

Turn your gaze upward! emotions, concerns, and regulatory strategies in Kierkegaard's *Christian Discourses*

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Abstract This essay argues that there are concrete emotion regulation practices described, but not developed, in Kierkegaard's *Christian Discourses*. These practices—such as attentiveness to emotion, attentional deployment, and cognitive reappraisal—help the reader to regulate her emotions, to get rid of negative, unwanted emotions such as worry, and to cultivate and nourish positive emotions such as faith, gratitude, and trust. An examination of the *Discourses* also expose Kierkegaard's understanding of the emotions; his view is akin to a perceptual theory of the emotions that closely connects emotions and concerns. In particular, this analysis unearths two main regulatory strategies located in the *Discourses*, strategies that closely resemble present-day psychological accounts of emotion regulation. I conclude that contemporary research reinforces Kierkegaard's philosophical analysis of emotions and emotion-regulation strategies. Drawing on this research provides the most persuasive interpretation of Kierkegaard's understanding of the emotions and emotion-regulation strategies. Additionally, present-day research clarifies the otherwise elusive, opaque strategies he describes. Finally, my analysis demonstrates that Kierkegaard's work can uniquely contribute to the present-day psychological research by emphasizing the need for diachronic regulation strategies, while the contemporary literature overwhelmingly focuses on synchronic strategies.

Keywords Kierkegaard · *Christian Discourses* · Emotions · Moral psychology · Emotion regulation

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Introduction

Beginning in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the realization of Anscombe's call to undergird ethical theory with a robust empirical moral psychology began in earnest (Anscombe 1958). An important part of this psychological turn was investigating the nature of emotions and their ethical significance. Although Aristotle is perhaps the primary historical inspiration for this turn to the emotions, Kierkegaard has also motivated many scholars to examine the concept of emotions and their role in the ethical life.¹ While Robert C. Roberts, Rick Furtek, and Merold Westphal are among those Kierkegaardians who argue that Kierkegaard holds something akin to a perceptual theory of the emotions, some others have challenged this claim (Welz 2007). This essay contributes to the debate over Kierkegaard's understanding of emotions by exegeting the 1848 *Christian Discourses* and drawing on contemporary experimental psychology to show that Kierkegaard views emotions as akin to perceptions and offers his reader concrete emotion regulation strategies.

In the *Discourses* Kierkegaard urges his reader to see the world like a Christian does, that is, to see 'with the eyes of faith' (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 40). The discussion of the cares of the pagan and the cares of the Christian make it clear that one of the main results of seeing with the eyes of faith is freedom from certain negative emotions and the experience of positive emotions. But how does this transformation occur in the Christian's life? I want to suggest that the *Discourses* contain specific strategies the aspiring Christian can employ to cultivate the emotions intimately related to faith. Though not explicitly named, practices such as attentiveness to emotion, attentional deployment, and cognitive reappraisal are evident in the *Discourses*. These practices help the reader to regulate her emotions, to get rid of negative, unwanted emotions such as worry, fear, and distress, and to cultivate and nourish positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, and trust. These emotions are crucial aspects of passionate faith.

The reader should note that I am not making the strong claim that equates faith (or other spiritual qualities such as hope or love) with emotion. This strong claim is difficult to reconcile with evidence from the Kierkegaardian corpus. For instance, in *Works of Love*, love is not merely an internal mental state or quality but also an 'active work' (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 301). As Claudia Welz puts the point, 'love is not just a habit but "is" only in its being done. It is not just the capability to act but that very action itself' (Welz 2007, p. 270). Spiritual qualities like faith and love are continually being attained and renewed for Kierkegaard, and beliefs and actions are also constituent parts of these qualities. Kierkegaard does not reduce faith to an emotion. Rather, his writings make clear that emotions are one *constituent* part of faith along with other aspects such as belief and action. The Christian who 'sees

¹ Roberts's (1984) essay "Passion and Reflection" was one of the first to examine the role of emotions in Kierkegaard's ethical thought, but this essay will also discuss several others who have continued the trend. While Roberts tends to read Kierkegaard as a virtue ethicist, I will eschew that debate here. My intention is to contribute to the discussion concerning the role that emotions play in the ethical life, not to make a case for reading Kierkegaard as a virtue ethicist. I will leave the reader to decide whether or not my interpretation contributes to the debate over whether Kierkegaard should be read as a virtue ethicist.

with the eyes of faith' will have different beliefs from the pagan, and will perform different actions than the pagan. But the Christian will also have different emotional reactions to similar situations, emotions that reveal the Christian's concerns and commitments. Therefore, I am supporting the weaker claim, namely, that emotions are a constituent part of faith.

In this essay I explore Kierkegaard's understanding of the relationship between cares or concerns and emotions, and his strategies for cultivating the emotions related to Christian faith. I proceed as follows. First, drawing on several of Kierkegaard's signed and pseudonymous writings, I briefly review Kierkegaard's understanding of the emotions, arguing that his view is akin to a perceptual theory of the emotions and that he closely connects emotions and concerns. Second, I analyze the first two parts of the 'The Cares of the Pagans' from *Christian Discourses*. This analysis shows that the *Discourses* exemplifies Kierkegaard's perceptual understanding of the emotions. I then argue that there are two main regulatory strategies located in the *Discourses*, and I compare these to present-day psychological accounts of emotion regulation.² I conclude that contemporary research reinforces Kierkegaard's philosophical analysis of emotions and emotion-regulation strategies. Contemporary psychological studies validate Kierkegaard's claims about the nature of emotions, and the need for, and soundness of, his emotion-regulation strategies. Drawing on this research provides the most persuasive interpretation of Kierkegaard's understanding of the emotions and emotion-regulation strategies. Furthermore, present-day research clarifies the otherwise elusive, opaque strategies he describes. Finally, my analysis demonstrates that Kierkegaard's work can uniquely contribute to the present-day psychological research by emphasizing the need for *diachronic* regulation strategies, while the contemporary literature overwhelmingly focuses on *synchronic* strategies.

The perceptual model of the emotions

Part one of the *Christian Discourses*, entitled 'The Cares of the Pagans', is 'a sustained meditation on the Gospel for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity in the lectionary of the Danish service book. It is from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6: 24–34' (Westphal 2007, p. 21). Kierkegaard begins by stating that the *bekymringer* (worries) that people have tell us whether they are Christians or pagans. He compares the *bekymringer*—the Danish term most often translated as *worries*, although Pattison points out that it should sometimes be translated as *cares*³—of the bird and the lily with the *bekymringer* of the pagan. Kierkegaard explains, 'Thus with the help of the lily and the bird we get to know the pagan's cares, what they are, namely, those that the bird and the lily do not have, although they do have the comparable necessities' (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 11). The pagan has whatever cares or worries the bird lacks. Kierkegaard notes that we could travel to a

² E.g., Gross (2002, pp. 281–291), Beauregard (2007, pp. 218–236) and Feinberg et al. (2012, pp. 788–795).

