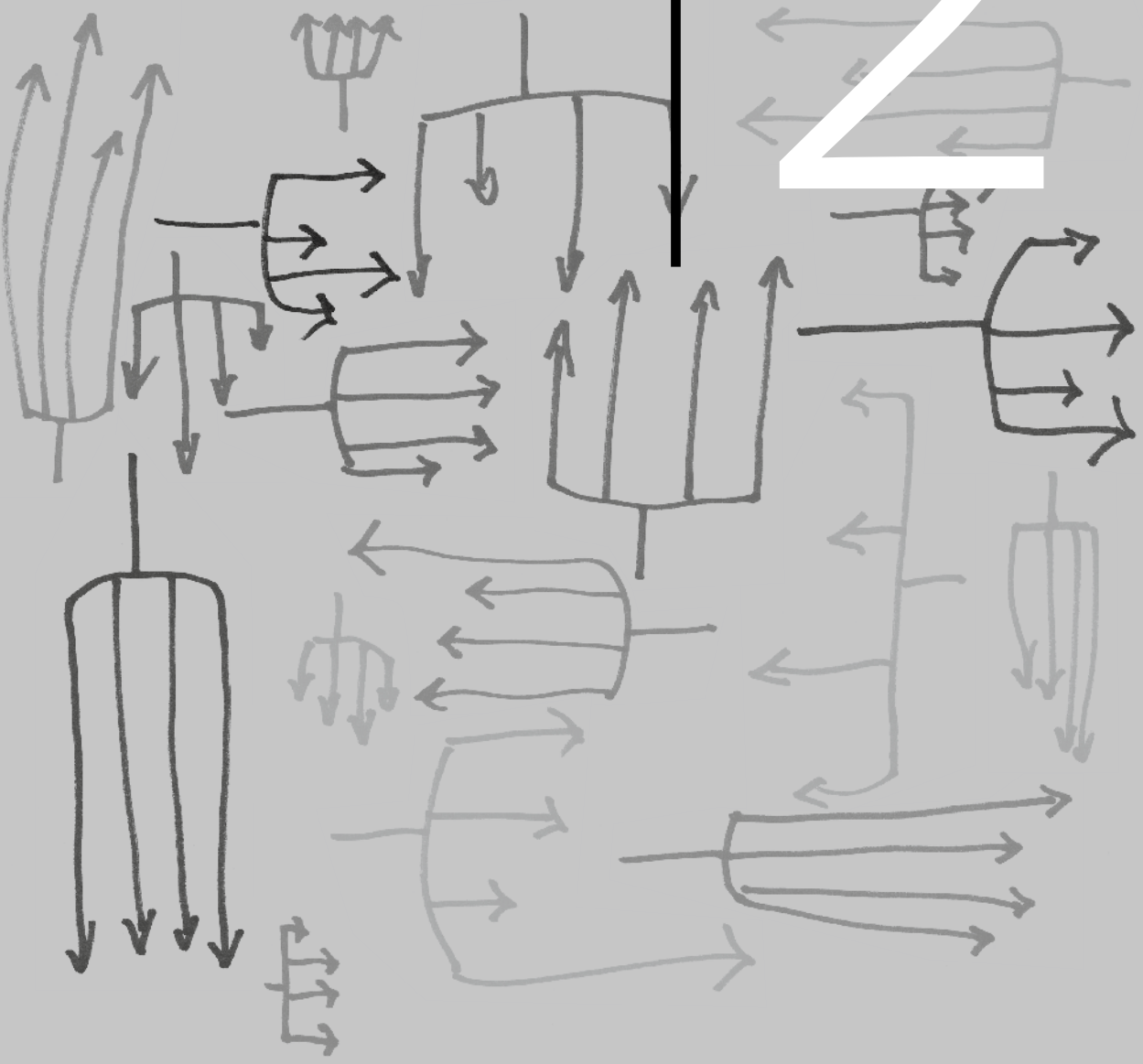
PROJECTS

IDENTITY

GREATER WHOLE

CONTEXT

The Fork

Linking personal growth to cultural transition

Rudy Vandamme

The Fork model

'How can you develop yourself in meaningful ways?'

