

**Individuality –
Challenge and Destiny (working title)
Introduction to the Fit Principle**

Remo H. Largo

It is not a blind power outside ourselves whose playthings we are, but the sum of the gifts, weaknesses and the other things we inherit, which a person brings with him. The goal of a meaningful life is to hear the call of this inner voice and to follow it as far as possible. The path would thus be: recognise yourself, but do not judge or desire to change yourself. Rather, let your life most closely approximate that predetermined shape of which you already have an inkling within you.

Hermann Hesse, 1931

Kommentar [RM1]: The original gives this date as 1971, but the quote is taken from a letter written in 1931 (Hesse died in 1962 and the letter was published posthumously)

Table of contents

Introduction

Part I: Human biological and socio-cultural development

All living things have a common origin

- Fossil evidence

- Commonalities in developmental biology

- Common threads of life

- The most important points in summary

Adaptation and change as a principle of life

- Long-term adaptations in the course of evolution

- Change from generation to generation

- A masterplan for development

- Related but different

- The most important points in summary

Socio-cultural evolution

- The overture to cultural evolution

- Exponential acceleration

- Social evolution

- Progress with collateral damage

- The most important points in summary

The fundamentals of the Fit Principle

- Every human is unique

Driven to understand the world
Driven to control our environment
Striving for emotional and social security
Attempting to live in harmony with the environment

Part II The combined effect of nature and nurture

How predisposition and environment (nature and nurture) interact

The same as your parents, or relatively different
How humans gradually increased in size
How humans gradually increased their intellectual abilities

Diversity remains, whatever our living conditions

Children develop their own characters

The child determines
The child is active and selective

The fundamentals of the Fit Principle

Self-worth and self-efficacy
Why advancement and decline are both meaningful
A society for all talents

Part III: Developing into unique individuals

Our brain

How the brain matures
Immense capacity and genuine miracle

What maturity and experience contribute to brain development

Activation and network-building through experience
When the brain is mature, learning continues in a different way
Genuine curiosity and sustainable learning
Curiosity from birth
Why children want to learn autonomously
Ongoing learning through network-building
A lack of security impairs development

Fundamentals of the Fit Principle

Following your own line of development
How we are shaped by experiences
The need to develop your talents
Various ways to become smarter

Part IV: Basic needs that determine our lives

Part V: Competencies we want to develop

Part VI: Ideas that make up our inner world

Part VII: Man-made environment and disempowered nature

Part VIII: The Fit Principle

Part IX: Misfit constellations

Part X: Epilogue/Changing times

Introduction

Develop yourself into the unique, unmistakable, irreplaceable person that is inherent within you.

Pindar (circa 518-442 BC)

I love to observe people of every age – in summer, for instance, on Münsterplatz in the centre of Zurich. The square is a constant bustle of strolling tourists, hurrying businesspeople, locals exchanging news and children playing. I am fascinated by the diversity in their faces and characters, the different ways that children, adults and old people interact with each other. The differences in their body language when, say, the grown-ups greet each other, and the little ones chase each other around. And the differences in the adults' interests: whether they are attracted by the venerable Fraumünster church or the trendy shop window displays. I never get bored of it. I am sure that no two people with exactly the same appearance and manner will walk across this square. Because I know that each and every one of the almost eight billion people who currently inhabit the earth is a unique being. This diversity is by no means unusual. Plants and animals are just as diverse within their own species. But what makes humans special, and what makes me an observer of them, is that we are the only ones – thanks to our highly developed intellectual abilities – who are aware of our own individuality and the diversity of our species.

From the age of just two, we begin to recognise ourselves as independent beings. Over the years that follow, we learn to imagine and empathise with other people's emotions, thoughts and behaviour. And in so doing, we learn that every person has his own characteristics, talents and ideas. By the time we have started school, at the latest, we begin to compare ourselves with others, and we continue this behaviour all our lives. As adults we measure ourselves against other people, in terms of appearance, for example, or professional and social positions, or performance and income. We delight in our strengths and deplore our weaknesses. We wonder how other people perceive us. And again and again, we are thrown back on ourselves: what do we have to accept about ourselves as "given", and what can we change if we just try a little harder? Over the years, however, we then realise that – even if

countless self-help books confidently promise such a thing – there is no ideal path that will show us how best to make our way in life. Nor can this book offer such an “ideal path”. Rather, it is an attempt to understand human individuality and the various ways humans try to survive in this world from the ground up. Because for every human, self-realisation is both challenge and destiny at once.

