



# INTERPRETING GROWTH POTENTIAL IN THE HOROSCOPE



## What is this about?

Modern astrologers strive for a form of horoscope interpretation that goes beyond naming the tangible. The horoscope also shows human growth potential. It can be difficult for astrologers to see these potentials in the horoscope. In practice, I regularly see astrologers who are 'stuck' in certain images about a symbol, and these are by no means always positive or growth-oriented, for example: 'as a Virgo, you are very critical of yourself', 'as a Pisces, you tend not to face reality', et cetera.

In this article, I explore a soul-oriented perspective that can help astrologers focus on the growth potentials in astrological symbolism. It concerns Ken Wilber's theory about the stages of development in the soul.

## The idea of the soul

Wilber's theory is in line with classical ideas about the soul. To understand his theory properly, it is useful to explain some basic ideas from this classical body of thought. In these teachings, the soul is regarded as the connector between spiritual and material reality. These realities are considered to be opposites: spirit

is eternal, matter is temporary; spirit is light, matter is dark; spirit is active, matter is receptive/formative, etc. The fundamental opposition between spirit and matter means that the soul, as the link between these realities, has layers. In principle, the soul is seen as the vehicle of the spirit (sometimes called the divine spark), but in order to function in a body, the soul also has an aspect that can function on the material plane.

These parts of the soul are referred to in different ways. The part of the soul that works in matter is referred to as the lower, irrational or astral part of the soul. The spiritual core of the soul is referred to, for example, as the higher, rational or spiritual part of the soul. The lower part of the soul is bound to material reality (e.g. the person Ben Rovers) and to the laws that apply in this realm: the inevitable cycle of rising, shining and disappearing. The higher part of the soul transcends this reality. This part of the soul is impersonal and continues to exist even when, for example, the person Ben Rovers no longer exists.

The general idea is that the lower part of the soul in humans is the tool of the higher and impersonal part of the soul: by gaining experience in the material world, humans contribute to the growth of consciousness.

## Ken Wilber's theory on the development of the soul

This theory boils down to the idea that consciousness in humans develops from pre-personal to personal and from personal to transpersonal.

The pre-personal phase is characterised by the absence of self-awareness. There is no distinction between the self and the world. Basic physical and emotional needs are leading. Behaviour is instinctive, automatic and unconscious. The personal phase is characterised by the demarcation of an I-reality and the development of personal consciousness. The self defines itself (who am I?), has its own will, sets goals, has thoughts, beliefs and feelings, and can reflect (on itself). The self makes choices. The transpersonal phase is characterised by the opening of the soul to a higher, non-dual reality. The personal will is directed towards a higher will, thinking opens up to spiritual rather than material knowledge, the emotional life detaches itself from personal likes and dislikes and becomes more universal, and actions are directed towards higher goals than personal desires.

Wilber indicates that this development in people generally follows the course of life (from infant to adult to elderly). This does not mean that it is a clear-cut and/or linear process. The 'starting level' in the soul and the lessons that are relevant in this life can vary. Every baby that grows up and becomes an adult will develop personal consciousness to some extent, but the way in which this happens and the areas in which this consciousness develops form a highly personal path. Development in one area may be faster than in others. It is also possible that development in certain areas stagnates or that there is regression to earlier stages of consciousness, e.g. as a result of trauma. These processes can occur simultaneously and side by side. In Wilber's view, all experiences that people have, including those of stagnation and regression, serve the development of transpersonal consciousness.

Wilber's stages can be applied to every level of human functioning. The diagram shows some abstract examples of these stages in the development of the will, thinking, feeling and acting.

Stages of Soul Development (examples)			
	<i>Pre-personal</i>	<i>Personal</i>	<i>Trans-personal</i>
<b>Willpower</b>	Personal will has not developed  <i>(e.g.: to undergo fate)</i>	Manifestation of personal will  <i>(e.g.: I want)</i>	Personal will is serving a higher will  <i>(e.g.: "thy will be done")</i>
<b>Thinking</b>	Unconscious/ automatic mental activity  <i>(e.g.: learn to walk)</i>	Conscious mental activity/making choices, focusing on I  <i>(e.g.: choice for A or B)</i>	Personal conscious mental activity opens up to higher consciousness  <i>(e.g.: meditation, 'higher' knowing)</i>
<b>Feeling</b>	Unregulated and undifferentiated feeling  <i>(e.g.: repetitive pleasure seeking/pain avoidance)</i>	Mental and moral reflection on own feelings  <i>(e.g.: I learn from my feelings)</i>	Universal compassion and love, aimed at higher spiritual values  <i>(e.g.: compassion with everything)</i>
<b>Acting</b>	Acting is instinctive/ automatic  <i>(e.g.: eating and sleeping)</i>	Acting is guided by personal will  <i>(e.g.: shaping personal choices)</i>	Acting is guided by a higher will  <i>(e.g.: acting in service of a higher good or purpose)</i>

## The layered soul in chart interpretation

The idea of the soul as a layered reality is an important concept for astrologers. It is the lower soul (the personality) that shows itself in a horoscope: whether someone has Moon in Aries or Moon in Taurus makes quite a difference. And the cheerful Moon in Leo becomes a bit more serious due to the square aspect with Saturn. These are laws that cannot be escaped (call it fate!).

In the horoscope, we see the instrument that the higher soul uses in this life. However, how this (lower) part of the soul manifests itself in concrete terms and how it relates to the higher part of the soul cannot be deduced from the horoscope. In order to determine the process of consciousness development, astrologers will usually have to rely on information from the individual whose chart is being interpreted.

