I am going to talk about the relation that holds between individuals and what I will call here manifestations. The rough idea, which I am going to modify later is illustrated by the following example: Take a person, say John Smith. We see him before us today, in a chair in front of us. That would be one manifestation of John Smith. Likewise, the John Smith we saw yesterday sitting in another chair is another manifestation. This is of course not a new idea, and I am not sure to what extent the things I am going to say are very new or very original.

It seems that there is a whole family of relations that are roughly similar to the relation between individuals and their manifestations, and sometimes it is rather hard to tell what relation we actually have in a specific case. The closest parallel is the relation between a type and a token. From linguistics, we can take as examples phonemes as types of sounds and phones as token of sounds. For a more everyday example, take a daily newspaper, e.g. Dagens Nyheter. In this case, there are two type-token relations, first the relation between the newspaper and its issues, and second the relation between each issue and the copies of that issue. As a further example, we can mention a symphony as the type, and the individual performances of the symphony as the tokens. We can go further and find relations that are similar to the individual-manifestation relation or the type-token relation but which do not quite resemble them as much as they resemble each other, for instance, the relation between a class and the individuals that are members of that class, and the relation between an object and the parts of that object. Perhaps the last example is the most interesting here, since there are people who have wanted to reduce what I have referred to as the relation between individuals and manifestations to the relation between wholes and parts. So, for instance, Quine and others talk about objects as being extended in a four-dimensional time-space, so that the manifestation of John that we see before us right now is just a slice of John thought of as a four-dimensional object. I think this is a rather unnatural way of looking at it, although it may be rather difficult to see the difference between looking at the
John that we see before us as a part of the four-dimensional John or as a manifestation of an abstract underlying individual John. I am not quite sure what kind of criteria one could have for distinguishing these two alternatives, but I guess the main thing that makes the whole-part theory sound unnatural is that we feel that each manifestation of John is in some way “complete”, it represents all of him in some sense, although it is of course not the whole four-dimensional object Quine is thinking of. Similarly, we would not say that a phone is a “part” of a phoneme. So it seems that in this respect, the individual-manifestation relation resembles the type-token relation more than the whole-part relation.

An additional argument for making this distinction may be obtained from the fact that there are in fact different types of manifestations, and we would like to include some kinds of things under the concept of a manifestation that are clearly not parts. If we look at the verb to exist to begin with, it has been pointed out by many people that one has to distinguish between different “modes of existence”. It seems that one and the same individual can exist in different ways, and an individual may have one mode of existence at a certain time although it does not have another. Thus human beings can exist, on one hand, as persons (or perhaps better, agents) and as physical objects, on the other. One could argue that an individual may exist as a physical object at a time when he has already ceased to exist as a person, i.e. when he is dead. One could also claim that this is reflected in the possibility of using different kinds of predicates about persons and physical objects. For instance, one can predicate something like to be intelligent only of a person and not of a physical object, but on the other hand, one can only predicate something like to be heavy of a physical object. We can note that there are expressions in English and other languages like John’s person and John’s body, for which the following interpretations seem natural: John’s person would be equal to the “person” manifestations of John and John’s body would be equal to the “physical object” manifestations of John. Suppose that we are at John’s funeral: John died a few days ago. We cannot then say:

(1) John is intelligent.

Rather we have to use the past tense:

(2) John was intelligent.

On the other hand, we can still say:

(3) John is heavy.

(when carrying his corpse, for instance). So it is still possible to predicate things of John that are predicable of physical objects, although we cannot say anything of him as a person. So, exist as a person might be interpreted as “to have person manifestations”. Generally, “exist at t” would mean “to be manifested at t”. Under this hypothesis, “to exist” would not be defined if the mode of existence is not defined.

We can find other examples of “modes of existence”, or, if we like, “modes of manifestation”, although it is not always clear whether we are dealing with
manifestations in the proper sense. For instance, we could say that when a picture represents some individual, that individual has a manifestation in the picture. We thus get sentences such as:

(4) John is handsome on this picture.

which we would then interpret as “the manifestation of John on this picture is handsome”. Perhaps, however, we would need a new concept to describe these cases. I suggest that we call such manifestations “reflections”. In other words, when we see a picture of John we see a reflection of John rather than a manifestation in the proper sense. Anyway, there are many similarities between reflections and the manifestations we talked about earlier. Notice, however, that in the case of pictures, images, etc., it is very hard to talk about time-slices, in Quine’s sense: a picture of individual is hardly a time-slice of it. We might suggest that fictional characters, such as Donald Duck, are such objects that do not have any “real” manifestations (i.e. as physical objects or as persons) but only reflections. Of course, we could also say that in the case of Donald Duck we have a set of reflections that do not really reflect anything. More in passing we could also mention other kinds of reflections or, if we like, peripheral kinds of manifestations, such as when we think of authors as being manifested in their works. Cf. the following sentences:

(5) You cannot find Solzhenitsyn in Soviet libraries.