'How can you make an organized start at developing who you are and who you want to be?'

This chapter presents an introduction to the Fork model, illustrating the method of development. This model consists of four tracks, which will be explained in the second section. In the third section, I will briefly describe the philosophy behind each track, as well as explaining why each track is necessary for meaningful development. The fourth and fifth sections address the two most important principles in the method of meaningful development. The first principle is based on the fact that you will be working on different tracks at the same time: 'multi-track'. The second one is about switching tracks throughout the process to boost development.

2.1 The model

This simple little model is the result of a decade spent working on a method for development. It is an instrument for approaching development in a methodical way.
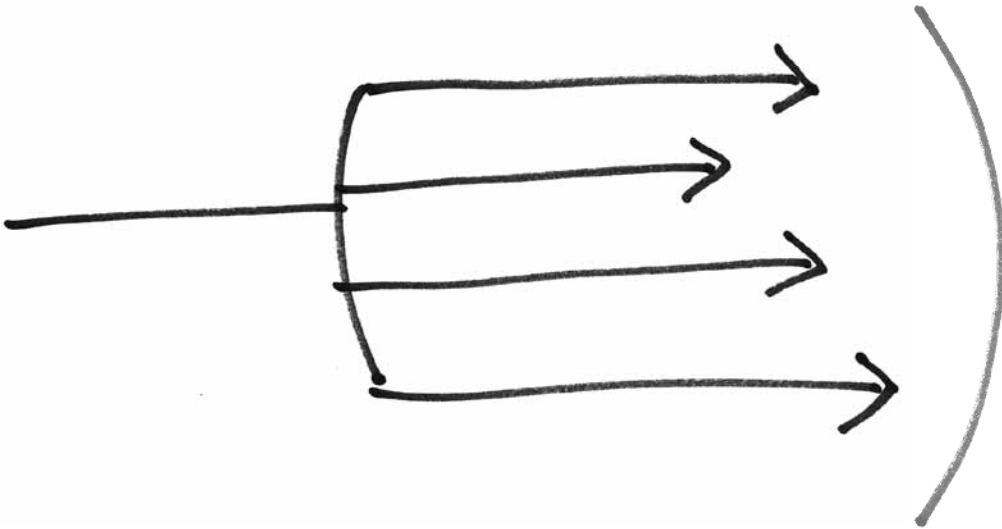
The fork is a symbol; it is a metaphor. It is a tool that western people use every day. We use it to handle our food as we eat. It allows us to get a grip on what we want to take in. It is also an instrument of precision. All in all, it is a good metaphor for a carefully developed method.

The metaphor can be extended even further: The handle of the Fork, the part you hold in your hand when you eat, stands for a single unified activity. In the shaft of

a fork, the tines have not separated yet. You could be in a situation, for instance, in which you notice that all sorts of events are going on in your life, but you just can't organize your thoughts about them. A typical example would be someone working hard on some concrete project and eventually getting results, only to notice afterwards that the project aimed for the wrong goal. Or you could spend ten years in a certain situation without having a clear idea of why you are in it. You think you have to put in more effort, and so you do. That is why you manage to keep it up for so long. In these examples, concrete results are confused with who you are as a person.

The tines or prongs of the fork begin at the point where the handle is divided. This explains why the 'Fork' is also a metaphor for division. The shaft divides into four parts; four ways of being engaged in change. In this way, the fork unifies four routes in a single image. This is why I tend to call the prongs tracks. It is because I associate the model with a railway station, trains, and changing tracks. Each track presents a way of advancing. At some point, you pick a track to start making headway on.