This means that an astrologer who wants to focus on growth potentials must be able to distil the individual's developmental tasks from the information in the horoscope and link these to the growth potentials of the soul that are revealed in astrological symbolism.

## Growth potential in astrological symbolism

From the way astrological symbolism manifests itself in a specific case, we can deduce how consciousness develops in and through the individual. Wilber's description of the three stages helps the astrologer to reveal the higher potentials.

Two examples are given below to illustrate this.

### The manifestation of Mars and Aries (Fire)

This symbolism concerns (among other things) the way in which the will is used. In the pre-personal stage, this use is unconscious, instinctive and primitive, primarily focused on survival. Biological impulses are

followed unfiltered. For example, the individual indicates that he or she is struggling with unfocused anger.

At this stage, it is important to allow someone to reflect on the manifestation of personal will. This involves matters such as defining one's own space, daring to take initiatives, standing up for one's own interests and the like. This reflection helps the person to develop personal awareness with regard to following their own passions. This creates space for considerations and choices.

For the spiritual seeker, the focus shifts from biological and personal motivations to responding to a higher will. Mars and Aries, for example, can fight for spiritual causes, but also learn to control their impulses and remain patient. Courage derived from a higher power is another example of a transpersonal expression of Mars/Aries. In general, the potential here lies in shifting the focus of the personal will: from a goal in itself to a means for a higher principle.

### The manifestation of Saturn and Capricorn (Earth)

This symbolism is (among other things) about the way in which earthly responsibilities are shaped. In the pre-personal stage of development there is unconscious identification with or rejection of responsibility. In the first case, the individual feels responsible for everything, is always working, the result is never good enough, and if it is not good enough, guilt follows, et cetera. In the second case, responsibility is unconsciously rejected. This can manifest itself in the form of external authorities that are perceived as an imposed restriction and whose authority is not accepted. Sometimes life itself is perceived as an imposed restriction.

At this stage, it is important for the astrologer to support the individual in gaining insight into how they deal with responsibilities in life. For some, this may mean putting personal responsibility into perspective, while for others it may mean 'getting to work'. Mental and emotional reflection on one's own responsibility enables the person to place the responsibilities they experience under the authority of their personal will and to ask themselves: what responsibilities can and do I want to bear in life?

For the spiritual seeker, the focus shifts from earthly responsibilities to spiritual responsibilities. The laws and rules of parents/group/work/state, etc. give way to insight into the laws of life itself. This usually means that strictness and striving give way to leniency and acceptance. In general, the potential here lies in passing on the spiritual lessons that the person has learned from life. The image of the old, wise teacher.

### Recognising stages of development in an astrological consultation

In order to offer a perspective on growth, it is important for the astrologer to recognise and distinguish between Wilber's stages of development in conversation with the individual. This is by no means an easy task.

Wilber talks, for example, about the 'pre/trans fallacy'. This refers to transpersonal experiences being mistakenly considered pre-personal, or vice versa. An example of the former is a spiritual experience in the spiritual world being mistaken for psychosis. An example of the latter is instinctive, unconscious behaviour being mistaken for enlightened wisdom or fantasy for spiritual insight.

An example of a 'pre-trans misconception': suppose someone with Mars/Aries does not follow their emerging impulses. On the one hand, this can happen on unconscious grounds (e.g. if there is fear), but it

can also be a conscious choice. It is important to investigate what is going on, because the individual may 'sell' avoiding anger, for example, as a conscious choice: 'I am above anger'.

People can conceal unconsciousness or feign consciousness. This sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish Wilber's stages. For example, someone may give an explanation afterwards for an unconscious action or receive a 'higher insight' which, on closer inspection, is still a product of human thinking. Or acting from a higher ideal may turn out to be primarily fulfilling a personal need.

In short, determining Wilber's stages of development can be a complicated task. There are no cookbook recipes available for this. Focus and practice help in making distinctions.

## Providing growth potential: how?

Perhaps the most important insight is that Wilber's model helps astrologers to keep their focus on development and growth.

An example: by examining how the caring function of Cancer manifests itself, it is possible to determine whether it is conscious, personal will-driven care or unconscious automatisms. If the latter is the case, the astrologer can support the individual in clarifying or strengthening their personal will, e.g. by providing insight into established patterns, offering alternatives and, more generally, making more conscious choices. For Cancer, this often involves realising healthy self-care. If the personal will can manifest itself, Cancer can grow towards a form of care that transcends personal needs, e.g. care based on universal compassion. The astrologer can support the individual in this process by providing insight into the personal (I-related) factors that may stand in the way of this desire. These can be deduced from horoscope factors.

An important insight that emerges from Wilber's theory is that the soul cannot develop without going through the personal phase. In other words, in order to transcend the self, it must first be formed, for the personality is an instrument of the higher soul principle. This means that conversations about spiritual growth often refer to quite earthly matters.

The astrologer naturally plays an important role in this process. In general, an astrologer who operates from a broader consciousness, will be able to offer a wider/higher perspective to the person whose chart is being interpreted. Conversely, unconscious content, unresolved personal 'issues' and the like prevent the astrologer from observing from a higher perspective. This is a plea for astrologers to practise a form of consciousness development throughout their lives. At the same time, it is also an acknowledgement of the inevitable fallibility of astrological work.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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