CHAPTER III

MAN: SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE LOOK

“The for—itself,” according to Sartre, “is separated from it’s self in three successive ekstasis;”¹ (“Ekstasis. Used in the original Greek sense of “standing out from”)² (1) Temporality (2) Reflection and (3) Being-for-Others. The concept of ekstasis is vital in Sartrean philosophy and the three ekstasis, it is practically agreed, can best be explained in Sartre’s terminology. So in order to make the point clear I would explain it by citing from Sartre’s own work Being and Nothingness. In the previous two chapters, the two ekstasis, viz., Temporality and Reflection in which, in Sartre’s own terminology, “The for-itself nihilates the in-itself (to which in one sense still belongs) in the three dimensions of past, present, and future” and “The for-itself tries to adopt an external point of view on itself”³ respectively, have already been discussed. In this chapter I shall discuss the third ekstasis, viz., Being-for-Others in which “The for—itself discovers that it has a self for—the–Other, a self which it is without ever being able to know or get hold of it.”⁴

I have already discussed that being-for—itself or in other words, human consciousness, is different from being-in—itself by means of negation or to be more precise by means of nothingness which comes in the world by his ability to ask questions and receive negative answers. It is through nothingness, which originates with and constantly accompanies
the human being, he experiences, comprehends and acts upon himself and structures the world. The being-for-itself is always conscious of something so that he always goes beyond himself to reach out to the world, to be related to the world and thus transcends himself. He “naughts” any given datum and is a free projection towards his possibilities. “By bringing Nothingness into the world the for—itself can stand out from Being and judge other beings by knowing what it is not. Each for—itself is the nihilation of a particular being.”

3.1 Self—Consciousness: Other, Body, Space and Time

Though the being-or-itself is always conscious of something, so that he is always outside himself, transcends himself but it is only through the existence of Others that for-itself becomes self-conscious. In other words our self-consciousness is basically acknowledgement of the existence of other persons and our being-for-Others is a necessary condition for the development of our self—consciousness, our being-for—ourselves or as Sartre puts it, “Thus the look is first an intermediary which refers from me to myself.” Our ‘primitive’ experience of our world presupposes our belief into the existence of Others. So it is necessary to discuss about our being-for-Others and their ‘Look’ (Here it must be remembered that ‘Look’ is being used in existential sense and not as it is used in ordinary parlance,) through which the for—itself becomes self-conscious and becomes conscious of an outside. When the for-itself becomes self—conscious he
also becomes conscious of space, time, and of his body. “I must apprehend the Other first as the one for whom I exist as an object.... The Other exists for me first and I apprehend him in his body subsequently.” It is also necessary to explain how each expansion of for-itself’s knowledge brings the possibility of determinism, e.g., world, Others. But Sartre has observed that this objectification by the Other does not necessarily constrain the process of becoming a pour-soi. So I shall discuss subsequently how the pour-soi struggles to regain its subjectivity by a ‘look’ to the Other and thereby makes the other an object.