³ Pattison (2010), cited in Krishek and Furtak (2012, p. 160).

distant pagan country and simply observe how they live their lives and see what cares they have, and we would expect those cares to be the cares the bird lacks. That said, he offers a simpler way: we can look at the people in Christian Denmark and see the kinds of cares *they* have. If the cares that the bird and the lily do *not* have exist among the people of Christian Denmark, then those Christians are actually pagan. Kierkegaard then takes that approach.

The first two sections of ‘The Cares of the Pagans’—‘The Care of Poverty’ and ‘The Care of Abundance’—reveal two important aspects related to *bekymringer*. First, *bekymring* sometimes refers to an emotion—worry. Second, *bekymring* sometimes refers to a care—a deeper concern or commitment. This dual usage suggests a connection between emotions and concerns: emotions are based on concerns and reveal important aspects of a person’s character. One finds this view of the emotions to be a common theme in Kierkegaard’s signed and pseudonymous works. (Although Kierkegaard never explicitly or systematically explains emotions, one can distill such explanations from his writings.) For instance, in the *Postscript*, the pseudonym Climacus uses two different senses of the Danish word *lidenskab* (passion). Roberts notes that *Lidenskab* can refer to ‘the kind of state that we usually call emotion—a response to particular features (as the subject sees it) of the subject’s world’, but can also refer to ‘the concern on which such responses are contingent’ (Roberts 1998, p. 187). Put differently, Kierkegaard understands that ‘passions can be both long term dispositions and occurrent states’ (Lillegard 2002, p. 256). Westphal (2014) understands passions as ‘what matters to us, what is important to us, what we care about deeply enough to be part of our identity’ (p. 106). Roberts, Lillegard, and Westphal agree that Kierkegaard’s primary understanding of passion is that it is a deep, enthusiastic commitment to something the agent cares about, whether that be God or NASCAR. When Climacus (Kierkegaard 2009a, b, p. 29) refers to one’s ‘infinitely, personally interested passion for one’s eternal happiness’, his statement indicates passion as care or concern.

Climacus also uses *lidenskab* to refer to emotions. He says that the orator ‘has much understanding of human passion, the power of imaginative description and command over the resources of fear for use in the decisive moment’ (Kierkegaard 2009a, b, p. 14). This passage brings up two important points. First, the orator understands passion because he knows how to induce fear in his listener. Passions are commitments or concerns, but they are also emotions such as fear. This same insight appears later in the *Postscript* when Climacus talks about bringing a man into a state of passion which refers to giving him an emotion that he cannot have unless he experiences passion in the sense of sustained interest (Kierkegaard 1992, p. 276).⁴ Second, the orator can create a passionate response of fear in his listener through ‘the power of imaginative description’. Changing how a person *thinks* about something can also change the way they *feel*. Speaking specifically of religious emotion, Kierkegaard notes that ‘... not every outpouring of religious emotion is a Christian outpouring... (rather) emotion which is Christian is checked by the definition of concepts’ (Kierkegaard 1955, p. 163).⁵ This connection between

⁴ Cited in Roberts (1984, p. 89).

⁵ Cited in Roberts (1984, p. 91).

emotion and concept suggests that ‘emotions always involve some assessment of one’s situation’ (Roberts 1984, p. 90). When the agent’s assessment changes, the emotion often follows suit. In this way, Kierkegaard indicates that emotions resemble perceptions. Just as beliefs can color our visual or aural perceptions, so beliefs also affect our *emotional* perceptions. For Kierkegaard, emotions are ‘perceptions of significance’, perceptions informed or colored by beliefs and concerns (Furtak 2005, p. 4).⁶

To say that emotions are like perceptions is to make several related claims. First, emotions are like sense perceptions in that they are both representative states. As Michael Brady comments, ‘a perceptual experience is a conscious mental state with intentional or representational content. To say that experiences have representational content is to say that they inform us or tell us about something’ (Brady 2011, p. 136). Therefore, perceptually, emotions are intentional mental states directed at objects or events in the world. Second, emotions generally involve ‘an evaluation or an appraisal of the relevant target’ (Brady 2011 p. 136). Fear generally involves the appraisal of an object as threatening the appraising individual or something the individual cares about. This example of fear shows that emotions are *impressions* and that the individual helps construe the object to experience it as fearful.

Furthermore, to say that emotions are akin to perceptions indicates that emotions ‘involve some kind of experiential presentation to the subject’ (Roberts 2007, p. 23). A famous example is an optical illusion like Wittgenstein’s duck–rabbit, which one can see in two different ways.⁷ The object presents itself to the subject, but the subject focuses on certain aspects of the object and thereby interprets the image through a certain preperceptual schema, namely, that of a duck or of a rabbit. Emotions are a kind of preperceptual schema that narrow the agent’s perception to certain ‘fields of experience’:⁸ if a person is angry, she is more likely to notice behavior that makes her angry and ignore behavior that doesn’t. As Lillegard states when exegeting Kierkegaard, ‘without passions nothing stands out, nothing is salient’ (Lillegard 2002, p. 253).⁹ He goes on to say that passions ‘screen out or limit the range of our attention, in a way analogous to the screening performed by physiological constraints in perception’ (Lillegard 2002, p. 253). Both the schema the individual brings to the experience and the aspects of the experience the individual focuses on affect the emotion she experiences. Insofar as individuals can control their schema and focus, they can control the subsequent emotion.¹⁰

Thus far, I have characterized emotions as related to deeper concerns or commitments and as akin to perceptions. The analogy with perceptions is important for one other reason. Although emotions are related to deeper concerns and therefore beliefs about the self or the world, emotions are not—*passé* Nussbaum—

⁶ For further support that Kierkegaard has something like a perceptual view of emotions, see Westphal (2011), West (2013, pp. 565–587) and Tietjen (2010, pp. 153–173).

⁷ See Roberts (2003, pp. 70–71).

⁸ Jones (1996, p. 11), cited in McLeod (2015).

⁹ In this sentence, Lillegard is adopting the older usage of passion as emotion.

