The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air: Three Godly Discourses, by Søren Kierkegaard, Translated and with an Introduction by Bruce B. Kirmmse, Princeton University Press, (2016)

I. Introduction

a. Who is Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)?

i. Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic
ii. 19th-century "proto-existentialist"
iii. The "father of existentialism"

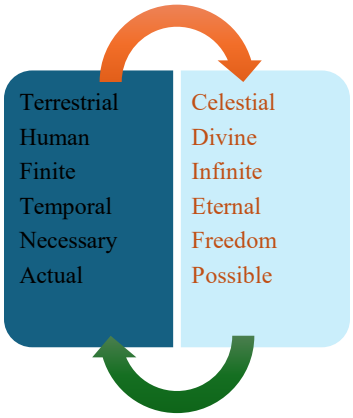
b. Overview of Existentialism: *Lily/Bird Discourses* Variation

i. THE MOMENT
ii. "In Here" (Self) versus "Out There" (Lily/Bird)
iii. The "Master Teachers"

c. The Existential Struggle

i. **An existential struggle is the inner confrontation with the big, unanswerable questions about meaning, purpose, freedom, and mortality. This is stress about the framework of the problem, not just the problem itself; in other words, why am I doing what I am doing at all?**

ii. Despair and the Misrelation of the Synthesis of the Self (Kierkegaard's Original Synthesis – Selfhood)



- Self is a spirit – the spirited component of life.
- The self [is a] synthesis.
- The self is a conjoining, [it is] activity driven, a creative act whereby we are making ourselves what we are and what we are to become.

As a fusion of these polarities, the self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. *Not the relation but the relation's relating to itself* [From *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849).

iii. WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW… Necessary versus Possible IN Actuality

d. Overview of *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air: Three Godly Discourses* (1849)

i. The Upbuilding Discourses**, meant for edifying and encouraging his readers**
ii. "what it is to be a human being – would that we might learn it, or, if it has been forgotten, that we might learn it anew from the lily and the bird… **silence, obedience, joy**!" (5)
iii. Nature is God's way of forcing humans to be morally and spiritually challenged… the absolute Otherness of God, the lily, and the bird show us who WE are!

e. The Gospel for the 15th Sunday After Trinity Sunday

No one can serve two masters for he must either hate the one and love the other, or hold fast to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat and what you will drink, nor about your bodies, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more than they? But who among you can add one cubit to your height, even though you worry about it? And why do you worry about

clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin. But I say to you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is today and cast into the oven tomorrow, would he not much more clothe you, you of little faith! Therefore, you should not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?", or "What shall we wear?" – the pagans seek all such things. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own. **[Mt 6:24-34]**

II. Silence

a. Silence is NOT quietude; not the absence of sound, not emptiness, not conditional, not what we think it is!
b. Silence versus "Chatter"
c. God speaks to us THROUGH the silence, the unconditional silence of the lily and the bird… Learn to listen.

III. Obedience

a. From silence we learn obedience.
b. “Out there”, with the lily and the bird, unconditional obedience arises from unconditional, holy silence.
c. In short, obedience is being content with being WHO YOU ARE, right here, in this moment… a most radical approach during Kierkegaard’s lifetime. This is existential obedience.
d. Humans will come to understand this type of obedience by learning it from the lily and the bird.

IV. Joy

a. Joy is more than exuberance over situational advances for the Self.
b. It is the culmination of where unconditional silence and obedience lead us… to take and accept one’s existence, just as you are, as a GIFT from the Creator.
c. The lily and the bird need no reason to be joyful. They ARE joy… They embody joy even in their suffering, and we can learn to do the same.
d. Listen, obey, and learn from the unconditional and HOLY silence of the lily and the bird, and you WILL find unconditional joy.