The prongs also serve as 'tracks of attention'. Your attention is what keeps you on track. If you want to become better at working on development, then knowing the object of your attention is crucial. An amateur can try many ways of doing something, but he may not always know exactly what he is doing. The expert knows what he is doing. If you are unable to concentrate on your track, then you run a risk of derailing. You could lose track, in other words. You will learn more about this in section 5 of this chapter, which deals with the track game.

The Fork enables you to get results, and this explains the image of lines and arrows, making it a model of results set out on a timeline. It is the metaphor of the way towards the goal, set along a line in time.

The context is also part of the basic model. Interaction with the context brings development. Without a context, there can be no development as the whole process is cut short before it has a chance to start. The environment feeds development by providing reasons to get going.

This book is about the method of proceeding along each track and the relationships between these tracks. The fork, along with the knife and the spoon, provides the arsenal of instruments with which you feed yourself. How the knife and spoon combine with the fork in a metaphorical sense, I will leave to your own imagination.

2.2 The four tracks

There are four ways of engaging in development. These ways are numbered one to four, each with its own name: project, self-guidance, identity, and the greater whole. We will start on the project track.

1. Project: making plans work out right

On which concrete goals do you focus your energy and attention?

You get results in concrete situations. You make a difference in the world. It starts with the way you get up in the morning and how you manage your time during the day, but the list goes on up to bigger activities such as finding a new job or organizing your sabbatical. You get results. People don't usually call these activities projects, because they seem to just happen by themselves. If events occur because you focus your attention on them, however, a well-thought-out plan arises. First, you create a gap between some current situation and a goal. Then you act to try and to bridge the gap, and so you create a difference. On this track, you engage in development by creating interesting differences in a concrete situation. We usually don't call this development, choosing words like being busy, working, or creating instead.

2. Self-guidance: increasing your competence at guidance

How are you engaged in what you do?

You develop your competence at guidance by paying attention to *how* you cope with life. Self-guidance is the ability to reflect on your own course and to adjust it; it is not about what you do, but about the way you do it. Development lies in growing more competent. The essence of this track is to view self-guidance as a competence. Guiding yourself is an ability you can learn.

3. Identity: defining yourself as a unique individual

Who have you become through your life experience and your encounters?

As you develop your unique individual profile, you start to get in touch with who you are, and you become aware of how this unfolds over the course of your life. This track is about the existence of 'something' that develops between birth and death: your selfhood. Identity is primarily an experience of being someone, an individual

who is different from others. However, it also includes the experience of the unique wholeness of your biological, psychosocial, and spiritual becoming.

4. Greater whole: having a place among the whole

How does the greater whole develop, of which your development is a part?

You develop yourself by contributing to the larger whole of which you are a part. First, you visualize the development of the larger whole. Then you start thinking about how you yourself are a part of that development. The whole can be all kinds of different contexts: the relationship you are in, your professional organization, your neighborhood, society, etc. This track always links individual development to development of the greater whole. After all, you are part of that whole. By becoming a good part, and thus developing the whole of which you are part, you will develop yourself in turn.

Each track has a core activity that can be expressed by a verb.
• **Track 1:** Advancing in projects is about ACTING: you act in a concrete context, and your acts create a difference.
• **Track 2:** Advancing in self-guidance is about LEARNING: You get better at guiding yourself as you are advancing.
• **Track 3:** Advancing on the track of identity is about MOVING: you move, making your way through life and through different contexts, and this is how you create selfhood.
• **Track 4:** Advancing on the track of the greater whole is about CONNECTING: the greater whole will develop more effectively if you connect to it, taking your place in the whole in a more effective way.

By getting familiar with the four tracks, you will become experienced at development.

2.3 The philosophy of each track

So what is the added value of each track for lasting development? The following sections further explain the idea behind each track.