¹⁰ For a related argument about how the agent’s subjective construal influences how the agent interprets and affectively responds to external (and internal) stimuli, see Snow (2010).

judgments.¹¹ Kierkegaard clearly understands this point, as we will see with the Christian who can hold certain beliefs yet have contradictory emotional perceptions of her situation. To better understand this distinction between emotions and judgments, consider an optical illusion such as a straight stick submerged in water or a highway mirage. In both cases, most adults *know* that the straight stick is not actually crooked and that there is no water on the highway. In other words, the mental assent or judgment is to a proposition that directly contradicts the perception, yet the perception remains. Emotions also can sometimes happen despite the contradictory judgment, as in the case of phobias. Someone with a snake phobia can know—even be *convinced*—that garter snakes are nonthreatening, yet still experience paralyzing fear at the sight of garter snakes. The individual experiences the snakes as threatening the individual’s life even though she knows that is false.¹² Finally, consider the example of obsessive–compulsive disorder (OCD). A person with OCD may assent to the proposition that his hands are not dirty, because he knows that he just washed them. However, he has the strong *impression* that they are filthy and must be washed. In cases of phobia and OCD, one does not need to assent to a different judgment (as that already may be the cause), but rather engage in extended cognitive-behavioral therapy. (I return to this point in the final section.)

In sum, emotions are like perceptions in four important ways. Emotions represent mental states with intentional content. They usually include an evaluative element (thus revealing deeper concerns). Emotions are impressions generated from the individual’s construal of the object, and they can sometimes directly contradict explicit mental assent to contrasting propositions.

At this point the reader might raise an objection to the perceptual interpretation of emotions and the concern-emotion connection. For instance, Welz argues that ‘the distinction between love as an emotion and an underlying concern seems to be read into Kierkegaard’s texts rather than derived from them’ (2007, p. 265). Note that I am not focusing primarily on love, but rather on the passion of faith, the cares and concerns that a person of faith has, and the emotions that will stem from that faith. Furthermore, the next section contains a close reading of Kierkegaard’s *Discourses*, demonstrating that I am not reading the concern-emotion connection into Kierkegaard, but rather deriving it from his writings.

¹¹ This is also where I disagree with certain aspects of Westphal 2011. Westphal draws too heavily on Nussbaum’s (1994) neo-Stoic account even as he tries to distinguish Kierkegaard’s account of passions from the Stoic’s. The main aspect that makes Westphal’s account neo-Stoic is his claim that every emotion ‘has the form of a judgment, an evaluative judgment’ (Westphal 2011, p. 90). Since there are clearly examples where the emotion directly contradicts the agent’s evaluative judgment, emotions do not always take the form of evaluative judgments; rather, emotions are affective perceptions that, like other perceptions, have representative content about the world. However, the agent need not *assent* to the content of that representation. As Roberts states in response to Nussbaum, ‘The reaction of the snake-phobic to a closely presented four-footed bullsnake that he judges to be harmless on the basis of careful consideration of the evidence is not a mere bodily movement but a full-fledged emotion. And what makes it such is that *the snake looks threatening to him despite his present judgment to the contrary*’ (Roberts 2003, p. 91; my emphasis). In Westphal 2014, he changes his mind and concludes that Roberts is correct: ‘while they (emotions) are intimately related to one’s beliefs, they are best thought of themselves as more like perceptions than beliefs or judgments’ (p. 115).

¹² See Roberts (2003, p. 90).

Another objection Welz raised against the emotion-concern connection is that she seems to think that its conceptually tied to virtue theory, and she is skeptical that Kierkegaard is a virtue theorist. However, the concern-emotion connection is conceptually disentangleable from virtue theory. Westphal—who distinguishes passions from emotions yet admits their close connection¹³—cites Harry Frankfurt’s concept of care as having significant overlap with Kierkegaard’s understanding of passion (2014, pp. 106–108). For Frankfurt, the agent’s ‘cares’ are the source of her practical normativity (Frankfurt and Satz 2006, pp. 27–33). However, note that Frankfurt is certainly no virtue theorist. Cares do not have to be stable, enduring character traits. They simply represent the things that are most important to the agent and that will generate occurrent mental states. There is no necessary, conceptual tie between the concern-emotion connection and virtue theory. Welz seems to admit that one can conceptually disentangle the two claims, as one of her conclusions is, ‘The structure of compassionate love as Kierkegaard describes it comes indeed very close to Roberts’ and Furtak’s descriptions of emotions as ‘concern-based construals’ or intentional ‘perceptions of significance’ (2007, p. 275). I now turn to Kierkegaard’s *Discourses* to provide further support of the concern-emotion connection and to unearth concrete examples of the four ways that emotions are like perceptions for Kierkegaard.

Emotions as perceptions in *Christian Discourses*

The *Discourses* contain rich descriptions of emotions, the various forms they can take, their sources, and the connection between emotions and concerns. In the *Discourses*, Kierkegaard contrasts the cares or worries of the bird with the cares of the pagan and the Christian. Recall that his basic thesis is that we can discern people’s *characters*—whether they are Christians or pagans—by closely examining their *cares*.¹⁴ This possibility arises because cares as worries rest on, or stem from, cares as concerns. Westphal notes that Walter Lowrie translated *bekymringer* as worries, indicating Kierkegaard’s reference to ‘those things that matter to us because they disturb our peace of mind’ (2014, p. 118).¹⁵ In his examinations of cares and worries, Kierkegaard first considers the bird. In Matthew, Jesus says that the bird is provided for and implies that the bird does not worry as people do. Why is the bird worry-free? Because it is not *concerned*. Kierkegaard stresses that this lack of concern is despite the bird’s actual economic situation. The bird *is* poor after

¹³ Westphal summarizes his position as follows: ‘So I have distinguished passion, as the disposition to have various emotions relative to what we care about, from emotions, as the occurrent, episodic, affective manifestation of some passion. I have emphasized the cognitive character of emotions in three ways: (1) they tend to be changeable in response to changed beliefs and for this reason susceptible to rational critique; (2) they are intentional, “of” or “about” some object of which they are an interpretation, a construal, a seeing-as; and (3) while they are intimately related to one’s beliefs, they are best thought of themselves as more like perceptions than beliefs or judgments’ (2014, p. 115).

¹⁴ Westphal notes that the ‘Christian’ and the ‘pagan’ are more nearly *Wesensschau*, descriptions of essential characteristics, platonic forms, as it were’ (Westphal 2007, p. 22).