Living in accordance with your own individuality isn't the only challenge; we also have to deal with the diversity and difference of our fellow humans. Imagine if we were all the same. The same height and weight, the same appearance, born with the same feelings and talents, and the same needs. Life would probably be comparatively monotonous, though there are some problems originating in the diversity of family, school and society that wouldn't exist. But without diversity there would be neither humans nor any other lifeform. Diversity and individuality are the fundamental preconditions for all life.

Just how diverse human are, and what difficulties this diversity brings with it, are the things that made the most lasting impression on me in my 30 years as a scientist and practising developmental paediatrician. From 1974 to 2005, I had the privilege of continuing a large-scale research project begun in 1954 at Zurich Children's Hospital. The Zurich Longitudinal Studies (see appendix) followed more than 700 normally developed children from birth to adulthood, in two consecutive generations, documenting the development of each child in areas such as motor skills and language. Our motivation for carrying out such extremely labour-intensive studies was the conviction that only when we are familiar enough with the diversity and the regularities in normal development can we do justice to children's individual needs and abilities, and support their development effectively in our roles as parents, therapists and teachers. In fact, when the data on the various developmental areas was evaluated, it revealed that there was no ability, no behaviour and no physical or mental characteristic that is developed to the same degree in all children. Children differ in their size and weight at every age. They require differing amounts of sleep and eat different quantities of food. Some children take their first steps at 10 months; others only at 20 months. Occasionally children are interested in letters at the age of just three or four, though most learn to read aged between six and eight, and some still find reading difficult into adulthood. In every respect, this diversity increases constantly as children get older, and – to a limited extent – it continues to increase when they become adults. Thus there are adults whose understanding of numbers never gets beyond primary-school level, while others have logical and mathematical abilities that enable them to perform complex IT tasks.

This means humans have very different resources with which to overcome the challenges large and small that life throws at them. Take Luca, for example, who came to my clinic with his parents. He felt he was a failure because at the age of nine, he still couldn't read. He was painfully aware that he was unable to fulfil his parents' and his teacher's expectations. Luca's sense of wellbeing was significantly impaired, and he reacted to this by becoming distracted and fidgety. In the course of my work, I have seen thousands of children who have been brought to us because they deviated from the “norm”. They were suffering from a wide variety of developmental and behavioural abnormalities such as waking during the night,

poor coordination or underdeveloped social skills. Their parents' and teachers' (often unspoken) demand on us was to give them the support that would bring them back in line with the "norm" - which, as our many years of experience had taught us, cannot be done. For us, the children's real problem was that, because they didn't conform to ideas of normality, they weren't allowed to be "themselves". And so we tried to help these children by understanding their individual needs and abilities. We would then discuss with parents and other care-givers how best to support each child, with his own strengths and weaknesses. It was often no simple undertaking; the adults ultimately had their own expectations of the child, their own ideas about his abilities and, above all, about the things he should be able to achieve. But when we did manage to tune the adults in to the child's individual needs and abilities, his mental and physical condition and his willingness to learn increased.

Living in accordance with your own individuality remains a constant challenge even in adulthood. Let's take a bank employee - we'll call her Sonya. Just like Luca, the schoolboy, her wellbeing is impaired when she is unable to achieve what she expects of herself in the workplace, and what her managers and colleagues demand of her. She feels overwhelmed, becomes exhausted and, in the worst-case scenario, starts to suffer from burnout. Her wellbeing will not usually be improved by improving her performance - through additional training, for example - even if that is often the path employers try to take. What she needs is for people to respect her individual talents and to bring her ability into harmony with her working conditions as far as possible. The same problem of adaptation arises where a person is not being challenged enough; the sense that what he has achieved is unsatisfactory, even meaningless, can also significantly impair his sense of wellbeing.

Several times a day, in both research and clinical practice, we were confronted with the question: why does one child feel comfortable and develop well, while another's wellbeing is impaired and his development abnormal? We almost always found the answers to this question in the degree of harmony between the child and his environment. Thus, for example, it emerged that sleep disorders frequently arise because parents have the wrong idea about how much sleep a child needs at a particular age. At the age of 12 months, an infant sleeps for anywhere between 9 and 14 hours a night. If the parents manage to tune into their child's individual need for sleep, the sleep disorder disappears. Over the years, observations like these taught us to pay attention, in all areas of development, to whether there was harmony between the child and his environment, and if not, to recognise how the child was being affected by the disharmony and how this could be remedied.

