

# Existentialism

Chapter 6.1 / 6.4 / 6.7

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# Kierkegaard's Rejection of Hegelianism

- Hegel believed that reason could explain everything (religion, history, ethics) through a grand philosophical system (thesis → antithesis → synthesis). But Kierkegaard had a very different take.
- Hegel wanted to make Christianity logical and respectable. But Kierkegaard asked: “If faith becomes a theory, does it still demand anything from us?” In other words, does it lose its power to challenge or inspire us?
- *“Believing something absurd might be more genuine than believing what’s logical.”*
  - Is faith more powerful when it’s irrational? Or should it be logical to be real?
- *“Trying to live by pure reason is like trying to navigate Denmark with a tiny map of Europe.”*
  - What do you think Kierkegaard means by this?
  - Can reason really guide our lives? Or can only subjective, lived experiences shape our lives?



# Kierkegaard's Three Life Paths

## Aesthetic

- Focus on intellectual appreciation
- "Speculative thought is objective, and objectively there is no truth for an existing individual, but only an approximation, since by existing he is prevented from becoming entirely objective" (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992, Vol. 1: 224).

## Ethical

- Focus on objective moral principle
- "Second, it is not only fruitless, but misleading to try to demonstrate or prove the objective truth of the beliefs by which men and women are expected to live. This is because in matters of living, as opposed to questions of pure intellect (natural science is the most obvious case), "truth is subjectivity" (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992, Vol. 1: 212)

