Yixuan Huang Topic 1

For Sartre, the situation of looking at between people has a special philosophical significance. By describing how he is caught peeking through a keyhole, Sartre explains how this “looking at” happens between himself and others occurred. When we find ourselves are being others look at, we will focus on ourselves, and everything we do. As soon as we are in this state of self-reflection, self-consciousness will separate from self; we can be shamed as our freedom escapes us in order to become a given object (p. 350). We finally become objects of others and owned by others which means that the self no longer exists but change to an object in the world. Sartre considers that the 'other' robs me of my freedom through looking at me, and thus, he supposes that hell is other people.

Since I disagree with Sartre’s arguments, I will not provide my own example, instead, I will post several questions to challenge his opinions. Whatever example he mentioned above, if I were a bold person, I could never feel shame, even if I were caught out doing something embarrassing. Does it mean that others will never rob me of my freedom? So why cannot we just describe Sartre’s behavior as shy? Besides, how do you know that you get caught out doing something embarrassing?

Moreover, in the example of peering through a keyhole, Sartre says that but all of a sudden, he hears footsteps in the hall, and someone is looking at him (p. 349). I want to suppose that I peer through a keyhole, and every precondition is the same as Sartre’s descriptions. However, this time, someone takes a piece of mirror and walks to the door. Then he holds the mirror in front of the hole, so that I can see my eyes in the mirror, but since I do know someone walks to the door, and do not know those are my eyes, I may still get the conclusion that someone robs my freedom. However, this “robber” is me! How can I rob my own freedom? I think this is a serious problem which Sartre does not realize.

Besides, if I can be caught out doing something by the “other” only through my feelings, such as hearing, seeing, touching, and so on, how can the disabled realize that he or she is caught out doing something, and thus his or her freedom is robbed by the “other”? Supposing a blind who is also a deaf is trying to read his roommate’s diary. I know that it sounds absurd, but it is not absolutely impossible. Since he cannot hear when his roommate let him put down the diary, does it mean that this person will never realize that he gets caught out?

Above all, I consider that we can be free from the gaze of the other, and there are some special situations which Sartre does not answer them perfectly. I think that Sartre’s arguments have several problems because of these special conditions. However, the one thing I should admit is that his arguments are constructive.