Questions of human individuality, and of the interaction between a human and his environment, have essentially been my preoccupations since puberty. At the age of 13 I was confined to bed for eight weeks, and during this time I devoured Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. I was so fascinated by the empathetic and lifelike portrayal of different human characters and the dramas that played out between them, that - once I was well again - I read my way through all the Russian literature that was available in German. Since that time, questions of why people are so different, what determines their lives, and what goes to make up a human being, have never left me. In 1963,

I began my medical degree at the University of Zurich. I hoped it would give me a deeper understanding of humanity. But my degree was a strange experience for me: I encountered an immense number of mental and physical phenomena of all kinds, but my catalogue of questions grew longer rather than shorter, and I still hadn't gained a deeper insight into the essence of the human being. In the decades that followed I then went in search of a complete conception of the human being, engaging with the most diverse specialisms, in particular evolutionary biology, philosophy, pedagogy and psychology. I read the writings of geniuses in thought and research like the philosopher Immanuel Kant and the evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin, the educator Maria Montessori and the psychologist Jean Piaget. But again and again I was disappointed. Their writings illuminated important partial aspects of the human being, but I was still missing a comprehensive view.

Kommentar [RM2]: This is spelled incorrectly in the German (Emmanuel)

However, over the course of 40 years, what I learned in the hospital and through my research, along with findings from diverse areas of study such as genetics and sociology, gradually came together – like pieces of a puzzle – to form a complete picture. I called it the Fit Principle. What it amounts to is that *every human, with his individual needs and talents, strives to live in harmony with his environment*. The Fit Principle rests on a holistic approach, which sees the diversity of humans, the unique nature of each person, and the interaction of individual and environment not just as the foundations of evolution, but as the basis of human existence.

This book paints a wide arc from the beginnings of evolution to modern humans, and its 10 parts are designed to give readers an introduction to the inner connections that exist between subjects as different as evolutionary biology, nature and nurture, human development and the Fit Principle.

Part I: Human biological and socio-cultural development

There are many things in our own lives that we can only understand and explain to ourselves when we call to mind what has happened to us in the past. Thus a glance back to the distant origins of humanity can also help us to understand our (current) nature.

In the Old Testament, in the first Book of Moses, the creation story tells us that man was created in a single day. The latest findings of anthropology, evolutionary biology and genetics have led to another no less miraculous insight. Over the course of 450 million years, we humans have emerged out of the relentless interaction between countless living beings and their environment. We share a common origin with all living things on this earth, and are therefore genetically related – albeit to varying degrees – to insects, reptiles and mammals, and even to algae, palms and fruit trees [ref]. To some extent, our responsibility for the environment is written into our genetic makeup.

How has evolution managed to give rise to innumerable living things over 450 million years? Every living creature developed out of a close, reciprocal relation between natural predisposition and environment - nature and nurture. Every living creature today still strives to adapt to its particular living conditions in order to survive and reproduce. If certain

individual members of a plant or animal species possess traits that afford them a better chance of survival and give them a reproductive advantage, they will have more offspring than individuals without these traits. This “natural selection”, as it is called, means that within a species, advantageous traits become more common and disadvantageous traits less common over the generations. Living things also adapt to existing environmental conditions with increasing specificity, which in the long term leads to the emergence of new species. Two conditions must be fulfilled in order for this process to succeed: great diversity within a species, and a genetic makeup which is subject to constant change.

Changing genes, diversity among people and striving to live in harmony with our environment are not just the foundations of evolution, but the basis of human existence. Our genes are put together anew every time a child is conceived. Every one of the seven billion people on this earth is therefore unique. And every human spends his whole life adapting to the manifold demands of the environment, in a way that will allow him to satisfy his needs to the greatest possible degree. This effort to live in harmony with the environment is at the very heart of the Fit Principle.

Modern humans are the only living things to have developed an irresistible and constant drive to expand their abilities and knowledge. In so doing, we don't just make the best possible use of the environment; we are also gaining increasing mastery over it. The effort to achieve harmony with the environment has been converted into dominance over the environment. In the past 200 years, scientific, technological and economic progress has accelerated exponentially – a fact which is at once gratifying and worrying. The number of achievements that led to the digital revolution in recent decades is much greater than in all of human history up to that point – resulting in an increasing threat to the environment and to ourselves.