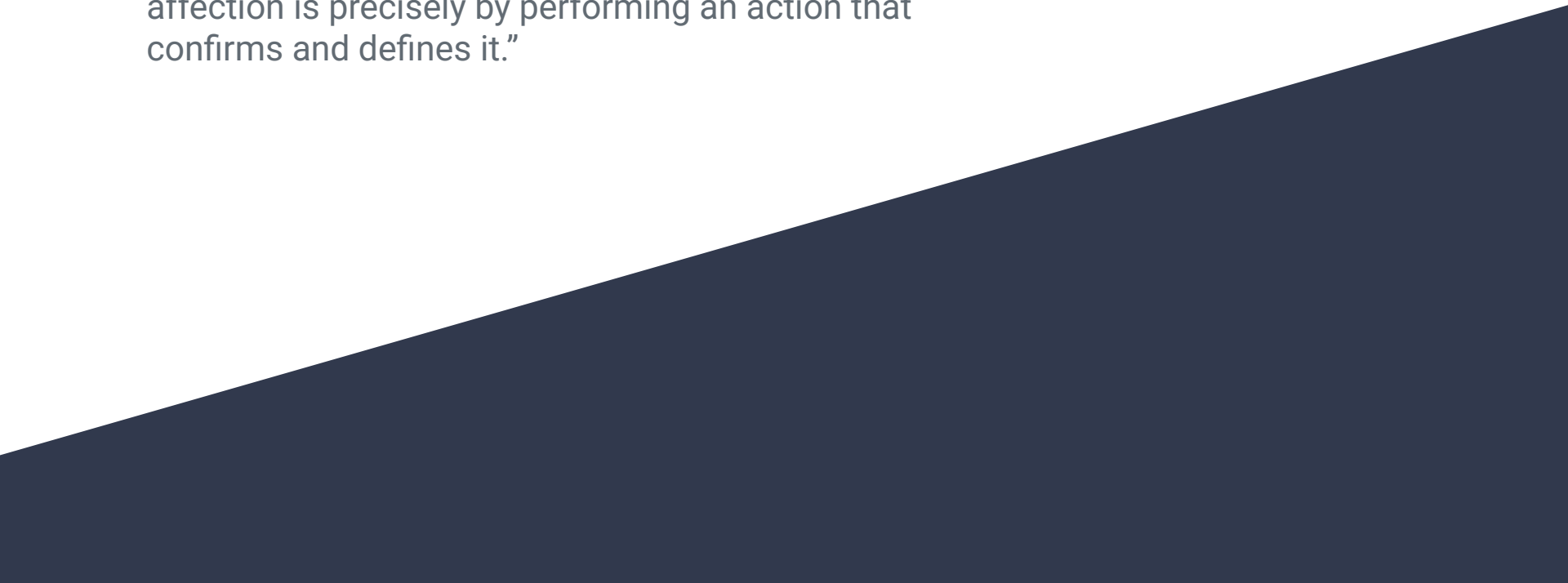
## Religious

- Kierkegaard seems to prioritize this path over others
- Leap of faith
- "any religion or philosophy by which we are meant to live has actually to be lived by. Whatever the objective truth of Christian teaching, those who live by it have to accept its truth subjectively (i.e., as true for them)."
- "With regard, for example, to comprehension, a person of high intelligence has a direct advantage over a person with limited intelligence, but this is not true with regard to having faith. That is, when faith requires that he relinquish his understanding, then to have faith becomes just as difficult for the most intelligent person as it is for the person of the most limited intelligence . . ." (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992, Vol. 1: 377)

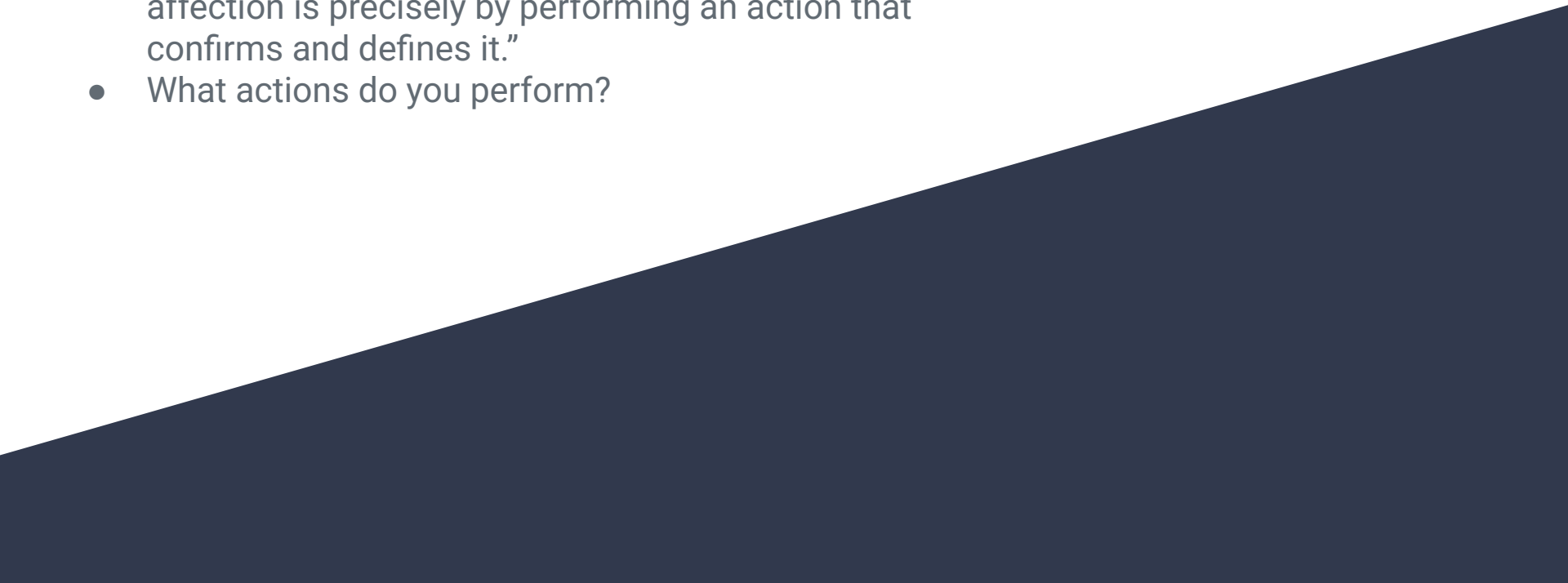
# What beliefs do you hold?



