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. Part III: Joy

a. **"Look at the Birds of the Air; They Neither Sow nor Reap nor Gather into Barns" – *Unconcerned About Tomorrow.* "Consider the Grass of the Field – *Which Today IS.*"** (From Matthew 6:26-30)

i. In this paraphrased refrain from the famous Sermon on the Mount, Kierkegaard brings in his very proto-existentialist position regarding the birds of the air and the lily of the field. Once again, we are concerned with space and temporality: the air, barns, fields, and today and tomorrow.
ii. Kierkegaard begins this chapter simply: Do this and learn: joy.

II. The Joyful Teachers

a. ***"The teacher of joy really has nothing other to do than to be joyful himself, or to be joy."*** **(71)**
b. Out there, with the lily and the bird, there is ALWAYS joy, for the joy is *within them*; yet they are "out there" at the same time.
c. For the joyful bird, there is **neighborly joy**, and the chorus of singing produces a "sea of sound". This is *holy silence*. She wastes no moments in her life, finding enough to take in joy.
d. For the joyful lily, the bird "jests and banters" with it… the lily and the bird work together as the joyful teachers. It is a "blissful, happy existence, so rich in joys!"
e. Consider the lily and the bird together in joy, and do not misunderstand this joy… **That it takes so little to bring this joy to the lily and the bird is PROOF that "they themselves are joy and joy itself." (74)**

III. Unconditional Joy

a. It is precisely because the lily and the bird exhibit unconditional joy that they *are* joy itself.
b. **The conditions for becoming joyful for humans, ironically, often cause *more* trouble and concern, for even if all the conditions were fulfilled, we perhaps would not become unconditionally joyful anyway." (75)**
c. Our greatest challenge as humans is to become unconditionally joyful, like Nature's profound teachers of joy: the lily and the bird.

IV. Thought Categories of Instruction

a. There exist thought categories of instruction that consist of this unconditional joy.
b. The lily and the bird are themselves the unconditional joy that they teach!
c. The lily and the bird express the subject they teach, which is different from their straightforward, primal originality – it is **acquired originality, which in turn is simplicity.**
d. Simplicity is not concerned with "simple, everyday expressions or high-flown, learned language" … Simplicity is that the teacher himself is what he teaches.
e. Their instruction in joy, expressed by their lives, is that there is today; it *is*, with **infinite emphasis on TODAY**, with no worry for tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.

V. Time and the Joy Equation

a. Quite simply, the joy equation is as follows: Today *is* for the lily and the bird – this is joy, but not without unconditional and unconditional obedience, which the lily and the bird have already taught us.

Therefore, **silence+obedience=joy**. The joy IS, as it is in the lily and the bird.

b. Time is central to the equation as he asks, "What is joy anyway?" Joy is more than a conditional, temporary state whilst one lives on this Earth.
c. Joy is to be truly present to oneself. I have to *be today*. **Being true to myself is authenticity, one of the hallmarks of existentialism. Less and less does "the day of misfortune" (tomorrow) exist for me if I stay in the present moment.**
d. There is always some "clever" and misdirected interpretation of "simple" by humans in their self-importance.

    i. Leave out the witticisms, and discover that solemn obedience, which is arrived at from solemn silence, can be joyful.

e. The fact that we exist at all, that we came into existence, that **today I receive the necessities of life to sustain me for this day, this moment**, that my senses are intact… or if some of my senses are failing, I still have some sense with which to learn from the lily and the bird…

    i. Kierkegaard reiterates that if *this is nothing to rejoice over*, then there is nothing over which to rejoice. **The lily and the bird ARE the JOY we humans rejoice over, our relentless master teachers.**
    ii. Let us rejoice that we have the lily and the bird to rejoice over in the movements of Nature for now. **THEY are today. THEY are joy. We are to LEARN from them, who are the teachers of JOY.** Again, all of this is not mere metaphor. Kierkegaard is being quite literal here.
    iii. To look upon the lily and the bird with joy, I become ever more willing to learn from them.
    iv. Do not allow your pride in being human to get in the way of learning from those who know better than you in matters of unconditional joy, a very difficult state of being to attain.

VI. The Sigh of Creation

a. While the teachers of joy *are* the joy they teach, they also have cares or sorrows, as does all of nature.

    i. **We must address the despairs of the world, which includes the sigh of all Creation that resulted from the Fall in the Garden.**
    ii. With that, they brought sorrow to Nature's beings, including the lily and the bird.
    iii. All of Nature is subject to perishability, as are we.
    iv. **Creation waits for restoration.**

b. Everyone, and everything, as the prey of perishability, is a dialectical relationship, requiring a solution.

    i. **This perishability IS the sigh**, "for to be subjected to perishability is to be what a sigh signifies; confinement, incarceration in prison; and the content of this sigh is: perishability, perishability!" (81).
    ii. Yet the lily and the bird are still unconditionally joyful in this state of perishability.
    iii. **Despite all this sorrow and suffering in the World, this "infinitely deep a sorrow", the lily and the bird remain unconditionally joyful, for they are joy themselves.**