Questions we will consider here:

- How can the incredible diversity among humans be explained? And how can we explain the fact that despite this, all humans have a common genetic code?
- How much do genes change from one generation to the next?
- What do we mean by harmony between an individual and the environment?
- How did our cognitive, linguistic and social abilities develop? Why do we have this insatiable thirst for knowledge?
- Where does our irrepresible need to master our environment come from? And how do we prevent ourselves destroying life on earth, and ourselves with it?

Part II: The combined effect of nature and nurture

What applies to evolution on a macro level also affects our own development. Every person is created from the constant interaction of nature and nurture. We realise our individual talents through the experiences we have with our social and material environment. So what part of our essential being is inherent or innate, and what is acquired? This is a question which drives amateurs as well as scientists. Roger Federer is one of the most successful tennis players of all time. Why did he come away with 17 Grand-Slam victories?

Because he has been blessed with an extraordinary talent, because he has trained a great deal, or because talent and desire to train came together in him to form an ideal combination? If parents are particularly empathetic and caring with their children, is their behaviour rooted in a high innate social competency, or was that caring behaviour taught to them as children? If young people devour a huge Harry Potter book in the space of a week, while some of their schoolmates have trouble deciphering a short column in a tabloid newspaper – is it because their reading abilities are inherently so different, or because they have received different support at home and school, or are both of these true?

The importance we attach to nature and nurture respectively is also relevant to society. What is our attitude, for example, to equal opportunities in education? Do children achieve such different levels of academic success because their talents are so different, or because they receive different levels of encouragement at school? How do we create fairness in the economy when people with such different abilities have to meet the same demands? Do we attribute a great performance to a high degree of talent, a good education or an exemplary attitude to work? Is it right for a boss to pay himself a particularly high salary just because he feels more competent than his colleagues? What should we reward: talent, hard work or success?

We behave differently as parents, teachers, employees and citizens depending on what significance we attach to nature and nurture. The important questions to be answered here:

- What portion of our characteristics and abilities is inherent? What do we mean by our natural predisposition, or “nature”?
- What portion of our characteristics and abilities is acquired? What do we mean by the environment, or “nurture”?
- What are a person’s developmental possibilities, and where do his limits lie?
- How must our society and economy be constructed in order to do justice to the diversity of needs and talents among humans?

Part III: Developing into unique individuals

Every child’s development recapitulates a stretch of evolution – on fast-forward, so to speak. Children are born with huge potential for development, which has evolved over many hundreds of thousands of years and has been put to the test. A child wants to realise this potential, and he really gets going a few months after birth. He starts reaching for objects and understanding simple causal connections. At a year old, he can walk unaided and understand a few words. At three, he starts drawing and building houses out of Lego bricks. At five, the child’s speech is largely error-free, and he understands simple numbers. Then he goes to school, and between that point and the end of puberty, his abilities take another quantum leap. What is happening in his brain as this child starts to grip, to speak, to read and count? An exceedingly complex process of maturation is taking place in the brain, which can only be achieved if the child is permitted to have the necessary experiences. To this end, he is

equipped with a boundless curiosity and genuine love of learning. He can't help but be interested in every aspect of his environment. He wants to encounter the world, to understand it as well as he can and prove himself within it.

Insights into child development are not only helpful for supporting a child in his development. They are also a wonderful point of access for improving our understanding of ourselves. How we became what we are now. Why some of our abilities are so well honed and others less so. Why we have such great interest and such an astounding willingness to learn in some areas of life, and hardly any in others.

Important questions:

- What does brain maturation contribute to development? How significant are our experiences with our social and concrete environment?
- What do we mean by curiosity and motivation to learn? How does a child acquire abilities, skills and knowledge?
- What forms of learning exist? What does child-centred, sustainable learning look like?
- What are we able to learn as adults, and what can we no longer learn? How does our adult learning behaviour differ from that of children?

Part IV: Basic needs that determine our lives

Humans have always shared all elementary needs such as nourishment with the more highly-developed animals. In the most recent phase of our evolutionary development, however, humans have developed the ways in which we satisfy our needs to such a degree that these needs have taken on a completely new meaning. Thus humans do not just find food. For thousands of years we have been cooking and seasoning our food, and holding celebratory meals on special occasions with table settings, wine and candles.