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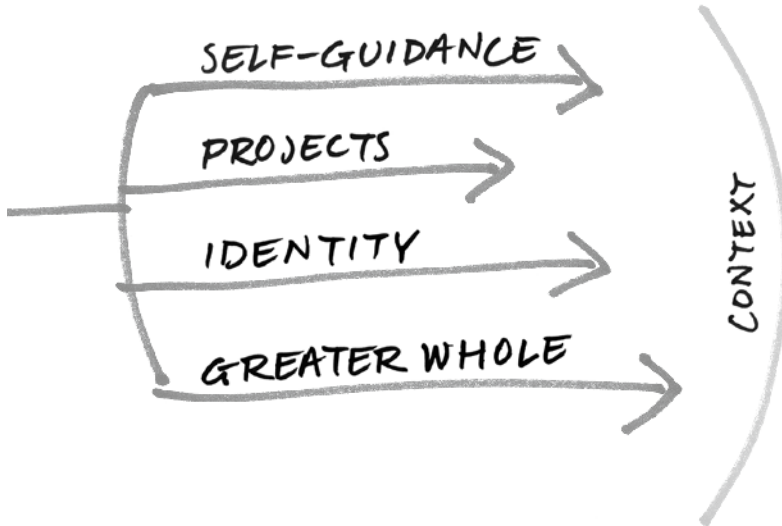
1. Projects: Grounded activity

Projects are always clearly marked out and related to their context. They are about concrete goals in concrete situations with concrete people acting in them. You live in the world, after all. You are an acting creature. You make an impact by acting, changing the world as you go. Contrasted to vague desires, feelings, ideals, and dreams, projects are about acting on dreams and desires in a grounded way. By grounded I mean that projects are concrete: firmly rooted in the ground, instead of up in the clouds

Projects take place within a timeframe. The result is always something that can be pointed out in an environment. You could say, for instance: 'In the next few months, I am going to find a new home'. 'I want to learn how to arrive at appointments on time'. These are visible activities and their results can be measured. You succeed, or you don't.

What does it mean to your philosophy of life to act in the world in concrete ways?

'I want to boost my self-confidence' is a desire instead of a project. It becomes a project if you make it concrete. You could say, for example: 'I want to be able to look my boss straight into the eye and tell him about the innova-

tions I would like in my work'. The project becomes clear if you find a way of making your goal a concrete one. Even if you define it in terms of a feeling, it is still a project: 'I want to keep feeling able to do something'.

Many of the projects we are involved in have lost their meaningful-ness. Yes, you are working on some projects, but no, you can't really remember why you started them in the first place. You could conclude that you are better off looking for some beautiful kind of development in an inner spiritual world. So long, real world; I am retreating to my little island to shut myself off.

Nonetheless, even spiritual desires need to be expressed in concrete terms. If you seek deep satisfaction with life, this will be expressed in real and visible behavior such as 'responding calmly when I am in a traffic jam'. Spiritual Being requires you to do something; it must have some real effect on the world. You simply can't 'Be first, and act later'. Floating on a cloud is not a meaningful activity. The world will determine whether your castle in the air is fit to live in. 'Being' requires a carrier: your body.

To develop is to become familiar with the possibilities and impossibilities of the world. You will not become an artist until you set about getting to grips with your material. This world is a world of opportunities, and the adventure is for you to get going with it. You will often make mistakes or fail to achieve your goals. Your only option is to accept limitations and personal failures. You will be disappointed. That isn't bad in itself. You have a very real chance of developing ego-strength along the way. In any event, you will be proud of the fact that you got to grips with the world. As you try to achieve results, an adventure of give and take will develop: you invest and you get something in return. There is challenge, mystery, and beauty to be found in this human-world relationship.

Projects are the way of being involved in development in a grounded way. Meaning-ful projects strengthen who you are, and they feed your development. They bring results that return to you. In this way, a project becomes a celebration of the fact that you live in a world with your body. Symbolically speaking, you can look at it this way: development needs a home. Projects provide a home; they allow you to act concretely and find a place. You can add a great deal of power to your development by getting results in meaningful and goal-directed ways.

