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. Learning Obedience from the Lily and the Bird

a. *"…here is the teacher himself who is obedient! And in what does he give instruction? In obedience. And how does he give instruction? By obedience. And if you were able to be obedient in the same way as the lily and the bird, you would also be able to teach obedience by obedience. But since neither you nor I are obedient in that way, let us learn from the lily and the bird: obedience.* (46).
b. **Humans are naturally disobedient creatures!**
c. Solemn silence versus "just plain silence": one must perceive the silence with an emphasis on the *infinite* to prepare oneself to be obedient in silence…
d. **Return to the Gospel**: Seeking infinite perception of silence to find obedience to God alone

II. Unconditional Obedience in Nature

a. *"Pay attention, then, to nature, which surrounds you. In nature everything is obedience, unconditional obedience. Here, 'God's will is done, as in heaven, so also on earth… here in nature 'God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven."* (47).
b. Nature knows the Scriptural Command to "Love the Lord Thy God with All One's Might" (Deut. 6:5/11:3; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27) … **It does so in *Silent Obedience*.**
c. **"…not one sparrow falls to the ground without his will"** (Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 10: 6/12:6).

d. Nature cooperates with God… there are no objections in Nature… **This is holy compliance.**

III. Half-Measures Versus Security

a. Return to the lily and the bird as "masters" in unconditional obedience to God
b. **KEY POINT: Half-measures avail us nothing!**

    i. Even a minor bit of disobedience is not unconditional obedience… the lily and the bird cannot and do not want to understand this concept… **this is contempt for God and *conditioned insecurity*!**
    ii. *The lily and the bird are masters at despising half measures… it is here that security rests!*
    iii. Security is only found in the unconditional… The lily and the bird know this, and they both submit to and always carry out God's Will *unconditionally*.

IV. The Obedient Lily and "The Place"

a. **"The Place":** Linguistically, Culturally, Individually Created… by humans

    i. **Yet does it exist for the Lily?** (Place, like Time, is also a human construct)

b. Humans judge an unfortunate "place" where the lily grows (a dunghill, for example), stating, "No, it is unendurable! It is of course a self-contradiction on the part of the Creator!"
c. Scriptural reference to **"Solomon in all his splendor"** (Matthew 6:28-29; Luke 12:27-28; 1 Kings 10:4-7, 23; 2 Chronicles 9:20-22)
d. **To be fully oneself in "unfortunate circumstances", in unconditional obedience to the Creator, leads one to be free of cares (worries)…**

e. **The "Place" corresponds to the "Moment"** in terms of creaturely death, yet the lily is not concerned or worried about death, for it is unconditionally obedient to the Creator and knows that it is cared for. Space and Time have no meaning in this context.

V. The Obedient Bird and "The Moment"

a. Return to **"the Moment"** and **"the Next Moment"**
b. The bird sets forth obediently on its journey when the moment comes for it to depart, letting go of what is certain in order to grasp what is uncertain… **Can we learn from the bird how to be unconditionally obedient in this manner?**
c. When the obedient bird encounters moments of evil in the world, she is steadfast in unconditional obedience, understanding "that which happens to it does not really concern it" … **"[these things] only concern it in an unreal fashion… what actually concerns it – but also unconditionally – is to submit to [a moment of evil] in unconditional obedience to God."** (57-58).

    i. Can we be "unconcerned" in this manner as humans when we encounter the daily "evil moments" of this world?

VI. The Virtue of Necessity

a. What the lily and the bird accomplish is **not a virtue of necessity**. It is a much higher, metaphysical virtue, always encompassed by the Loving Creator and His relationship with His creatures.
b. We humans may misunderstand this and say, "Well, the lily and the bird are just doing what they have to do to survive in Nature, nothing more. There is no divinity in this equation! We may say, "Well, of course they can be obedient! After all, "they cannot do otherwise; to become an example of obedience in that way is of course to make a virtue of necessity." (58).

c. Kierkegaard reminds us here that **obedience arises from silence**, and he also reminds us that the lily and the bird are not the objects of concern in this writing. **They are the master teachers that we are to look up to.**
d. You are to simply keep silent and obey. We are all subject to Necessity, but God's Will is done even if I don't make something a virtue of necessity.

    i. Certainly, it is virtuous to take care of the necessities of life before drifting off into future possibilities, good or bad, but this is not the point the lily and the bird are trying to get across to "wise" humans.
    ii. However, you may become so unconditionally obedient in carrying out God's Will that you might truthfully be able to say to yourself that **you DID make a virtue of necessity, and that is all well and good!**

VII. The God of Patience

a. Kierkegaard has made it clear that [submitting to God's Will] is what we should all strive for, as unlike the lily and the bird, we run the risk of **testing God's patience**, even forfeiting it!