From the Fit Principle point of view, our lives are determined by six basic needs. Alongside the satisfaction of physical needs, we have a great desire for security, social recognition and a fixed position in the family, in our circle of friends, the world of work and in society. If we receive the desired recognition, we feel at ease and accepted. If we are side-lined, we feel rejected and emotionally insecure. Two other basic needs are the desire to develop our talents and to achieve the things for which our talents suit us. Children have a particularly marked drive to develop their talents and acquire skills. The final basic need that drives us is the need for existential security. A regular income and security for ourselves and our possessions are very important to us. Unemployment, financial worries, or even the loss of our worldly goods and the threat to life and limb can have an extreme impact on our wellbeing.

Our mental and physical state depends on whether we manage to satisfy our basic needs sufficiently. We use all our strength and time in pursuit of this aim.

The following questions arise here:

- What do we mean by “basic needs”? Where do they come from?
- How do basic needs develop over our lifetimes, and how significant are they in the different periods of our lives?
- What feelings and ideas are connected with our basic needs? What are we trying to express with them?
- How different can these basic needs be among humans?

Part V: Competencies we want to develop

Intelligence is frequently equated with intellectual ability and the intelligence quotient. But our mental abilities go far beyond the intellectual capabilities captured by established tests. We need to factor in motor skills, which are essential for craftsmen such as joiners, or for playing a musical instrument. And social behaviour, which encompasses the different forms of interaction between people, and the mental ability to put yourself in another person’s shoes and understand their behaviour.

Terms like “intelligence” and “intelligence quotient” also suggest a unified performance by the brain. Nowadays, however, we recognise a multiplicity of intellectual abilities. They are honed to different degrees not only in different people, but within individuals. This means there are people who are very talented linguists, but are much less good with numbers. For other people, it’s the other way round. A single figure like the intelligence quotient cannot therefore do justice to a person’s individual talent profile. This chapter introduces eight talents, or “competencies”. Each of these competencies stems from abilities such as visual perception, which we have in common with more highly-developed animals. Visual experiences give rise to our first ideas about space, then to linguistic concepts such as special prepositions, and finally to activities such as drawing or building houses.

Questions to be addressed here:

- What do we mean by competencies? What do they consist of?
- How do competencies develop into abilities, skills and ideas?
- How different can the development of these competencies be between people?
- How different can the development of these competencies be within an individual person?

Part VI: Ideas that make up our inner world

Ideas enable us to think, just as understanding and the use of speech do. For example, I am currently contemplating what ideas mean to me, and capturing my thoughts in these lines. We start trying to understand the world when we are very young. We create a world from the ideas we form based on our experiences with our environment. We explain the world to ourselves almost compulsively. We just can't help it. A life without ideas is simply unimaginable for us. The acquisition of ideas is what makes us into human beings.

We exchange our thoughts and convictions with other people, and share common ideas, for example those of a religious nature. Some ideas exercise tremendous power over us and determine our lives within a community to a large extent. The Catholic Church regulated human relationships with its dogma and morality for centuries. It accorded itself an absolute right of interpretation, regarding for instance the role of men and women, marriage and divorce, or attitudes towards homosexuality. But even religious ideas are not set in stone. If living conditions change fundamentally, humans adapt their ideas to fit them. These days we orient ourselves more by secular than religious ideas, for example on the equality of men and women, or different forms of partnership.

We are guided by our ideas, and use them to justify our actions in everyday life just as we do in global politics. It is therefore worth examining the content and influence of our ideas:

- What do we mean by ideas? What distinguishes thoughts, memories, words and mathematical formulas?
- How do ideas come into being during a child's development? How do our experiences within the family and in educational institutions influence our world of ideas?
- What is the significance for society of ideas such as equality of opportunity? How do they arise? How do they assert themselves?
- What is the significance of consciousness for the availability of ideas? What is consciousness in the first place? Do ideas also exist in the unconscious?

Part VII: Man-made environment and disempowered nature

For some years now, we have been very concerned about our environment – and with good reason. Global CO₂ emissions reached a record level of 36 billion tons in 2013, which in the worst case scenario will lead to a rise of several degrees in global temperatures within the current century. In the short period between 2000 and 2012, deforestation destroyed a 1100 x 1100 kilometre area of forest and the habitat of countless animals and plants. In a few years, human cities and areas of habitation will have reached the size of Australia. We are plundering the earth's mineral reserves, polluting its waters with chemicals and littering our environment with waste. It is high time we became aware of our responsibility towards the natural world.