The Other by its look brings a sudden and essential modification within the for-itself, that is, the individual turns into an object, a thing—in—itself. For the Other, who is also a consciousness and freedom, through its ‘look’ makes the being-or-itself by ceasing all his possibilities and transcendence, because he imposes on him certain characteristics and places the individual within a fixed time and space. Thus by the Other’s look an individual ceases his surpassing power and he cannot project himself towards new possibilities. “Here I am ---Jew , or Aryan, handsome or ugly one—armed etc. all this I am for the Other with no hope of apprehending this meaning which I have outside and, still more important, with no hope of changing it” This is the original fall for the for-itself as it ceases its power of transcendence as well as freedom. As Sartre writes, “My original fall is the existence of the Other.” Accordingly to
Sartre, the inert world, that is, the thing-in-itself is not an obstacle to human freedom, rather it is Other’s freedom which stands as an obstacle to for-itself’s freedom. This look is a threat for those who intend to live an authentic life, for the for-itself begins to realize that his being has been determined and there is no new possibility to surpass the present situation. “what I apprehend immediately when I hear the branches crackling behind me is not that there is someone there, it is that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I cannot in any case escape from space in which I am without defence- in short, that I am seen”\textsuperscript{10} These threats can be overcome through freedom and every assertion of freedom enriches the human being. Man is free to treat a threat as a new possibility or as a constraint. So if man finds himself determined he is responsible for this. He is not responsible for the source of the threat but for his attitudes towards the threat. It is man’s attitude that makes an event a threat, a constraint or an aid to further action. In his novel The Reprieve, we find reflection of this view. In a letter to Mathieu, Daniel writes, “What anguish to discover that look as a universal medium from which I can’t escape. But what a relief as well. I know at last that I am. I adopt for my use …..I need no longer bear the responsibility of my turbid and disintegrating self; he who sees me causes me to be; I am as he sees me.”\textsuperscript{11} Thus the look of the Other produces not only anguish but also a sense of relief in the for-itself.
According to Sartre, my own apprehension of my own existence is so structured that it presupposes the existence of other consciousness beings. Just as for-itself is the only possible venture of the in –itself, the "existence of being" constitutes the "individual venture" of the for-itself. The existence of Other makes me conscious of my having an outside as not being a mere subject, but as a consciousness as I see myself. "Thus the man who discovers himself directly in the cogito also discovers all the others, and discovers them as the condition of his own existence. He recognizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which one says one is spiritual, or that one is wicked or jealous) unless other recognizes him as such. I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself. Under these conditions, the intimate discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as a freedom which confronts mine, and which cannot think or will without doing so either for or against me. Thus, at once, we find ourselves in a world which is, let us say, that of "inter-subjectivity." It is in this world that man has to decide what he is and what others are." By realizing that there are others, I have a nature. For this to be possible, of course, I need not be acted upon or judged by the other. Even if the other does not impose his categories on me his very being makes me conscious of an outside. In other words my self-consciousness
is developed only through other's gaze. Just as another person will not face me as a "structure" but as a concrete individual, so I as a subject encountering another person cannot be taken as a "structure" either. It is the apprehension of myself that I become conscious of the other as also a self.

The concern for being-for-others is captured by other French existentialists as well. De Beauvoir in *Ethics of Ambiguity* tells us, "the individual defines himself only by his relation to the world and to other individuals." Merleau Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception* says, "The For-Themselves, me for myself and the other for himself –must stand out against a background of For Others--I for the Other and the Other for me. My life must have a significance which I do not constitute; there must strictly speaking be an intersubjectivity." According to Sartre people are not things or objects and that is the reason that the relation with other people is a very different kind of relation than my relations with things and naturally other people are experienced by me in a manner totally different from any other experiences of object. In the same manner Merleau Ponty says, "We are involved in the world and with others in an inextricable tangle." The other person is interesting to me on two accounts: to the extent that he reflects myself, that is to say, to the extent to which I am an object to him and to the extent to which he is an object to me. The other as subject is not only the one capable of perceiving the
same objects as me, he is first and foremost the one capable of making me the object of a look: "(My) fundamental connection with the Other—as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of being seen by the Other."  

Since I am an object only in so far as I exist for the other person I have to obtain from that other person the acknowledgement of my being. I need the Other in order to realize fully the structures of my being "I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of the another." 

The for-itself refers to the for-others. Thus my being-for-myself as a self consciousness being depends on my being-for-others. When the other looks at me I realize that I have self-for-others. In many of Sartre’s novels and plays we find reflection of this view that our conception of ourselves depends on what others think of us. In St. Genet, it is the look of an adult ‘catching’ ten-year-old Jean that moves him to think of himself as a thief and a pervert. Genet made into a ‘thief’ by watching eyes that catch him red–handed. "A voice declares publicly: “You are a thief.” The child is ten years old. “This Look makes Genet ‘unrealizable to himself.’ He repeats the magic word: “Thief! I’m a thief! He even looks at himself in the mirror, even talks to himself as to someone else: “You are a thief.” Is he going to see himself, to feel a bitter, feverish taste, the taste for crime that he gives off for others, is he at last going to feel his being? Nothing changes: a child scowls at his own reflection, that is all......" 

