

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

I VS MY BEHAVIOUR

Source: Opera.AI

The distinction between **"I"** and **"my behaviour"** is one that philosophers, psychologists, and religious thinkers have explored for centuries.

At first glance, they seem inseparable. After all, people know us largely through what we do. Our behaviour is what becomes visible to others.

Yet we often speak as if there is a difference:

- "I lost my temper."
- "That wasn't my best behaviour."
- "I behaved badly."
- "I acted out of character."

These expressions suggest that we experience ourselves as something more than any single action or pattern of actions.

One way to think about it is:

- **The "I"** is the subject—the one who experiences, chooses, reflects, remembers, and imagines.
- **Behaviour** is what that subject does or expresses in the world.

Behaviour can reveal aspects of a person, but it may not reveal everything. A kind person can act unkindly. A fearful person can act courageously. A generous person can have a selfish moment.

At the same time, behaviour is not irrelevant. If someone repeatedly behaves in a certain way, others will reasonably conclude that those behaviours tell them something important about the person. Over time, behaviour becomes part of character.

This creates a tension:

- If we identify completely with our behaviour, we may feel trapped by our past actions.
- If we separate ourselves completely from our behaviour, we risk avoiding responsibility for what we do.

A balanced view might be:

We are not reducible to our behaviour, but neither are we independent of it.

Our behaviour is one of the main ways our intentions, values, habits, and choices become visible. It does not exhaust who we are, but it is one of the clearest windows into who we are becoming.

That raises an interesting question: when you ask about "**I vs my behaviour**," are you wondering whether behaviour *defines* the self, or whether there is a deeper self that exists apart from behaviour? Those are related, but quite different, questions.

Does behaviour define the self, or is there a deeper self that exists apart from behaviour?

This is one of the enduring questions about human identity.

There are broadly two ways of answering it.

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