

WIP: Walter Hilton and Intention in Ascent

Abstract

Intention can be understood as an aim, a commitment to realising a certain action or goal. In Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection*, intention is the most important prerequisite for contemplation, encapsulating one's desire for God, the stretching (Latin 'intendere') of one's soul wholly to Him. As Clark (1979) identifies, it is an intention that must be constant, even if intermittently sub-conscious – a 'virtual intention' that exists because of prior willing or desire, but is not always actively performed – and, within the *Scale*, is presented as the fundamental orientation of the heart. Though attaining contemplation and being granted co-presence with God depends on divine grace, it would be impossible without the heart being turned to Him, or without the contemplative desiring this with a 'hool entent'. As it is the main factor the contemplative has any influence over in their journey to union, one of Hilton's major preoccupations is sincerity, or the extent to which one's actions are aligned with their intentions, and whether the words in the mouth correspond to the words in the heart. The scepticism towards language is a feature of apophatic literature, with *The Cloud of Unknowing* notably emphasising the importance of meaning over speech, or content over form. Like the *Cloud*-author, Hilton is conscious of the limits of language in conveying meaning but envisages the contemplative state as one that restores this severed link.