¹⁵ Westphal notes that ‘passions are not so much emotions but dispositions to have emotions’ (2014, p. 108).

all; the bird has no food stored away for tomorrow and so quite literally does not know where its next meal will come from. Kierkegaard calls poverty its ‘external condition’ (1997, p. 14). Crucial to Kierkegaard’s point, the bird does not let its situation affect its self-image: *the bird does not see itself as poor*. The bird does not let its situation affect its self-image because, despite its external condition, the bird is not *concerned* about its lack of a storehouse filled with food. But the bird’s *perception* is easy; it comes naturally since the bird lacks the notion of temporality and the future-orientation that people have.

Kierkegaard then compares the bird to the Christian and the pagan. How does one tell the Christian and the pagan apart? After all, Kierkegaard states that regarding their economic situation, the Christian and the pagan both look the same. Their situation is material destitution. Their house, clothes, and daily provisions are alike. Kierkegaard argues that one sees the difference in their mental attitudes, specifically, in emotions such as worry. The Christian is more like the bird than the pagan, because the Christian lacks any worry about her condition. Kierkegaard states, ‘if one in poverty is without the care of poverty, one is poor and yet not poor, and then if one is not a bird but is a human being and yet like the bird, then one is a Christian’ (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 14). A Christian does not worry about her poverty *despite* her poverty. Kierkegaard clarifies that the Christian’s lack of worry is due to the Christian’s belief that God will provide her daily bread just as God provides for the bird. He states, ‘The poor Christian’s wealth is precisely to exist for the God who certainly did not once and for all give him earthly wealth—oh no, who every day gives him the daily bread. Every day! Yes, every day the poor Christian has occasion to become aware of his benefactor, to pray and to give thanks’ (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 16). The Christian knows that her social situation is poverty, but her belief that God will provide alleviates any *worry* about that poverty.

Those passages reveal Kierkegaard’s belief that emotions are connected to deeper beliefs and concerns. The Christian thinks about her welfare just like any human being, only with an important difference. She *believes* that God will provide for her and firmly *commits* to this belief. Because she firmly commits to the belief in God’s provision, she experiences none of the pagan’s worries, but instead experiences trust and gratitude. One may respond, how does one get firmly entrenched beliefs? To put the point slightly differently, what prevents the Christian from simply being like a phobic, who believes that God will provide yet still worries about tomorrow? I return to this point below when I discuss emotion-regulation strategies.

The poor pagan, by contrast, has both the external condition of poverty and the *worry* about that poverty. The pagan continually feels anxious over the source of his next meal. Therefore, the pagan continually *focuses* on what he lacks: his worry results in a different construal of his situation. Indeed, his words reveal his focus: ‘he has and knows really nothing else to talk about other than poverty and its care’ (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 18). The pagan’s worries thus also suggest deeper concerns or commitments. The pagan does not *believe* in an omnibenevolent power that provides him with daily bread—he believes he either must provide for himself or starve. The beliefs and concerns that orient his life result in certain kinds of desires and worries. Kierkegaard states, ‘he becomes significant to himself by means of the thought that he is exclusively occupying himself with this life-question’, namely,

what provision do I have for tomorrow? (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 18). The pagan's emotions, desires, and language reveal his fundamental concern with provision. Therefore, the Christian and the pagan see the same situation differently, partly because they bring different conceptual schemas to the situation. One schema postulates trust in God's provision, and the other premises individual responsibility apart from divine help.

Kierkegaard's comments about the cares of abundance reinforce his analysis of the cares of poverty. The bird is the richest creature of all: it has the entire world at its disposal. Yet the bird does not *know* it is rich. There are rich Christians and rich pagans. The difference is found in their concern-based emotions. The bird has no worries, because it has no knowledge or concern about its future. The pagan has the care of abundance, because 'the rich pagan has knowledge about his wealth and abundance, and with increased knowledge comes increased care' (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 34). What is this knowledge of? That a human being can never have enough material wealth to be truly satisfied and secure: 'Just as there has never lived a bird that has ever taken more than *enough*, so there has never lived a rich pagan who has obtained *enough*. No, there is no hunger as insatiable as abundance's unnatural hunger, no knowledge so insatiable as the defiling knowledge about wealth and abundance' (Kierkegaard 1997, pp. 34–35). The knowledge that no amount of wealth ever yields true security generates the *concern* to accumulate wealth continually, and this concern generates the *emotion* of worry.

There is one way that Kierkegaard's analysis of the care of abundance goes beyond his analysis of the care of poverty. He states that it is more difficult to overcome the care of abundance than the care of poverty. The bird is naturally ignorant of both and therefore has neither care. The human is aware of both poverty and abundance and therefore must *achieve* her standpoint of not worrying about her condition. However, the rich Christian finds it more difficult to achieve ignorance about her wealth than about her poverty. Accumulating wealth becomes an all-consuming desire for the rich pagan; it becomes all he thinks about and all he talks about. He continually frets over the possibility of not maintaining his wealth in the future. He focuses all his attention on fulfilling this desire, which he never quenches. Therefore, the rich Christian finds it hard to become ignorant of this desire. However, Kierkegaard provides strategies for this goal, which I turn to in the next section.

Emotion-regulation strategies in the *Christian Discourses*

Having unpacked Kierkegaard's implicit perceptual theory of the emotions and his comparison of the cares of the bird, the pagan, and the Christian, I now turn to the practices Kierkegaard describes for how to assuage worry and foster trust and gratitude. It should be reiterated that Kierkegaard is not *anti-emotion*; rather, he wants his reader to experience the positive emotions that stem from, and reinforce, passionate faith. Furthermore, Kierkegaard is not recommending that his reader become detached from this world and its cares. Rather, Krishek and Furtak are surely correct when they note that Kierkegaard's 'discourses offer us a way of

becoming well-disposed toward all that matters to us within this realm: and renouncing our claim on contingent reality is not the same as detaching ourselves from caring about it altogether' (Krishek and Furtak 2012, p. 171). Living a life filled with joy, trust, and gratitude, requires regulating the negative emotions that stem from existential insecurity. The following section describes these regulatory practices and the contemporary research that supports them.

The first emotion-regulation strategy Kierkegaard provides is a technique for becoming aware of one's emotions and concerns, which I call 'attentiveness to emotion' (AE).¹⁶ Kierkegaard teaches his reader to pay attention to her emotions and furthermore teaches her that *her emotions reveal her concerns*. This lesson causes her to realize how she has come to construe the world in pagan terms and teaches her to pay attention to her emotions. Emotions that reveal pagan concerns bring the Christian anger or sadness. Ideally, this anger or sadness motivates her to change. However, those emotions give her no concrete strategies for transforming her concerns. Therefore, AE is an important start to transforming one's cares through emotion regulation, but it may not help much. To the contrary, AE may engender a meta-anxiety over one's attachments or cause one simply to resign herself to those attachments.¹⁷ It may lead to what psychologists call 'cognitive dissonance', which occurs when an individual realizes that she holds two contradictory beliefs, caused by the misalignment of some of the individual's own views with some of her other views (Ross and Nisbett 2011, pp. 45–46).¹⁸ Therefore, AE is only the first step in transforming one's concerns.