But we should ask ourselves not just what we are doing to nature, but how greatly we are damaging ourselves in the process. How much of the natural world do humans need in order to remain mentally and physically healthy? After all, our forebears spent the past 200,000 years out in the natural world, not in sterile rooms. We were originally made for a life in nature.

In the space of just 200 years we have largely separated ourselves off from nature and set ourselves up in an environment shaped by scientific progress, technology and economics.

This migration has also fundamentally changed the ancient structures of our communal life. With the advent of industrialisation, our original communities began to dissolve. Large families with numerous children and relatives shrank into small families with one or two children and few relatives. The divorce rate increased tenfold over the twentieth century. Partners and parents increasingly live apart. The comprehensible communities of our forebears, connected to nature, have become anonymous mass societies based in cities.

Do we, especially as children, still feel secure under modern living conditions? As adults, do we still receive the necessary recognition and affection? Can we really get by without a stable social network of people we trust? Could it be that a lack of security and social recognition has led to a rise in psychological disorders such as ADHD in children and depression in adults?

We must therefore examine our interaction not only with the natural world, but also with the environment we have created:

- What is the significance of nature for our wellbeing?
- What effect has the transformation of our original communities into an anonymous mass society had on our wellbeing?
- What are the consequences of the altered family structure for child development? To what extent are adults dependent on reliable partnerships and a stable social network?
- What happens if we can no longer fulfil our psychological needs in modern society? What effects will that have on our mental and physical health?

Part VIII: The Fit Principle

For millennia, humans have been trying to give life meaning through religious and spiritual ideas, the humanities and most recently, the ideas of neurobiology. And every religion, ideology and theory develops its own ideal image of the human. These ideas are frequently linked to high aspirations such as improving human nature or transforming the world into a paradise.

The Fit Principle is not designed to present another ideal. The intention is rather to come as close as possible – without an overarching metaphysical or theoretical structure – to the unique nature of the human being. The principle is based on the following basic assumption, which is taken from human evolutionary biology and which governs the everyday life of the individual:

Every human strives to bring his individual needs and talents into harmony with his environment. The more successful he is in this, the greater his wellbeing, sense of self-worth and self-efficacy.

Of course, even if we direct our efforts towards this aim day after day, we certainly don't always manage to achieve it. This is sometimes down to us, to our expectations and abilities,

and sometimes to the outward circumstances of our lives – and often to both. Again and again, we struggle back onto our feet and set ourselves new challenges, to give our lives direction and purpose again. And so over the course of our lives we get better at utilising our strengths and accepting our weaknesses. We become familiar with our needs and our potential for development, but also with our limitations, and in this way we come closer and closer to our essential self.

The Fit Principle is not about achieving as much as possible, striving for the highest social status or heaping up the most wealth. If humans could only be satisfied once they had reached the goal of the maximum that can be achieved, the overwhelming majority would descend into unhappiness. And that is by no means the case. Most people are satisfied if they can fulfil their individual needs sufficiently, and largely realise their talents.

Questions arising in relation to the Fit Principle:

- How can we achieve harmony with our environment? What must we contribute to this, and what does the environment have to contribute?
- How can we understand our needs, abilities and ideas well enough to recognise and accept our potential for development, but also our limitations?
- What are the characteristics of a Fit constellation? How does it affect our sense of wellbeing?
- How can we support others and help them to live in harmony with their environment?

Part IX: Misfit constellations

We don't always manage to live in harmony with our environment. Smaller "misfit" situations, which an individual is able to overcome without any great difficulty, are part of everyday life. They impair neither our physical nor our mental wellbeing. Rather, they are a constant incentive to examine the validity of our accustomed behaviour, ideas and ambitions, and adapt to changing circumstances. But if demands on us (at work, for example) go beyond a certain level, which differs from person to person, they create a misfit constellation with repercussions. This can make people feel helpless and powerless, and seem tense and anxious. They tend towards aggressive behaviour or social withdrawal. They suffer from psychosomatic disorders such as stomach complaints, and increase their consumption of addictive substances like alcohol or medication.

Misfit situations affect some people more than others, depending on which basic needs, competences and ideas are involved, the person's previous experience of misfit situations, and the stresses and strains of their current situation. For an older person, losing a job can lead to a genuine life crisis, complete with existential anxiety and a feeling of having been devalued, while the strain remains low for a young adult, who has alternative career paths open to him.