Clearly, (5) is ambiguous: between the following readings:

(6) (a) You cannot find any manifestations of S. as a physical person in Soviet libraries (because he has left the Soviet Union).

(b) You cannot find any works of S. in Soviet libraries (because they have been banned).

Both readings are true but the second is more natural than the first. Some other examples are:

(7) Chomsky is hard to read.

(8) John came out from his room with Wittgenstein in his hand.

Quine (1960, 173) argues that (9) is equivalent to (10):

(9) Tabby is eating mice at t.

(10) Tabby at t is eating mice.

where Tabby at t is a noun phrase that refers to a time-slice of Tabby (a cat). Geach (1972, 310) objects to this that eating is not something that you can predicate of time-slices, i.e. time-slices cannot be said to eat. So according to Geach, the temporal adverb would have to be interpreted as going with the whole sentence. Accordingly, Geach argues that we have no reason to postulate such strange entities as time-slices, and people who have talked of time-slices as
being distinct objects have misunderstood the whole thing. Geach may be right about the example in question, but it possible to choose other cases that are trickier for his position. Consider the verb compare, The object of compare must in general denote a set consisting of at least two objects. Thus, I can compare Geach and Quine, but I cannot just compare Geach. But consider now the following sentence:

(11) I am comparing Sweden of today and Sweden as it was in 1850.

The question is: what am I comparing in (11) if we are not allowed to talk about time-slices or manifestations?

Another perhaps not very conclusive argument can be obtained from the fact that you can refer to two manifestations of the same individual using the plural, for instance:

(12) I compared the John I saw before me with the John I had known in my childhood, and I found that they were quite different.

So far I have been talking about manifestations as if it were well-defined what is a manifestation and what is not. Now I shall now that this is not the case. Suppose we take an example of the type-token relation such as the relation between a phoneme and its phones. If we take a word like /kik/, there is no doubt how many tokens of the phoneme /k/ it contains: it is easy to determine that there are two. Similarly, I can pick up any book and say about it that contains such and such a number of tokens of the grapheme a. or of such-and-such a word, or of any linguistic entity, and the verification of my statement meets with no serious problems. In other words, it is usually quite easy to count tokens. On the other hand, when we talk about manifestations of individuals, counting is much more difficult. Earlier, I used locutions like “here is one manifestation of John and yesterday we had another” but suppose I ask “How many manifestations have there been of John during the last two minutes?” Such a question does not seem to have a very good answer, unless we suppose that there have been infinitely many. Then, however, it follows that a noun phrase such as the John of today would not refer to one manifestation but rather to an infinite number of manifestations. In general, we find that the entities we need seem to be such infinite sets of manifestations rather than individual manifestations. Obviously, these sets will be subsets of the total set of manifestations of some individual. I shall assume that each such subset corresponds to an object that I shall call a “subindividual”. I shall leave open the question whether subindividuals can be reduced to sets of manifestations or not – a metaphysical problem which seems to have no bearing on what I am going to say. The relation between individuals, manifestations and subindividuals can now be said to be analogous to the relation between e.g. phonemes, phones, and allophones, where allophones are “subtypes” of sounds.

Suppose we want to talk about a certain subindividual a. There are at least two different ways of defining a: the first is to specify the contexts in which a occurs, e.g. to say that we want to talk about the subindividual that corresponds
to the manifestations that appear during a certain period of time. In this case, we get something that very much resembles a “time-slice”. The second way that I want to mention is the following: we can pick out all the manifestations of a given individual that have a certain property and thus obtain the subindividual that corresponds to that set of manifestations. There is a standard linguistic device for picking out a subindividual: the word as in English (or corresponding words in other languages). Most frequently as works according to the second principle: it picks out a subindividual with a certain property, e.g. John as a teacher, but it can also (perhaps only secondarily) pick out a time-restricted subindividual, as in John as a child.

The second way of picking out a subindividual has usually been talked of as “picking out an aspect of an individual”. In such contexts, people have also used locutions like “referring under a description”. For instance, iii the classical case of the Morning Star and the Evening Star, it has been said that the Morning Star refers to an aspect of Venus or to Venus under a certain description (“appears in the morning”). I do not know whether there are any significant differences between my way of looking at these problems (in terms of “subindividu als”) and the theories that have been formulated using these concepts, but there may well be. There might also be some important difference between the time-slice like subindividu als and the aspect-like ones, but it can at least be noted that it is not always clear whether we are dealing with one or the other. For instance, the Morning Star could be considered an “aspect” of Venus, but we could also look at it as a disconnected set of time-slices of the four-dimensional object Venus, to use Quine’s terminology.1

I shall now discuss a few linguistic phenomena that seem to be connected with the problems I have talked about. I have already mentioned the word as. We can note that as can occur in different positions and slightly different functions. Consider for instance (13).