In No Exit
Inez teases Estelle, "suppose I covered my eyes and refused to look at you, all that loveliness of yours would be washed on the desert air." And Estelle says of herself, after finding that there is no mirror in the room in Hell, "I feel so queer (she pats herself.) Don't you ever feel that way too? When I can’t see myself I begin to wonder if I really exist. I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn’t help." Similarly, in The Reprieve Daniel says, "'I think therefore I am,' which used to trouble me so sorely, for the more I thought the less I seemed to be; and I say, 'I am seen, therefore I am' .....He who sees me causes me to be; I am as he sees me.' In Nausea I myself , if he saws me –But I was transparent to his gaze."

"The Other intuits Me, I do not intuit this Me, I apprehend this Me." This Me is my being-for-others. This Me is not my for-itself nor is it the Other’s for-itself. So this Me is produced by a double negation and acts as a differentiation between two beings-for-themselves without which the two beings-for-themselves would merge and there would be no distinction. This Me is a consciousness which limits the I from the you. "The other through whom this Me comes to me is neither knowledge nor category but the fact of a strange freedom." So man’s freedom cannot float free of its connection to other individuals as being completely isolated from the interpersonal world. In Existentialism and Humanism Sartre says "We will freedom for freedom’s sake, and in and through particular circumstances. And in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely upon the
freedom of others and that the freedom of others depends upon our own. Obviously, freedom as the definition of man does not depend upon others, but as soon as there is a commitment, I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time of mine." When the other looks at me, I experience that I have a self-for-others but I am never able to know this self intimately, since it does not originate from my consciousness but from the consciousness of others. So far as I live it, it is unknown and unknowable to me, and it is only through the existence of other that I arrive at my bodily self-consciousness. The existence of my own body is, therefore, of a new type, neither in-itself, nor for-itself but for-others." To study the way in which my body appears to the Other or the way in which the Other’s body appears to me amounts to the same thing....the structures of my being-for-the-Other are identical to those of the Other’s being—for—me." Further, through the existence of other the for-itself enters into objective domain of space and time.

3.2 Shame, fear and Pride as Original Reactions

Man exhibits patterns of behaviour, such as shame, fear, pride, which imply others by referring to them. While we do not create physical objects by our look, our self—consciousness is created by other’s look. “Shame, fear and pride are my original reactions," which mark the relationship of consciousness to other consciousness. Just as nausea is a
means of self-recognition in contrast to the otherness of the inert, so shame, fear and pride are means of self-recognition in contrast to the otherness of the other. If my acknowledgement of myself as myself necessarily involves my acknowledgement of the existence of others, then how would I insist that others might not exist? If this is true, how could anyone insist that others may not exist? Be what it may about the reality of others, no human being would ever proclaim that others do not exist. The mode of my own being yielded by nausea is the for-itself, the mode yielded by feelings like shame, fear and pride is the for-others. Sartre writes, “The Other’s look makes me beyond my being in this world and puts me in the midst of the world which is at once this world and beyond this world.”31 In this context, we may note that Sartre’s contention about the origination of self-consciousness has a great similarity with that of Rabindranath Tagore as represented in his third poem of *Prantik*. What Rabindranath Tagore wants to say is that a man, when alone, has no fear; fear arises when he is among other people. (ekākir nāi bhaya, bhaya janatār mājhe) A man when alone, he has no shame (ekākir kono lajjā nāi). One’s feeling of shame presupposes the truth of “Being-seen- by the other” (Lajjā sudhu yethā – sethā yār –tār chokher ingite)32

One’s feeling of shame presupposes that one’s body is accessible to other observer. The structure of shame is such that one feels shame before someone for his deeds and can not feel shame unless he believes
in the existence of others or in other words one is ashamed of oneself only in so far as one sees oneself being seen by the other. When one is performing a disgraceful act, for example, looking through a key-hole one is not self-conscious. “Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a key-hole. I am alone and on the level of non-theletic self-consciousness. This means first of all that there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them. They are in no way known; I am my acts ........I am a pure consciousness of things..... This means that behind that door a spectacle is presented as “to be seen,” a conversation as “to be heard.” The door, the keyhole are at once both instruments and obstacles.....”33 My self inhabits my consciousness when “But all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! What does this mean? It means that I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure—modifications which I can apprehend and fix conceptually by means of the reflective cogito.