    i. This is the danger that only humans know. The lily and the bird and all of Nature do not run this risk, for they are all *in* the Being-ness of unconditional obedience.
    ii. **God has a patience that is incomprehensible.**
    iii. With the lily and the bird, He is the fatherly Creator and the Sustainer, yet he does not need to have patience with those who follow him in unconditional obedience.

b. For us, He is also the **God of consolation**, which we need in our state of conditional obedience (disobedience).

    i. Humans should not take this patience and consolation in vain, as this is a very serious matter.
    ii. Use this knowledge properly, as one would use a savings account in matters of wealth.

c. “For the sake of God in Heaven, use [this wealth of knowledge about God being the God of patience] properly; otherwise it plunges you into even greater wretchedness; it transforms itself into the opposite – it is no longer consolation, but becomes the most terrible of all accusations against you.” (62).

    i. **We have a responsibility to be unconditionally obedient in everything, like the lily and the bird.** In other words, do not take God’s patience in vain.

VIII. Ambivalence and Satan’s Temptation

a. Kierkegaard always returns to the original message of the Gospel. Do not despair, and do not compare one’s shortcomings as a human with the virtues of the master teachers, the lily and the bird.
b. **However, if any CONDITIONS remain, you [human] run into the problem of ambivalence.**

    i. One’s will must be perfectly aligned with God’s Will “on earth as it is in Heaven”. There is indeed no way that God’s Will is not fulfilled.
    ii. Ambivalence is dangerous due to Satan’s cunning, and he can only use this ambivalence against you, the human.
    iii. **The lily and the bird and all of Nature are impervious to Satan’s cunning, for all of Nature is unconditionally obedient to God.**

c. It is impossible for this frightening entity to lead the lily and the bird into what we know as temptation because there is no ambivalence in them.

    i. Ambivalence, strictly reserved for humans, resides way down “in here” with humans, and deep down there is also disobedience, of course; that is the result of said ambivalence.
    ii. **Where there is no ambivalence, Satan is powerless.**
    iii. Where there is ambivalence, there is temptation, and all the stronger the more one moves back and forth in insecurity and indecisiveness.

iv. **However, if we conceal ourselves in God, "in unconditional obedience is unconditionally secure; from his secure hiding place he can see the devil, but the devil cannot see him." (65).**

d. **The devil is equally blind when he looks upon simplicity.**

i. In my hiding place in the security of God's protection over my soul, I am truly "delivered from evil", as the Lord's Prayer marks.

e. Kierkegaard returns to the refrain from the Sermon that **No One can serve Two Masters**. There are, therefore, two powers: God and the world, good and evil, and these two powers are in "mortal combat with each other" since eternity.
f. Kierkegaard notes that **even the smallest inclination toward one side or the other (good or evil) is seen by the opposite side as unconditional opposition, an affront**. Thus, one cannot "forget" or avoid this danger, for it is an absolute, enormous danger in the eternal combat between good and evil, God and the devil.
g. **Unconditional obedience MUST be grounded in love, which is the very BEING of the lily and the bird.**

IX. Return to the Gospel: The Lily and the Bird in Unconditional Obedience

a. The gospel, **"the wisdom of upbringing"**, does not move into intellectual or verbal quarrels with a human being in order to prove to him or her that it is so; "the gospel knows very well that this is not the way things are done", and humans are free to follow the advice of the gospel or not.
b. **The Gospel makes use of the authority of God in Christ in reverse order**: instead of the human being not understanding the meaning of the lesson and then deciding to obey unconditionally, **ONLY** by unconditionally obeying God does a human come to understand that what the gospel says is so, and "You *shall* learn from the lily and the bird takes on authority at this point.

i. **"… so that it might move even the hardest heart; it takes you by the hand, as it were – and does just as the loving father does with his child – and says: 'Come, let us go out with the lily and the bird.' Out there… 'Consider the lilies of the field; abandon yourself to them, lose yourself in them – does not this sight move you?'" (69).**

ii. One master, in complete unity, in one "great divine service" … this one thought is learned from the lily and the bird.

c. **The Return to Eden**

i. It was the sin of humans trying to serve two or more masters that "disturbed the beauty of the whole world where previously everything had been so very good; it was his sin that introduced discord into a world of unity; and consider that every sin is disobedience and every disobedience is sin." (70).

ii. How can we right this wrong, we humans who disturbed the way things were meant to be in the world? **By turning to the lily and the bird, we will come to know JOY, which reverses sin and brings the light of the Creator back into the fallen world.**

d. At the end of Part II, Kierkegaard addresses the final condition which we seek: unconditional joy, without worry and without despair.