(13) As a child, John had curly hair.

In (13), we define a subindividual of John and say something about this subindividual, so the as-phrase could be said to be in topic position. In (14)

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1 The following sentence is ambiguous in a way that suggests that there are indeed differences between the two types of subindividu als:

(i) As a general, Smith was a failure
(ii) can be interpreted either as (i) or as (iii).
(iii) When he was a general, Smith was a failure.

In (i), we talk about a “time-slice” of Smith, in (iii), about an “aspect” of him. Possibly this ambiguity is related to the ambiguity in the verb be which is discussed below (“be a subindividual of” vs. “play the role of”) (This was suggested by Nils-Erik Enkvist).
(14) John returned as an old man.

the as-phrase is in focus position; it tells us what the subindividual of John that returned was like.

There is a phenomenon which has been called “false pasts” (Lakoff 1970). Consider e.g. (15).

(15) The animal you saw was a chipmunk.

The remarkable thing about this sentence is that although the past tense is used, the animal in question is in all plausibility still a chipmunk when the sentence is uttered. Lakoff gives the following explanation of the phenomenon: “in the mind of the speaker, the chipmunk has made its appearance and gone, and is no longer relevant. It is no longer in view, and the speaker is no longer conscious of its existence.” I think this formulation is rather strange if you look at it, at least if you take it literally, especially in view of the fact that the sentence that Lakoff actually gives is the following:

(16) The animal you saw was a chipmunk – see there he is running up a tree.

This seems to contradict what Lakoff said, namely that the chipmunk is no longer in view, and that the speaker is not conscious of its existence. Although it is possible that Lakoff meant the sentence to be interpreted in such a way that the first clause is said while the chipmunk is hidden from the speaker, I think it is clear that this is not necessary for the acceptability of the sentence.

I shall now attempt to give another explanation of the false pasts (which is in essence a reformulation of what I said on this topic in Dahl (1971)). I want to claim that using a false past when predicating something about an individual which is defined by a definite description one is actually referring only to the subindividual for which the description holds, i.e. in the case in question, to the chipmunk “as you saw it”. Cf. a minimal pair such as

(17) The man I talked to was an Englishman.

(18) The man I talked to is an Englishman.

The second (as Lakoff points out) is natural only if the speaker knows the person he is talking about from some other context – i.e. it is not the first time the speaker talks to him or sees him. It seems to me that this fits in with the claim that using the past tense one restricts oneself to a subindividual – a subindividual that existed only in the past. The use of the past in such contexts would then be a special case of the general rule that if you say something about an individual that existed only in the past, you use the past tense, as in (19).

(19) Winston Churchill was an Englishman.

I shall now discuss the verb (or copula) be, mainly as it appears in sentences of the type NP1 is (was) NP2 where both noun phrases are definite, e.g. the classical example (20).
The Morning Star is Venus.

It has been rightly pointed out that such sentences are much less frequent in everyday language than in philosophical textbooks. I shall return to this problem later.

The standard theory for such constructions is that *be* expresses identity, i.e. is synonymous to *be identical to*. My claim is that this is not generally true, rather *be* in the contexts in question expresses the relation that holds between two objects just in case the first is a subindividual of the second, in other words, the manifestations of the first are included (not necessarily properly) in the manifestations of the second. This definition includes the case when the two objects are identical (since the manifestations of the first object are then a non-proper subset of the manifestations of the second).

My claim implies that *be* is in principle asymmetric. Some empirical support for this may be obtained from people’s judgments about the degree of acceptability or naturalness of sentences such as the following:

1. The Morning Star is Venus (reasonably normal)
2. The Morning Star is the Evening Star (considerably less natural)
3. Venus is the Morning Star (even worse)

If we suppose that *the Morning Star* and *the Evening Star* refer to subindivduals of Venus, only the first sentence would be true, since the subindividual relation would hold between the Morning Star and Venus but not between the Morning Star and the Evening Star or between Venus (as the first argument of the relation) and the Morning Star (as the second argument of the relation). There is a problem here, though. Some of you will probably not agree with my judgments concerning (21-23), you will judge them all as grammatical and true. And in any case, these sentences have been used as examples by many philosophers and even by linguists; they do not seem to have found anything wrong with them. How are we to explain this?

As I said before, lots of people have been talking about things like “referring under a description” or “talking about an object from a certain perspective” and so on, and have said for instance that the Morning Star refers to Venus as seen in the morning. I think that such an unqualified statement is too simple. Rather, we are dealing with a systematic ambiguity, which is due to a principle which I am now going to formulate:

4. If a name *n* of an individual *a* is used or has customarily been used only in certain contexts, e.g., during a certain period of time, *a* can be understood as a name of the subindividual of *a* which occurs exactly in those contexts.