First of all I now exist as myself for my unreflective consciousness. ........... I see myself because somebody sees me — as it is usually expressed....... Now the unreflective consciousness is a consciousness of the world. Therefore for the unreflective consciousness the self exists on the level of objects—in—the world; this role which developed only on the
reflective consciousness—the making-present of the self—belongs now to the unreflective consciousness. Only the reflective consciousness has the self directly for an object. The unreflective consciousness does not apprehend the person directly or as its object; the person is presented to consciousness insofar as the person is an object for the Other. This means that all of a sudden I am consciousness of myself as escaping myself, not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness but in that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other."

So in Sartre’s philosophy, "the content of shame is that I am an object and constituted as such by the other. I exist for him, and even for myself, as I exist for others, rather than as a pure spontaneity who ‘is not what he is’. And as an object, I depend in an ontological way upon a consciousness other than my own. The shame, in effect, concerns my solidification as an object of consciousness, and a loss or seeming loss of freedom. ‘I am somebody rather than nobody. I have acquired an identity I have not given myself.’ So in the end it is not just the way in which I might be for another consciousness that includes shame: it is rather the fact that I have a kind of existence that can appear to another consciousness however I may do so." In Being and Nothingness, Sartre describes in the same manner a consciousness in a state of jealousy which is totally devoid of am I. When a man is totally absorbed, compelled by jealousy, look through a keyhole, he is totally absorbed by his spying
activities and he is only a consciousness of the world. “My attitude ... is ... a pure mode of losing myself in the world, of causing myself to be drunk in by things as ink is by a blotter ....”

Similarly as opposed to anguish, which is the definite structure of human consciousness and arises with the recognition of one’s freedom, fear has nothing to do with for-itself. It arises from for-itself’s confrontation with those unknown circumstances, which might come to him from without. In anguish man becomes conscious of his freedom and is a free agent to choose from the various interpretations which interpretation he will actualize, according to his own choice, whereas the situation which provokes fear arises when he apprehends threats from other people or dangers from things. Fear denies the freedom of choice, which is the condition of human consciousness and places for—itself in a kind of determination, where all the possibilities of any situation are presented to him not as an interpretation but as facts. It restricts all his freedom and responsibility and reduces for—itself from a structured being into a concrete being. So feeling of fear is also a proof for the existence of others.

Pride is a feeling where for-itself can esteem himself in a more excessive way, by the appearance of the other. A man can be proud of something and before someone. Unless he believes in the existence of other his feeling of pride becomes meaningless. Shame and pride are not
merely feeling or sensation but need evaluation of the situation and this evaluation is possible through the look of an other. 

Apparently pride may seem to be a category apart from shame and fear because shame and fear symbolize defeat and pride ordinarily symbolizes freedom through victory. Sartre reminds us that all the three attitudes are reactions to others and are a result of being reduced to thing-hood. They stand in the way of man’s freedom, which is expressed by being what he is not. Shame, fear and pride reduce man to what he is through definitions. Sartre holds that it is through the other’s look there arises in for—itself a new dimension of being in which his own self is presented as an object to the other, “……the other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me. I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the other. 