2. Self-guidance: emancipation
People usually think of self-guidance as a technical competence: guiding yourself in order to act in a goal-directed way. Mastering this competence starts in childhood. Later on in life, you add more complex skills, such as deciding on your studies, or managing yourself in your busy life, or learning to accept ageing and disease.

Once a skill is mastered, it becomes a subconscious competence. You could say it dives beneath the surface. You don't need to think about it anymore – you just do it. These subconscious competences guide our actions at each step along the way. We hardly remember we ever mastered them in the first place.

As with any skill, people vary in how good they are at it. One person may be better than another at balancing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. Some people are very good at self-motivation, getting themselves into action with ease. Others are less good at it. Some people are better at decision-making than others. Top athletes, successful professionals, and entrepreneurs are more competent at self-guidance than the average person. A few hints are all they need to decide on the right course of action. Perhaps you have excellent self-guidance in some areas, even though you are less competent at it in others.

Are you aware of the difference between what you do and how you do it?

We often don't use the track of reflection and self-guidance until something starts to go wrong. At that point, engaging in self-guidance becomes a necessary detour on the way to success.

I advise you to choose this track consciously, so that you will discover the treasures it has to offer for your development. Too much of our attention gets caught up in *what* we do. Reflecting on *how* you do it is about being aware of your relationship to what you do. It is about the underlying choice for critical thinking, listening to your own conscience, and being aware the way certain events have an effect on you. You become an 'agent', a being with the will to shape life in a conscious way.

You can choose to stop fighting for something and just wait patiently instead. You can choose to go through life with optimism. You could even choose to approach a conflict in a beautiful way. Self-guidance is a way of emancipating yourself from overpowering circumstances. We used to be much more dependent on such circumstances, such as labor conditions, family patterns, dictatorial politics, or patronizing religions. Today, the main challenge for emancipation lies in economic and political patterns. Nobody is forcing you to live expensively or to be busy all the time. When you think about it, all individuals in our western society are free to arrange their own lives, but this hardly becomes apparent from the way we behave. There is far more space to move around within the limits of freedom than the space we allow ourselves. Even though the idea of free will is subject to debate, it is still a value worth defending: be critical about what other people tell you to do, and start taking your life into your own hands.

Being aware is a value in itself. Without it, you cannot foster spiritual development: what you do is not as important as how you do it.

3. Identity: using your selfhood as your touchstone

Literally, identity means that which stays identical to yourself during the course of your life. It is that which stays the same. Selfhood will create itself within your person through the interaction between your physical constitution and influences from the environment.

Identity can be described in words: 'I am introverted, I am a go-getter, I am an optimist'. Nonetheless, the area where you really feel a difference between yourself and the environment is your experience of selfhood. This experience goes hand in hand with the way you define yourself in society. Your relationships define what is typical of you. You are a European citizen, you are an executive, you are from this or that social class, and so forth. Identity corresponds to the psychological and biological need to be an individual. You need to create a mental inner space to remain whole as a living being. You have to give yourself some room, or your personality is at risk of falling apart

In this new millennium, it becomes clear that this track is vitally important for meaningful development. The world is full of opportunities and temptations, leaving us with a great deal of real freedom to stop or start a wide range of activities. Such freedom of choice can make you feel restless. Being aware of your selfhood can serve as a compass on this ocean of freedom. It is your touchstone, your reference point, your norm for making decisions.

You will notice your identity when you get the feeling that it is alright, or as it should be, in the way your life is going, in what you do, and in the way you feel. Development of identity is what creates your compass. You put together your own compass as you learn from experience: some of your behavior is good for you and works well for you. If something doesn't fit you well, you gain more information to fine-tune your compass. A simple example is the way you travel. The more you travel, the more you will know what works for you. As you learn what works for you, your compass is getting better and better, allowing you to travel with more and more precision.