VII. *"Cast All Your Sorrows Upon God"* (1 Peter 5:7)

a. How, then, does this miracle happen? **IN deepest sorrow, to be unconditionally joyful, certainly seems like a miracle…**

    i. The lily and the bird manage their sorrows and cares quite plainly and simply: As they always do, they get rid of this hypothetical "tomorrow" ...
    ii. The lily and the bird have learned to take this to heart, for **they live in simplicity.**
    iii. "…Unconditional simplicity is required in order to take [1 Peter 5:7] unconditionally altogether literally…

b. Kierkegaard brings us back to time from the existentialist point of view, for **it is this very instant of casting one's sorrows upon God – this Moment in time** – is "contemporaneous with the first moment it

exists – at that very instant it is unconditional joyful. Marvelous dexterity!"

i. We do not need to know "what" God does with all of our cares and sorrows, for it IS in the Moment that He works his miracles.
ii. **Unconditional joy is a miracle.**

c. The dexterity of the unconditional is a "marvelous feat". Like "the fear of meekness," it "contains a contradiction, or it is the feat that resolves a contradiction." (84)

i. To "cast" something away implies "force", but force is exactly what is NOT to be used, Kierkegaard reminds us.
ii. **What IS to be used is unconditional compliance** – this is what the Master Teachers, the lily and the bird, teach us.
iii. We also relate this to the "Beatitudes," which begin the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12), which means "supreme blessing or "happiness" in the ancient translation.
iv. **We approach God in humility in order to follow 1 Peter 5:7 to find unconditional joy.** The lily and the bird approach the Creator meekly, yet boldly before the students (us) at times.

d. To be unconditionally joyful, **one must cast *all* one's sorrows away**, withholding none inside the Self.

i. This is a difficult feat for humans, for we have a tendency to cast our cares upon God, then take them back, sometimes in the same Moment – in immediacy - and sometimes the following day.
ii. **The lily and the bird know nothing about this tendency.**

e. Further, if we cast our sorrows somewhere else – not unconditionally upon God – then "one is not unconditionally rid of them".

i. **The cares and sorrows will return to you as a distraction, and in a worse form than the form they took before!** Kierkegaard reminds his reader that a distraction is a "dubious and ambivalent remedy for sorrow." (85)

ii. Rather, to unconditionally cast all one's sorrow upon God is called "collectedness", yet this is the "feat performed by the contradiction!" (85)

f. We learn, then, from the lily and the bird how to cast ALL our sorrows upon God, with no half-measures and no ambivalence… and ONLY upon God, yet **we must never cast away joy!**
g. We are once again reminded that Almighty God bears all our sorrow lightly as nothing." (86) The apostle Peter also reminds us that in **worshipping God by casting all our sorrows upon Him, we are to believe that God cares for us.**

i. We bear the sorrow of sin, which the lily and the bird do not understand, nor would they ever want to.
ii. They cannot teach us how to refrain from sinning, for this is the way of the Fall. However, as the master teachers, they follow the command of the Creator to show us how to *be joy by being joy*.
iii. **There IS a way out of worry about tomorrow and regret about the past, and the pursuit of unconditional joy in the Moment IS the way.**
iv. However, you must *want* to learn from the lily and the bird.

VIII. Return to the Poet and Society

a. The poet, as we know, often praises Nature with his words, creating "small worlds", perhaps by building and living alongside the bird and its mate…
b. It is depraved human society that causes the poet to sorrow, and he only wishes to escape it to be one with Nature and God, which can be perceived as a noble endeavor.
c. **Kierkegaard is well-known for his criticism of the delusions regarding the "bliss" of society, and we can certainly sense the despairing undercurrent of Self-self delusions in our own society today.**
d. We must admit that despite the sorrow, "there is actually an inescapable joy of love with which the birds, male and female, are a pair, and that despite the sorrow, there is in the single state a self-contented joy with which the lily is solitary.

e. In humility, Kierkegaard admits that he, like all of us, *is* the poet.

IX. The Last Prayer in "The Prayer"

a. The last prayer in the Lord's Prayer is the following verse from Matthew 6:13: **"Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory."**
b. True prayer, according to the master teachers, "prays itself joyful… unconditionally joyful".

    i. In the last prayer, we are, with the lily and the bird, always looking upwards and outwards to the otherworldly Other.
    ii. ***His* is the power, and I hand over my power to His care, just as the lily and the bird did from the very Beginning.**

c. Submit to His Will, and submit to His Kingdom, on earth as it is in Heaven, for all of this belongs to the loving Creator. The lily and the bird know this, and you *shall* learn from the lily and the bird.
d. Behold eternity as the lily and the bird do, moment to moment, for "the day of eternity, it indeed never comes to an end".
e. ***This* is unconditional joy, that *I may remain eternally present to myself*. This wondrous secret is found in the simplicity of the lily and the bird and all they teach us.**

    i. The dangers surrounding the idea of death become insignificant in this light.
    ii. Consider what concerns you, then realize that "*this very day* you are in paradise." The transition from time to eternity - the "greatest possible distance" – leads me to this survival of everything, for **I have a today that never has to end if I will learn unconditional joy from the lily and the bird.**

f. You are assured of this every time you pray this last prayer, "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory."

i. **You will draw near to this eternal paradise each time you pray this prayer, the lily and the bird teach you. You must fervently and in earnest, like the lily and the bird, pray this prayer: "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory – forever, Amen."** (90).