Here is an example to explain (24): The city of Leningrad has had several names (*Petersburg, Petrograd, Leningrad*). What the principle says is that since e.g. *Petrograd* was the name of the city from 1914-to 1924, Petrograd can be used as a
name of the subindividual defined by that period,” in Quinean terms, the slice of the four-dimensional object that is Leningrad between 1914 and 1922. (It is important to understand here the difference between “during the period a, n was the name of the individual a” (i.e. n was used during that period) and “n is the name of the subindividual! of a that is defined by the period a.”) Thus, (24) enables us to say things like (25).

(25) Leningrad is a larger city than Petrograd (was).

If we take the Morning Star and the Evening Star to be ambiguous, as they should be according to the principle I have stated, namely as referring either to a subindividual of Venus or to Venus itself, the sentence (22) is four ways ambiguous, and some of these interpretations are true (to be more exact, two of them). For instance, if we interpret both the noun phrases as referring to Venus itself the sentence will come out true. But, on the other hand, if the NPs refer to different subindividual of Venus, the sentence is false*. However, something else is true, namely what is stated in (26):

(26) The Morning Star is the same planet as the Evening Star

This is in fact the normal construction when we want to make a statement of identity, namely "X is the same Y as Z".

Geach (1972) presents a theory of “relative identity”, according to which one cannot simply say that something is identical to something, but rather one must say that something is the same X as something, where X is some common noun. One cannot say that the Morning Star is the same as the Evening Star, one must say that it is the same planet as the Evening Star. We can connect Geach’s theory with what we have said earlier if we assume that the common noun X determines what kind of objects identity is defined for, more specifically it determines (among other things) whether the objects are individuals (or e.g. types), subindividuals or manifestations (or tokens). Cf.

(27) This is the same phone as that.

(28) This is the same phoneme as that.

These two sentences may have different truth-values, although this and that may be the same entities in both.

We can compare the construction “X is the same Y as Z” to syntactically similar sentences such as (29).

(29) John loves the same girl as Bill.

which seems to mean “The girl John loves is identical to the girl Bill loves”. If we interpret (26) in the same way, we get (30).

(30) The planet that the Morning Star is identical to the planet that the Evening Star is.

One thing that we should note here is that the meaning of identity does not come by the word be but rather by the word same.
Sometimes, *be* has a temporally restricted meaning. In the sentences above, no such restrictions were necessary, but consider (31).

(31) Mr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde.

As you remember from the story, Dr. Jekyll was sometimes manifested as a very evil figure, viz. Mr. Hyde. So the natural way of looking at the situation is that Dr. Jekyll is the underlying individual and Mr. Hyde is a subindividual of him. Therefore, if you compare the sentences (31) and (32),

(32) Mr. Hyde is Dr. Jekyll.

seems to be much more naturally interpreted as true, whereas (31) seems false if it is not read as containing an implicit temporal restriction, say

(33) Dr. Jekyll is now Mr. Hyde, so please keep indoors.

(33) may well be a true statement, provided that it is spoken at a moment when Dr. Jekyll has a manifestation which belongs to the subindividual Mr. Hyde. So when we have the temporally restricted cases, we have to say that \( NP_1 \) is \( NP_2 \) at \( t \) means something like "\( NP_1 \) at \( t \), i.e. the subindividual which manifests \( NP_1 \), at \( t \) is a subindividual of \( NP_2 \)."

Not all sentences of the form \( NP_1 \) is (was) \( NP_2 \) can be interpreted in the way I have suggested above. Cf. the following sentence.

(34) Laurence Olivier was Hamlet.

In this case, *be* seems to have the meaning “play the role of” or “have the function of”. In Russian, sentences like (35) – the translation of (34) differ morphologically from seemingly similar sentences such as (36).²

(35) I.O. byl Gamletom.

(36) Ėtot čelovek byl Petr. "This man was Peter"

The predicate NP in (35) takes the instrumental case, whereas the corresponding NP in (36) takes the nominative. Notice that the instrumental case is normal (at least in the past tense) when the predicate NP is a definite description, e.g.

(37) Ivanov byl načal'nikom ětogo učreždenija “Ivanov was the head of this institution”

Also in this case, a paraphrase with “had the function of” seems natural. This suggests that there are at least two main types of \( NP_1 \) is (was) \( NP_2 \) sentences, neither of which express identity.³

² In Finnish, the essive case is used in a similar way (I am indebted to Nils-Erik Enkvist for drawing my attention to this.)

³ Geach (1962) uses similar examples from Polish to argue that some cases of *be* are asymmetric. Pettersson (1972) ascribes the opposition between nominative and instrumental in Russian partly to the distinction between “function” and “class”.

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References


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