Kierkegaard hints at several constructive regulation strategies that help the individual maintain her Christian commitments in a pagan society, such as seeing oneself as a traveler, remembering one's death, and focusing on the eternal. Regrettably, Kierkegaard only vaguely describes those strategies. In order better to make sense of the strategies, then, it helps to refer to some salient findings from contemporary psychology. Those contemporary emotion-regulation strategies are more systematic than Kierkegaard's and validate their efficacy through laboratory studies.

For example, psychologist James J. Gross and colleagues have completed a series of experiments that focus on different cognitive strategies that humans can engage in to influence what emotions they have, how they express them, and what behaviors follow from them.¹⁹ They state, 'specific emotion regulation strategies can be differentiated along the timeline of the unfolding emotional response' (Gross and John 2003, p. 348). Gross identifies five different points in the emotion generation sequence—situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment,

¹⁶ Commenting on similar passages, Westphal notes that the Christian's different orientation 'is a matter of attention or attentiveness'. However, he does go into much detail concerning how this attentiveness helps the Christian regulate her emotions (Westphal 2007, p. 28).

¹⁷ I am grateful to Robert C. Roberts for this pushing me to make this point.

¹⁸ Note the similarities between cognitive dissonance and the experience of the phobic or OCD victim. In both cases, the agent experiences contradictory mental attitudes.

¹⁹ The reader should note that these experiments on emotion regulation are not "one-off" studies. The evidence is well-documented and robust. For instance, see Gross (2007). *Handbook of emotion regulation*. New York: Guilford Press. For a related overview, see (Beauregard 2007).

cognitive change or reappraisal, and response modification. Four of these strategies are *antecedent focused*—they take place *before* the emotion has been generated. One strategy is *response focused*—it takes place *after* the emotion is generated. The main response-focused strategy is expressive suppression, which involves inhibiting ongoing emotion-expressive behavior. When we think of emotions as negative experiences that we must control or eradicate, we can use this strategy to that end. Since Kierkegaard's strategy is to replace negative emotions with positive ones—in other words, to stop the negative emotion before it starts—it follows in my reading that he generally forgoes response-based strategies.²⁰

Two antecedent-focused strategies bear striking similarities to strategies Kierkegaard describes in the *Discourses* and therefore help make sense of his suggestions. The first strategy is *attentional deployment*. The idea is simple. An individual in a certain situation, allowing the situation to play out, can focus her attention on various aspects of the situation (Gross 2002, p. 283). Some of those aspects increase her emotion, while others decrease it. For instance, she may go to dinner with a friend, only to have an uncomfortable conversation. Once there, recognizing that she cannot handle the emotional impact of the conversation, she counts ceiling tiles instead of listening intently. On the other hand, she may feel that listening intently and experiencing the full range of emotion helps her better understand the situation. Therefore, she listens. Both are instances of attentional deployment. Notice the similarities to the account of emotions given above. Emotions happen when representational content makes a certain impression on the agent, an impression that narrows the agent's perception to certain 'fields of experience'. By intentionally focusing on different aspects of the situation, the impression changes and so does the emotion.

The second strategy is *cognitive reappraisal*. After choosing to focus on one aspect of the situation, the agent can assign various meanings to that aspect, variously construing the situation. She can view an exam as merely a test, rather than as a measure of her value as a human being. Or she can construe a job interview as a way to get to know a potential employer and have an interesting conversation about a new field, rather than as a personal interrogation with life-altering consequences. Again, individuals often use cognitive reappraisal to decrease emotional experience, but can also use it to enhance emotional experience or to experience what is deemed as the proper or beneficial emotional experience. To use the previous example, one can construe the difficult conversation with a friend as an opportunity to deepen a friendship, rather than as uncomfortable or threatening. One might even view the discomfort as necessary for forming a deeper bond.²¹ Those strategies would offer ways to experience the emotion, but redirect it positively by construing the situation differently. Notice that cognitive reappraisal has similarities to the account of emotions given in part two. Just as a person can bring a different

²⁰ This initially may strike us as counterintuitive, since Kierkegaard seems to assume that most of his readers are currently experiencing negative emotions such as worry. However, the strategies that Kierkegaard describes are not strategies for stopping already occurring emotions (response focused), but rather for generating different kinds of emotions. Antecedent-focused strategies do precisely this—regulate the kinds of emotions the agent experiences.

²¹ I am grateful to Jessy E. G. Jordan for this suggestion.

preperceptual schema to the representational content—such as in the case of Wittgenstein’s duck–rabbit—thus construing the representational content differently, so too a person can ‘view’ emotional-eliciting situations through different schemas, thus altering the resulting emotion.

Kierkegaard employs something similar to both strategies in the *Discourses*. Consider the poor yet not poor Christian. Recall that the bird’s perception of its situation is natural: it is unaware of poverty as a concern. However, the Christian is aware of her external condition: the world never lets her fully forget it. Therefore, she must first focus her attention on different aspects of her situation, thus employing the strategy of attentional deployment. Kierkegaard asks, ‘But then is the poor Christian indeed rich? Yes, he certainly is rich, and in fact you will *recognize* him by this; he does not want to *speak* about his earthly poverty but rather his heavenly wealth’ (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 17). This statement indicates that the Christian can pay attention to one of two different aspects of the situation of being materially poor: based on the earthly aspect, the Christian really is materially poor. However, based on the heavenly or eternal aspect, the Christian is rich. God provides enough every day. Therefore, I argue that the Christian intuitively practices something like attentional deployment through *language*: the Christian *speaks* about her heavenly wealth, not her earthly poverty, thus *focusing* her attention on one aspect of the situation. Just as the viewer of the duck–rabbit focuses on different aspects when wishing to see a duck rather than a rabbit, so the Christian speaks—and thus focuses on—her heavenly wealth in order to experience the emotion of gratitude rather than the emotion of worry. As West notes, ‘This redirected, concerned attention is also the key to the rich Christian’s freedom from the care of abundance’ (West 2013, p. 577).