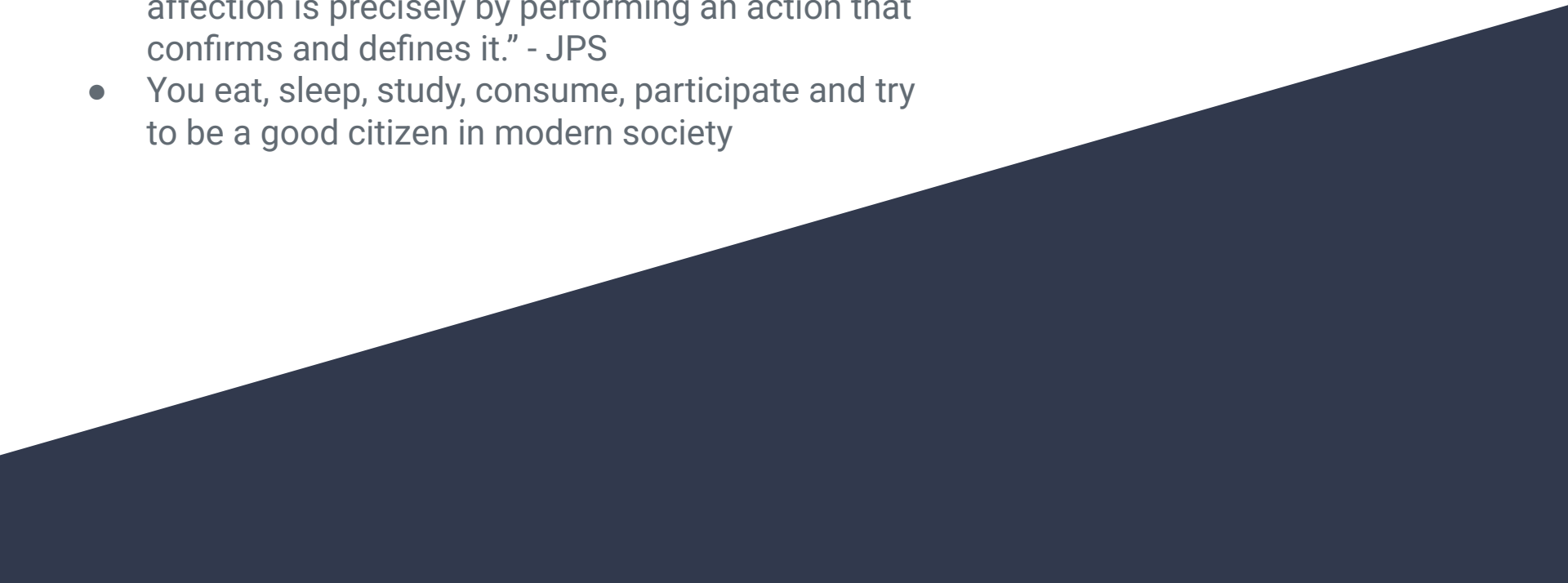
# What beliefs do you hold?

- “The only way I can measure the strength of this affection is precisely by performing an action that confirms and defines it.”
- 

# What beliefs do you hold?

- “The only way I can measure the strength of this affection is precisely by performing an action that confirms and defines it.”
  - What actions do you perform?
- 

# What actions do you perform?

- “The only way I can measure the strength of this affection is precisely by performing an action that confirms and defines it.” - JPS
  - You eat, sleep, study, consume, participate and try to be a good citizen in modern society
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Do we commit acts of evil everyday?

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How are we different from sincere Nazis?

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# Absurdity

## Rationalist

- Things *must be*
- There is some reason why the universe is the way it is
- **“Principle of sufficient reason”**: Belief that everything has an explanation
- That nothing exists without purpose or cause

## Empiricist

- Things just are
- No reason, only need facts derived through observation and science

## Existentialist

- Agree with Empiricist view that reality has no rational explanation
- Differ in how they respond to that absence of reason.

# Theory Of Everything

- While empiricists may reject the need for an all encompassing reason in favor of science science has moved towards attempting to define the universe
- Theory Of Everything: A hypothetical framework that could explain all mechanics of the universe
- Could such a theory be sufficient enough to reject absurdity?