Do you have an inner compass on the path of your life?

There will be some point at which you notice that your old compass is no longer working. You have entered a stage in which you want new experiences. You rush into new activities that challenge your new profile. Your self-image and your experience are constantly engaged in this type of interaction, going back and forth along the way. The main challenge for most

people is to become aware of the selfhood of what they are in their lives. There is a lot of self-knowledge out there for you to collect.

> By adding this track to your project track, your development becomes 'identity based', based on who you are. Projects may seem meaningful because they are goal-directed, but not all results are meaningful. Meaningfulness comes from the benefit the result has for yourself, for who you are. If you use meaningfulness in deciding whether to start a project or not, you change the reason for doing projects. They will not be about running after results any longer, but about a real feeling of going in the right direction.

> Once you accept the fact that you have an identity, you truly start to respect something that is bigger than your little ego can grasp. The complete picture of your identity, which will only reveal itself by the end of your life course, is too much for you (or anyone) to understand.

4. The greater whole: giving meaning

We think about objects in terms of their individual parts rather than in terms of the relationships these objects have. Almost everything we do in terms of development is based on separation. Children are fed knowledge in schools, as if we could just 'insert something' without looking at their social environments. We separate projects from ourselves, creating results only to wonder why we wanted to achieve them in the first place. We regard ourselves as individuals, as if we were capable of defining ourselves without including the world around us.

I stress the importance of always looking at this track as a part of lasting development. Just adding this track to your development will already change way you develop in a positive way. A surprising number of people never ask themselves the question of 'How does the whole of which I am part develop?' You will only develop anything at all if you also think about how such development is good for the development of the greater whole.

How is working on yourself a way of developing the whole?

For many people, development becomes more meaningful as soon as they ask themselves this question. Thinking in terms of wholes is not just more lasting; it is more meaningful at the same time. Your individual development will become more powerful if you link it to that of others in your group and to the development of the whole.

How is working on the greater whole a way of developing yourself?

The greater whole exists in space, such as your family, neighborhood, and culture, but there is also a greater whole in time. You act in certain ways now because it can guide future generations in their development. A striking example is the way in which parents break their own patterns of education in order to raise their children differently. This prevents destructive patterns of education from being passed on to future generations. Doing something for other people instead of for yourself can give you a lot of energy and motivation.

> We can see how the value of this track lies in breaking down individualism. We need to consider development in terms of relations, ecology, and systems – only then will it be meaningful.

2.4 Multi-tracking as a test for lasting development

The four tracks make up a single whole. Many of the models that address change, solutions, and innovations are single-track models. I choose to use a multi-track model. It allows for a fair share of complexity, which is necessary for truly understanding lasting development.

The four tracks are in fact different parts of a single whole, running alongside each other, or in other words: multi-tracking. This is what makes development lasting. The whole is more than just the sum of its parts. The way these different tracks influence each other results in powerful movements, similar to the way musical instruments combine in an opera. Even if you are able to pick out individual instruments, you still hear a single melody. It is not about this track or that track – it's about this track *as well as* that track.

If you look at development with lastingness in mind, one track results in the next one:
- Attention to concreteness gives rise to the question of the 'why' of results;
- Individual development will make you want to find meaning within a greater whole;
- Attention to the 'what' results in attention to the 'how', and vice versa;
- Being involved in the whole will make you wonder about the contributions of individual parts;
- Desires result in projects.

Which track do you prefer?

The tracks are equal in value. No single track is better or more important than any of the others. All four of them are crucial in what they have to offer for development. You may change tracks at some point, shifting attention from one to another, but in the end, you will proceed along each track at the same pace.

The following chapters will deal with the methods of each individual track. The first track we will discuss is the project track. This is no coincidence: a project is a good point to make a start. It will provide firm ground to base your development on. So what you should do is to start with the world, instead of beginning with looking inside yourself or reflecting on your behavior. Put yourself in a strong and steady position first. You can make your own ego healthier by taking action. After that, the other tracks will follow.