How do you deal with a misfit situation? There is a wealth of medical, psychological and esoteric treatment available for people suffering from any kind of misfit situation. The Fit

Principle doesn't focus on relieving symptoms like headaches or sleep disorders, but on tackling the misfit situation itself by making a thorough examination of a person's current circumstances. How much have I contributed to the current misfit situation, because, for example, I have been unable to use my competencies correctly at work? What has the environment contributed, for example by overwhelming me with complicated work? What misfit constellations have I already experienced, where did they come from and how did I deal with them?

Questions to be raised in Part IX:

- What do we mean by a "misfit"? How can a misfit arise? What are the causes behind it?
- How can we recognise a misfit situation? Which basic needs are we unable to fulfil? Where do our strengths and weaknesses lie? What expectations do we have of ourselves and the environment? And are they realistic?
- How can we help others who find themselves in a misfit situation?

Part X: Epilogue

From the Fit Principle perspective an ideal society, to some extent a paradise on earth, would be constituted so that all people could live in accordance with their own individuality. They would be able to satisfy their physical needs, and they would feel secure and provided for in their community. They would be able to develop their talents and achieve things that fulfilled them. They would feel existentially secure and not threatened in any way. And they would be able to live a life they themselves had determined in every respect.

The scientific, technological and economic progress of the past 200 years has made a significant contribution – even if this progress has not yet reached all countries of the world – to people's mental and physical wellbeing. In highly-developed countries, the health of the population is better than it has ever been, and life expectation has doubled. Most people have access to an advanced education system. In Europe material comfort and peace have reigned for 70 years, an unprecedented length of time. And yet a general sense of satisfaction has yet to be seen.

Progress may have improved our quality of life, but it has also had a hugely detrimental effect on the environment. From the perspective of the Fit concept, however, there are further serious problems, initially expressed in a general vague unease, which have as yet hardly impinged on human consciousness. Two examples follow here.

For 200,000 years humans were self-sufficient. They worked together in communities to subsist – often under the most difficult of circumstances – and to fight against existential threats. With the start of the industrial revolution, self-sufficiency began to decrease, and with it self-determination and self-reliance. Within 200 years, humans have departed from a way

of life they knew for 200,000 years, shaped by self-determination and self-reliance. Nowadays, people are largely dependent on the services of state and commercial institutions. They are increasingly under the impression that nobody can now see through these anonymous and often global monstrosities, with their extreme complexity and their lack of transparency. People feel alienated, and some are plagued by existential fears. Humans are deeply social creatures who rely on some form of communal life for their wellbeing, such as used to exist in small communities: stable relationships with trusted people and a culture that creates a sense of identity and common purpose. Within a few generations, communities of familiar faces have become societies with huge state and commercial institutions. Important basic needs are no longer fulfilled by humans, but by these anonymous institutions. Unlike our forebears, we are no longer forced to approach other people and construct a sustainable social network in order to survive. And so our relationships have become ever more superficial and noncommittal. Our emotional security is often only temporary. We are in constant competition with each other. We have to prove ourselves over and over as partners and workers, and we are always in danger of dropping out of all our relationships and becoming socially isolated. We lead our lives as though we could afford to forgo enduring and sustainable interpersonal relationships, as if our mental wellbeing was not reliant on these. But this attitude is increasingly proving to be a fallacy. Anonymous institutions can neither create trusted relationships, nor fulfil our basic social and emotional needs. Only humans are capable of this. It is high time we gave some serious thought to how we want to live together in future.

Questions we will address in Part X:

- Within state and commercial institutions, who is actually responsible for the mental and physical wellbeing of billions of people?
- How can quality of life be maintained when automation, robots and digitalisation are putting more and more people out of work?
- How must a society be constituted so that people are able to exercise their individuality, and yet social cohesion is protected?
- How can we reconcile diversity and individuality with values such as equality and fairness? In view of the great diversity among humans, is a fair society even possible?
- To what extent are people today shaped by the legacy of the past - for both good and ill? Are we as capable of adaptation as we need to be, meaning we are made for all kinds of environments, or do we really have to rethink the way we live? And are we even capable of this?

The diversity among living things, the unique nature of every living thing and its constant struggle with its environment, are some of the basic principles of evolution, and thus also of humanity and human nature. They are part of the *conditio humana*, which has found expression in religion, philosophy and art for millennia. In my clinical and scientific work, and of course in my own life, I have always been very moved by the efforts of individuals to bring their individuality into harmony with their environment. These experiences are at the root of this book.