The opposite happens with the pagan. One difference is that there is no other aspect of the situation to focus on, since he is ‘without God in the world’ (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 18). Kierkegaard writes, ‘He is not silent like the carefree bird; he does not *speak* like a Christian, who speaks of his riches; *he has and knows really nothing else to talk about than poverty and its care*’ (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 19). The pagan *should* have the care of poverty, since he has no other situational aspect on which to focus his attention. Let me note here that Kierkegaard is of course aware that some pagans—namely, Socrates—can focus on other aspects of the situation, specifically, the eternal.²² We might extend this claim to include other ancient philosophical thinkers and schools as well. Certainly, the Stoics adeptly focus on other aspects of the situation.²³ However, note first that Kierkegaard thinks Socrates is unique among the pagans precisely for his passion for the eternal. Therefore, he may not think that this perspective is open to most pagans. Second,

²² I am grateful to Jessy E. G. Jordan for pushing me to clarify this point.

²³ Rick Furtak fruitfully compares Kierkegaard’s view of emotions with the Stoic view and argues that both Kierkegaard and the Stoics understand that emotions are perceptions of significance. However, for the Stoics, ‘since nothing outside of oneself is truly of value, emotions are false perceptions of significance that does not exist’ (Furtak 2005, p. 24). Furtak rightly argues that Kierkegaard does not hold this negative view of emotion. Passion for him is essential to a fully human life, which is why he offers strategies to improve or regulate emotions, not eradicate them. In this way, Kierkegaard’s theory offers a redemption of feeling.

Kierkegaard thinks that the age of passion has come and gone and that modern Europe has entered the age of reflection, and no member of the crowd is passionate about eternal things.²⁴ Therefore, he thinks only one perspective is open to most modern ‘pagans’. However, since the Christian does have another, more important aspect to focus on, she should not have this care.

Perhaps the clearest statement of attentional deployment in the *Discourses* comes at the end of ‘The Care of Poverty’:

To be without care—indeed, it is a difficult walk, almost like walking on water, but if you are able to have faith, then it can be done. In connection with all danger, the main thing is to be able to *get away from the thought of it*. Now, you cannot get away from poverty, *but you can get away from the thought of it by continually thinking about God*: this is how the Christian walks *his* course. *He turns his gaze upward* and looks away from the danger; in his poverty, he is without the care of poverty (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 21).²⁵

The preceding passage makes several important points. First, unlike the previous quote about Christian speech, here Kierkegaard recognizes that even a Christian with the proper concerns finds it hard to regulate her emotions and not become more worried about her situation (more on that in a moment). Second, the passage clarifies that the Christian can focus on one of two different aspects of the situation. The Christian can focus on her existential insecurity and the lack of food for tomorrow, or she can focus on God’s daily provision. The former aspect produces the emotion of worry, the latter the emotion of gratitude. The Christian literally ‘turns his gaze upward’—focusing attention on a different aspect of the situation, thus construing it in different terms. As Westphal puts the point, ‘It is a matter of attention and arises from what the Christian “bears in mind” and remembers’ (Westphal 2007, p. 28). The same external condition makes a different impression on the agent because of the shift in attentional focus. Thus, the Christian slowly escapes the constant preoccupation with poverty and wealth by focusing her attention on a different aspect of the situation and develops trust in the process.

The *Discourses* also evidences a second form of emotion regulation called cognitive reappraisal. Gross describes the strategy of cognitive reappraisal as an ‘antecedent form of cognitive change that involves construing a potentially emotion-eliciting situation in a way that changes its emotional impact’ (Gross and John 2004, p. 1304).²⁶ Both attentional deployment and cognitive reappraisal help people to reconstrue a situation. The difference is that attentional deployment involves focusing on a different aspect of the situation; cognitive reappraisal

²⁴ For Kierkegaard’s analysis of the passionlessness of the present age, see *Two Ages*, especially the section on the present age (Kierkegaard 1978). Kierkegaard elaborates on the role the crowd plays in affecting the individual’s passion in ‘To the Single Individual’, stating, for instance, that the crowd ‘is untruth, since a crowd either makes for impenitence and irresponsibility altogether, or for the single individual it at least weakens responsibility by reducing the responsibility to a fraction’ (Kierkegaard 2009a, b, p. 107).

²⁵ My emphasis added.

²⁶ Gross and John (2004, p. 1304).

involves construing that chosen aspect in different *terms* which gives it a different *meaning*.

The *Discourses* exemplifies cognitive reappraisal when Kierkegaard reflects on how to think of death. He describes the strategy when discussing both the care of poverty and of abundance. When speaking of the care of abundance, he states, ‘But when I think that I can perhaps die tonight, “this very night,” then, however rich I am, I do not own anything. In order to be rich, I must own something for tomorrow... Take the riches away, then I can no longer be called rich; but take tomorrow away—alas, then I can no longer be called rich either’ (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 27). A person can construe the situation differently by assigning different *meanings* to wealth: one can understand wealth as something the person *possesses* and as necessary for continued material well-being, or one can understand it as *fleeting* and unpossessable: ‘losability is an essential feature of wealth’ (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 27). The person changes her thoughts about her wealth by construing it in terms of her mortality and thus reconstruing wealth as inherently losable. Within the horizon of death, a Christian reconstrues wealth as fleeting and ephemeral and thus strips it of its negative emotional impact.

Reconstruing the meaning of wealth is no easy task, because the crowd constantly tells the Christian that money surpasses all else that one could gain and that she should constantly strive to increase her wealth. The Christian sees other members of her social group putting all their energy into making money and then measuring their own happiness according to their bank accounts.²⁷ As Kierkegaard puts it in a beautiful story in the discourse ‘To Be Contented with Being a Human Being,’ other agents constantly state that security and happiness comes from full storehouses. Hear this statement enough, and it’s hard not to start to believe that money begets happiness.²⁸ The materialistic worldview necessitates that the Christian assign money a different meaning: no one can ever truly be rich since death can come at any moment, and the deceased would lose everything. This thought makes money irrelevant to true, lasting happiness. Kierkegaard makes it even clearer that one can assign the same object—riches—different meanings and thus reconstrue it when he states, ‘the rich Christian bears in mind that he has not received it (the wealth) *in order to* keep it but as entrusted property’ (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 29).²⁹ Lillegard notes, “bearing in mind” (*betaenkende*) here includes seeing things a certain way, having a certain pattern of salencies. In order to cure

²⁷ This is of course still true in our time, and the relationship between materialism and social comparison is documented. See Richins (1995, pp. 593–607).