2.5 The track game: switching attention

If you see the differences between the tracks, becoming familiar with their unique aspects, you will see that shifting your attention is a way of speeding up the movements of your development.

Below you will find six of the most important track switches:

Create meaningfulness by linking project and identity.
Although all projects are conscious processes, they are usually linked to a personal theme of development at a subconscious level. Any result you invest in is not just about achieving the goal, but also about a desire to add to your own development. Your activities become more meaningful if they are linked to who you are, and connected to what you need to strengthen your feeling of selfhood. When you become overwhelmed by the issues of the day, you will find peace of mind by taking your personal development as your starting point.

*What personal development do
you feed when you carry out your
project?*

If you get stuck in a project, see what you can learn from the way you approach it.

If you are stuck while trying to get results, the first track for you to turn to is that of self-guidance. Find out if there is some challenge for you to learn a certain self-guidance skill. Once you have found it, you can either start to learn how to use it, or you can use the project to train this skill.

What guidance skills do you need to learn to advance in this project?

If you get stuck in a project, look for personal themes that block your way.

Obstacles in projects may be related to a part of yourself you have forgotten about while carrying out the project. You could use the track of identity to find the part, the desire, or the value asking to play along. Make what you find a part of the goal of your project.

What part, desire, or value in your personality should be built into the goal of your project?

Link your own development to your place within the greater whole.

Your personal development will become much more meaningful if you link it to something you add to the greater whole. Linking both tracks shifts your attention from just searching inside yourself to a broader context.

How is your personal development fed by what you add to the development of the greater whole to which you belong?

If you get stuck in therapeutic soul-searching, engage in a project.

You can make a lot of headway in developing personal themes by achieving concrete results and putting them into the world. Soul-searching can make you run around in circles. So do something, get going. Get some results. Create a difference.

What concrete results help you shape your personal development?

Learn to see growth in self-guidance as part of your personal development.
If you notice that you are following patterns in the way you guide yourself, you
can ask yourself whether they are connected to some personal theme of develop-
ment. Self-guidance is not a necessary evil. It can be more than just a way to get
results. Developing self-guidance is an opportunity to get a positive outlook on life.
Advanced forms of self-guidance are spiritual exercises. They are a choice you can
make.

*How can you feed your personal
development by learning self-
guidance skills?*
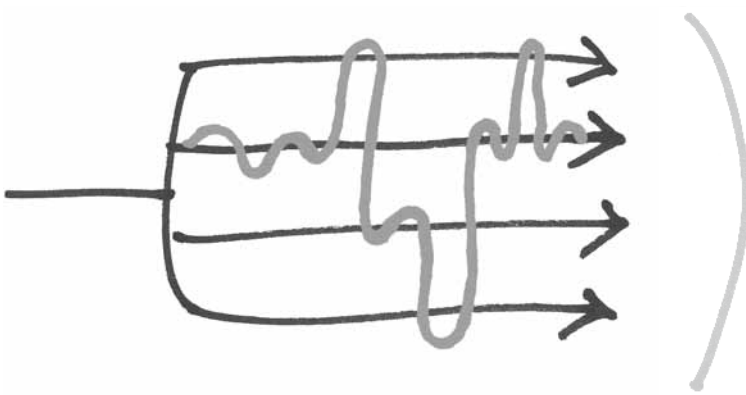
2.6 Conclusion

The Fork is a method for lasting development. It allows you to use a number of
principles:
1. There is no specific order to the tracks. They are equal to each other.
2. Each track is necessary. None of them can be ignored.
3. Development becomes lasting when tracks come together.
4. Switching tracks will help you when you get stuck, and can make development
   more lasting.

From here on, the key is really getting to know each of the tracks, and learning to
use methods that help you advance along each track. You will read all about this in
the following four chapters. The final chapter will deal with guiding the develop-
ment of others.