

Mindful Monday Moment – Week #2

Doing vs Being – An Explanation

1. The Core Definition of Doing: Action and Execution

At its most fundamental level, "doing" is the act of engaging in an activity. It's the opposite of inaction or passivity. It involves the expenditure of energy, whether physical or mental, to bring about a result. This can be as simple as:

- **Physical Action:** Running, eating, writing, building something.
- **Mental Action:** Thinking, planning, problem-solving, creating a new idea.
- **Verbal Action:** Speaking, singing, telling a story.

In this sense, "doing" is the bridge between a thought or intention and its manifestation in the real world.

2. "Doing" as a Process and an Outcome

"Doing" can refer to both the process itself and the completion of that process.

- **Process:** The continuous act of working on a task. For example, "I am doing my homework." This emphasises the ongoing nature of the activity.
- **Outcome:** The finished result of an action. For example, "The work is done." This indicates that the process is complete, and a state has been achieved.

3. "Doing" in Social and Relational Contexts

"Doing" also carries significant weight in how we interact with others.

- **Doing for Others:** Performing an act of service or kindness. This could be helping a friend move, cooking a meal for a family member, or offering a listening ear. This kind of "doing" is often tied to empathy and altruism.
- **Doing with Others:** Collaborative action. This involves working together towards a common goal, such as a team sport, a group project, or a community event. This "doing" is about shared effort and collective purpose.
- **Doing to Others:** This can have a negative connotation, referring to an action that affects someone else, often in a harmful way. For example, "What did he do to you?"

4. "Doing" in Philosophical and Existential Contexts

From a more philosophical perspective, "doing" is central to the human experience.

- **"Being" vs. "Doing":** This is a classic philosophical distinction. "Being" refers to one's fundamental existence or state of mind, while "doing" refers to one's actions and

contributions. The question of whether we are defined more by who we "are" or what we "do" is a recurring theme in philosophy and psychology.

- **Purpose and Meaning:** Many people find a sense of purpose and meaning through what they "do" their work, their hobbies, their contributions to society. "Doing" can be a way of leaving a mark on the world and fulfilling one's potential.
- **The "Doing" of Life:** This is a more abstract use of the term, referring to the activities and experiences that make up a person's life. "How are you doing?" is a common greeting that asks about a person's current situation and well-being.

5. Nuances and Idiomatic Expressions

The word "doing" is also used in many idiomatic expressions that add to its meaning.

- **"What's doing?":** A casual way of asking what is happening or what people are up to.
- **"Make a living doing...":** To earn money from a particular activity.
- **"Doing well/poorly":** An assessment of a person's health, financial situation, or performance.

In summary, a comprehensive definition of "doing" is a multi-faceted concept that encompasses:

- **The physical and mental execution of an action.**
- **The process of an activity and its completed outcome.**
- **The social and relational acts of helping, collaborating, or affecting others.**
- **The philosophical and existential quest for purpose and meaning through action.**

"Doing" is not merely an action; it's a dynamic and fundamental aspect of existence, communication, and self-expression.

Just as "doing" is a complex concept, "being" is even more so, especially in philosophy. It's not just the simple state of existing. It's a profound and multifaceted idea that has been at the core of philosophical inquiry for millennia. Here's a comprehensive definition, broken down into its key aspects:

1. The Core Meaning of Being: Existence and Reality

At its most basic, "being" refers to the state or fact of having objective reality. It's the opposite of non-existence or nothingness. When we say something "is," we are asserting its presence in the world, whether that presence is:

- **Physical:** A rock, a tree, a person.
- **Abstract:** A concept, a number, a thought.
- **Metaphysical:** The universe, a deity, a fundamental reality.

In this sense, "being" is the fundamental characteristic that all things share. It is the raw, unadulterated fact that something is, rather than not.

2. "Being" as Essence and Nature

Beyond mere existence, "being" can also refer to the **essence** or **nature** of something. This is what makes a thing what it is. For example, a tree's "being" isn't just that it exists; it's the sum of

its defining qualities its "tree-ness." This includes its physical properties (trunk, branches, leaves) and its function in the world.

This leads to a crucial philosophical distinction:

- **Being (uppercase 'B'):** The universal, abstract concept of existence itself. It's the very nature of reality that allows things to exist. Philosophers like Parmenides and Plato explored this idea, seeing it as an unchanging, singular, and eternal reality.
- **Being (lowercase 'b'):** The individual, specific entities that exist in the world. These are the instances of "Being," such as this tree, that person, or this idea.

3. "Being" vs. "Doing" (The Philosophical Distinction)

This is where the concept of "being" becomes most interesting and directly relates to your previous question.

- **Doing** is about action, performance, and what one produces or accomplishes. It is a state of active engagement.
- **Being** is about one's fundamental state, identity, and inner reality. It's about who or what one is, regardless of external actions.

The debate is whether a person is defined more by their "being" (their inherent character, values, and consciousness) or by their "doing" (their choices, actions, and contributions). Many philosophical traditions, from ancient Stoicism to Eastern thought, emphasise "being" over "doing," suggesting that inner peace and authenticity are more important than external accomplishments.

4. "Being" in Existentialism

Existentialism is a school of thought that places "being" at its absolute centre. For existentialists, the meaning of "being" is intimately tied to the human experience. They famously use the phrase **"existence precedes essence."** This means:

- Unlike a man-made object (like a hammer, which has a pre-determined purpose or essence), human beings are not born with a fixed nature or purpose.
- We are simply "thrown into existence" (a concept known as *thrownness*).
- Our "essence" who we are - is not given to us but is created through our choices, actions, and the meaning we choose to give our lives.

For existentialist philosophers like Martin Heidegger, the human being is a unique kind of "being" that is concerned with its own existence. He calls this *Dasein* (German for "being-there"). The key is that we don't just exist; we are aware of our existence, our temporality, and our finitude (our inevitable death). This awareness can lead to feelings of *angst* or dread, but it also gives us the absolute freedom and responsibility to create our own meaning.

5. Nuances and Everyday Usage

In everyday language, "being" also takes on different shades of meaning:

- **"How are you being?":** This often asks about a person's state of mind, their character, or their behaviour at a given moment.
- **"Being in the moment":** A common mindfulness practice that focuses on experiencing the present without judgment or distraction.

- **"A human being":** This phrase combines the idea of existence ("being") with the specific essence or nature of being human.

In summary, a comprehensive definition of "being" includes:

- **The fundamental fact of existence.**
- **The essence or inner nature of a thing.**
- **The philosophical distinction between one's inherent identity and one's actions.**
- **The profound, self-aware, and meaning-creating nature of human existence, as explored in existentialism.**

"Being" is therefore not a passive state but a dynamic and conscious process of existing and defining oneself.