²⁸ In the discourse ‘To Be Contented with Being a Human Being,’ Kierkegaard tells the story of a wood dove who lived in wonder and let ‘each day have its own troubles’ until it met two tame doves from the nearby farmer’s house. The tame doves stress to the wood dove that because of the farmer’s storehouse their ‘future is secure’. As a result of these conversations, the wood dove became uncertain and insecure about its own life: the wood dove thought ‘it must be very pleasant to know that one’s living was secured for a long time, whereas it was miserable to live continually in uncertainty so that one never dares to say that one knows one is provided for’. The wood dove had no actual needs; it found enough to eat each day. But now the wood dove ‘had acquired an *idea* of need in the future. It had lost its peace of mind—it had acquired *worry about making a living*’ (Kierkegaard 1993, pp. 174–175). The wood dove’s desire for security gets it caught and killed.

²⁹ Emphasis in original.

anxieties (various emotions), one must reform one's concepts or thoughts (*forandre sin forestilling*, CD, 53), and that reform enables one to replace worldly ways of seeing and emotions with other emotions which are more appropriate, better formed, such as thankfulness and confidence in God' (Lillegard 2002, p. 257). Reforming one's thoughts in order to have a new pattern of saliences requires assigning the same object or aspect (wealth) a different meaning: it is not one's own but a gift from God. Realizing the fleeting nature of wealth conceived of as a divine gift allows the Christian to avoid the care of abundance by practicing the emotion-regulation strategy of cognitive reappraisal. Rather than being concerned—and thus worried—about where tomorrow's food will come from, recognizing that God gives her the gift of wealth, the Christian trusts that God will provide and expresses gratitude for each day's provision. Emotional changes follow situational reconstrual.

Diachronic emotion regulation

I have argued that Kierkegaard articulates emotions as related to concerns and thus akin to perceptions. Furthermore, Kierkegaard anticipates at least two contemporary emotion-regulation strategies, attentional deployment and cognitive reappraisal. Two important insights emerge from his understanding of those strategies. First, Kierkegaard's emotion-regulation strategies are diachronic, whereas contemporary strategies are largely synchronic. Second, Kierkegaard's diachronic strategies aid in the moral transformation of the self, further reinforcing the connection between emotions and concerns. Concerning the relevance to contemporary research, consider the bird once again. The bird's perceptual standpoint is immediate. It has no care of poverty because it *cannot* have the care of poverty. A human, however, is prone to care: her existential insecurity strongly inclines her to think (and worry) about the future. Kierkegaard observes, 'The Christian is different from the bird, because the bird is ignorant, but the Christian *becomes* ignorant; the bird begins with ignorance and ends with it; the Christian *ends* with being ignorant' (Kierkegaard 1997, pp. 25–26).³⁰ Therefore, the Christian must *work* to focus her attention and reconstrue her situation so that she no longer has the cares of poverty or abundance. The Christian has to work to achieve this standpoint because 'originally the Christian is a human being' and not a Christian. What does it mean to be a human being? Vulnerability and insecurity are basic aspects of the human condition. Becoming a Christian means developing emotion-virtues such as trust and gratitude.

Everyone is, and will remain, a human being. However, a Christian is a human being who does not worry, but rather trusts that God will provide, and takes joy in each day. Kierkegaard states that, by 'bearing in mind' certain things, the Christian has become ignorant of her wealth. But this standpoint comes only after a long, difficult process: 'Yet to become ignorant in this way can take a *long time*, and it is a difficult task before he succeeds, *little by little*, and before he finally succeeds in

³⁰ My emphasis.

really becoming ignorant of what he knows, and then in *remaining ignorant*, in *continuing* to be that, so that he does not sink back again, trapped in the snare of knowledge' (Kierkegaard 1997, p. 26). The knowledge that the Christian strives to become ignorant of is that she possesses her wealth. By focusing on wealth's fleeting nature and that it is a gift from God, the Christian becomes ignorant of her wealth. But this task proves formidable since the Christian is still a human being living among other human beings, all telling her that her wealth belongs to *her alone*. Therefore, the individual must repeat the process over and over again until the basic concern the emotion stems from becomes a steadfast disposition (as opposed to simply being one of several different competing concerns such as the concern for wealth and the concern for having faith that God will provide).

The repetition required in the above task differs from the findings of much of the present-day research. Present-day research examines primarily single instances of emotion regulation. For instance, in many experiments, two groups of subjects view the same disturbing images: one group is told to react naturally, the other is told to reconstrue the image to decrease its emotional impact. Based on brain scans, physiological measurements, and subjective reports, the reconstrual group does not typically experience the negative emotions that the control group experiences. The experiment has been done with everything from sad movie clips, to pornographic images, to stories crafted to generate disgust.³¹ However, the research does little to help those who wish to change the basis of *concern* for the emotion, so that they do not simply continue to experience that unwanted emotion.

Kierkegaard's goal is not simply to help his reader regulate particular emotions, but to cultivate passionate faith with the fruits of gratitude and trust. Passionate faith is a character trait, and Kierkegaard defines character in *Two Ages*: 'Morality is character; character is something engraved,³² but the sea has no character, nor does sand, nor abstract common sense, either, for character is inwardness' (Kierkegaard 1978, pp. 77–78). In order for passionate faith and its virtues to become engraved in the Christian, particular instances of emotion regulation are not enough. Such singular activities do not reflect character—the self's fundamental, orienting concerns. Cultivating the concerns constitutive of character requires *diachronic* rather than *synchronic* emotion-regulation strategies. Synchronic strategies—singular instances—may be merely instrumental or consequentialist. The agent may realize that in certain situations it is not beneficial to display emotion and may therefore use one or more of these strategies for its immediate benefit. On the other hand, the person who wants to achieve a fundamental change in her concerns may be disappointed when she finds that the individual instances of emotion regulation do not result in any lasting change. Such a person must resort to *diachronic* emotion-regulation strategies.

Distinguishing between diachronic and synchronic emotion-regulation strategies is difficult at first glance. Examining a single employment of either strategy may make one indistinguishable from the other. However, crucial differences prevail

³¹ E.g., Gross (2002, pp. 281–291), Beauregard (2007, pp. 218–236) and Feinberg et al. (2012, p. 788–795).

³² *charasso*—to make pointed, sharper, thus to engrave—the root of character in Greek.

between the two. To see these differences, first consider two recent studies that employ diachronic strategies, but do not focus on the cultivation of virtuous dispositions. For instance, Jeffrey M. Schwartz's research on cognitive-behavioral OCD therapy exemplifies a long-term antecedent-focused strategy that includes cognitive reappraisal as well as other antecedent-focused strategies. Schwartz and other researchers believe that OCD patients can actually change their behaviors (and indeed their neurocircuitry), and, to this end, developed a multi-step cognitive-behavioral method.³³ These steps include reappraisal by relabeling obsessive thoughts, attentional deployment by turning one's attention to something else besides the obsessive thoughts, and behavioral changes. For instance, one can work in the garden instead of wash one's hands yet again. Twelve out of eighteen patients who engaged in this 9-week program experienced both objective and subjective change. They reported significant reduction in their OCD behavior, and their brain activity differed significantly (based on scans before and after the program).³⁴

The second example focuses on experienced meditators. In one study, individuals who practice meditation for at least 5 hours a week for 5 years are instructed to engage in a form of open monitoring or mindfulness meditation. They are to remain 'in a quiescent state, receptive to any thoughts, emotions or sensations, but without any lingering on them, or allowing them to disrupt to the meditative state', while being shown a series of positive, negative, and neutral pictures (Sobolewski et al. 2011, p. 45). An electroencephalography (EEG) machine measures their brain activity. When compared to control subjects with no prior meditation experience, the experienced meditators exhibit none of the neurological responses to the negative pictures the novices do. The differences in neurological activity lead researchers to posit that 'meditation practitioners either perceive adverse emotional stimuli in a different way from non-meditators or regulate (inhibit) the emotional reaction to negative stimuli—while processing of positive stimuli remains unaltered (uninhibited)...' (Sobolewski et al. 2011, p. 47). Various negative phenomena do not easily distract an experienced meditator. The Christian who wishes to be poor without the care of poverty thus benefits greatly from avoiding the negative stimuli while attending to the positive aspects of the situation—that God provides each day.

³³ See Schwartz (1999, p. 122). Although Schwartz developed his own unique version of CBT, CBT is one of the most widely studied and successfully implemented therapies in modern psychology. As Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt state in their article "The Coddling of the American Mind," "Cognitive behavioral therapy is a modern embodiment of this ancient wisdom. It is the most extensively studied nonpharmaceutical treatment of mental illness, and is used widely to treat depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and addiction. It can even be of help to schizophrenics. No other form of psychotherapy has been shown to work for a broader range of problems. Studies have generally found that it is as effective as antidepressant drugs (such as Prozac) in the treatment of anxiety and depression. The therapy is relatively quick and easy to learn; after a few months of training, many patients can do it on their own. Unlike drugs, cognitive behavioral therapy keeps working long after treatment is stopped, because it teaches thinking skills that people can continue to use." (Lukianoff and Haidt 2015, p. 46). See also Teasdale 1997; Steketee et al. 1998.

³⁴ Schwartz notes that 'What this accomplishes is a change in perspective away from automatic responses (exactly the sort of activity the basal ganglia is wired by many millennia of evolution to perform)... and toward a more precise, considered, and consciously goal-directed interpretation of the present moment's experience—which is, of course, a much more cortically directed activity' (Schwartz 1999, p. 127).

Another study examines the neural basis of ‘one-pointed concentration’, practiced to ‘strengthen attentional focus and achieve a tranquil state in which preoccupation with thoughts and emotions is gradually reduced’ (Brefczynski-Lewis et al. 2007, p. 11483). The study compares novice, intermediate, and expert meditators, and the results suggest that the skill of focusing and sustaining attention gets easier as the practitioner gets more proficient. The more proficient the meditator, the less effort it takes to sustain one’s attention, which makes it easier for the advanced meditator to engage in simultaneous tasks. For example, a proficient meditator can simultaneously monitor and dismiss distractive stimuli. The ability to sustain focus while simultaneously ignoring distractions benefits a person trying to maintain a passionate faith amid the crowd. When the crowd murmurs ‘Aren’t you worried about tomorrow?’, the individual can ignore the noise and maintain her focus.

These studies on OCD and experienced meditators lend strength to the efficacy of diachronic regulation strategies. OCD patients who complete the 9-week study see significant improvement in their symptoms; this improvement cannot be accomplished in one instance. Meditation practitioners who have years of practice can focus and refocus their attention much quicker and with less effort than those with less experience; meditating only occasionally does one little good. Even though we can describe single instances of these practices, they are ineffective unless they are done repeatedly over an extended period of time; this time requirement distinguishes diachronic from synchronic regulatory strategies.

Kierkegaard’s diachronic strategies are also distinguishable from synchronic strategies. Synchronic emotion-regulation strategies are amoral, instrumental, and focused on the moment. Synchronic emotion regulation is morally neutral: a young mother might employ these strategies to control her anger so that she does not lash out at her child in public, while a psychopath might employ them so that his excitement does not cause him to kill his victim in broad daylight. Notice that this ability to regulate makes synchronic strategies instrumental—their purpose is to help the agent accomplish a goal that is not inherently tied to the strategy itself. The amorality and instrumentality of the synchronic strategy makes it by nature temporary. Once the goal is accomplished, the strategy is no longer needed. Conversely, Kierkegaard’s regulation strategies are inherently moral, non-instrumental, and focused on the eternal. Kierkegaard’s strategies are inherently moral because their purpose is self-transformation. The agent aims to change from a person whose fundamental, orientating concerns or passions are focused on relieving existential insecurity and is therefore full of worry into a person whose fundamental concern is passionate faith and is therefore joyful and grateful. That the goal of the strategies is self-transformation means that the strategies are non-instrumental. For instance, the regulation strategy of focusing on God’s daily provision is inextricably linked to faith. Finally, these strategies are all diachronic because their focus is not only on tomorrow but also on *eternity*. They are inherently long-term strategies; they will not work if the agent is thinking only about short-term or instrumental gains. The agent is focused on what ultimately matters, what is of lasting value. Diachronic emotion-regulation strategies therefore differ categorically from synchronic strategies despite initial appearances. Passion will always be

a vital part of the person of faith, and emotions will stem from and reinforce those that passion. Kierkegaard does indeed realize that having joy in the face of existential uncertainty is difficult, but thankfully he gives us the resources to cultivate the passionate faith from which joy springs eternal.

Conclusion

Kierkegaard is well aware of our “existential insecurity” and the worries that stem from living in a materialistic culture. His signed writings aim to edify the reader through the encouragement of passionate faith and trust in God’s provision. But not only does he help the reader better understand the nature of faith, he educates his reader on the relationship of emotions and cares. Most importantly, he provides the reader with concrete emotion regulation strategies for overcoming the worry that stems from existential insecurity and cultivate faith, trust, and gratitude. Kierkegaard is also aware that cultivating faith is not easy, that it is difficult and will take time, perhaps a long time. But by continually turning our gaze upward, focusing our attention on the right aspects of our situation, and reconstruing both wealth and daily bread as gifts from God, we can find peace and rest while engaging the world each and every day.

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