By the mere appearance of the other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the other.”37 For-itself needs the totality of others in order to be himself, just as he needs the Facticity of the in-itself in order to be for-itself, the concept of ‘detotalization’ ( The term ‘detotalization’ is an existential term and the series to which it belongs consists of ‘totalization’, ‘de-totalization’ and re-totalization.) is well explained in the following lines quoted from Peter Caws, “ the for-others is one of the modes in which the for-itself appear; all the Others, for each for-itself form a totality, but it is
what Sartre calls a ‘detotalized totality’ because there is no independent point of view from which all the subjectivities can be seen as cohering; all of them combine to characterize each in its modes as for-Others, but this totalizing is done afresh from each vantage point and does not confer any objective totality upon the whole."³⁸

3.3 ME and the Other’s Look

My fundamental relation to the other person is determined by the permanent possibility of being seen by him. Through this permanent possibility of other’s look I am turned into an object to him and the other’s self is a subject. The other faces me in his look as object. To quote Sartre, “......... Other can be defined only by a total organization of the world and that he is the key to this organization....... Other–as–object is nothing but a center of autonomous and intra-mundane reference in my world.”³⁹ Being-for-Others in this sense is the very conditions of my being. In Sartre’s famous play, No Exit, a female character Estelle says, “I feel so queer, (she pats herself) Don’t you ever feel that way too? When I cannot see myself I begin to wonder if I really exist. I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn’t help.’’ Further she says, ‘’ When I used to talk with people, I always made sure there was one nearby in which I could look at myself. I talked, I saw myself, talking, I saw myself as others saw me _that kept me awake.’’⁴⁰ The permanent structure of my being-for-others is to be in danger, this is
the danger of losing my freedom to the other’s freedom. In No Exit Inez teases Estelle, “And what keeps you from “taming” me? (They look at each other, Estelle smiles, with a sort of fascination)…..Suppose the mirror started telling lies? Or suppose I shut my eyes, and refused to look at you, what could you do with all that loveliness of yours? Don’t be afraid, I can’t help looking at you. I shan’t look away. And I’ll be nice to you, ever so nice. Only you must be friendly, too.”41 My world, which had been immediate to me and distance-less becomes integrated in the light of my experience into the other’s world and his possible projects. “……….. The alienation of myself which is the act of being-looked-at, involves the alienation of the world which I organize.”42 I experience myself situated in an objective world where all my possibilities have been ruled out. With the other’s look the ‘situation’ escapes me, i.e. I am no longer master of the situation.

Seen from the opposite direction as soon as I see the other’s freedom, the freedom ceases to exist, it becomes an object, because one’s freedom can not be known by another. Freedom is an intimate consciousness which one has as-a-being-for-itself and it can not be found in any other mode of being.

When we perceive the world we are free to look at it as we please. But when we are looked at by others and are consciousness of being looked at then the observer’s look becomes pre-dominant and our
freedom goes into the background and we become vulnerable. If we succumb to this look then we become determined. I am virtually reduced to a thing-in-itself through my bad faith. Allowing myself to be reduced in such a manner is a result of my choice. It is entirely up to us to decide whether we are going to treat the other’s look as the final interpretation of myself. We are free either to allow ourselves or not to allow ourselves to be defined in spite of feeling vulnerable. The passage from being vulnerable to being defined is a deductive one, if we forget our original freedom. We begin to live according to the look imposed by others not know the look of others. Knowledge implies freedom, but since our freedom is in the background, knowledge is not possible. To live without knowledge is to be in bad faith. Here it would be worthwhile to remember that Sartre uses knowledge in a restricted sense. Uninterpreted data collection does not give rise to knowledge. Knowledge, by definition, must be true. So when one accepts other’s interpretation, point of view or imposition without intervening through one’s own freedom, the type of cognitive situation that results will not be entertained as knowledge in Sartrean philosophy. Thus in the presence of the world or in the presence of other persons we may gather information but that could not be equated with knowledge. At this point it will be relevant to remark that there cannot be a computer simulation of human knowledge. This sort of living is what we experience in shame or pride as reaction to looks. Thus my transcendence is
transcended by other’s look and by succumbing to this look I try to escape the fact that I am free and start living according to the definitions given by others. So I cannot at the same time look and being looked at, because I cannot at the same time assert my possibilities and conform to other’s look.

Sartre raises the question: Supposing the origin of the look does not exist, i.e., supposing it was an illusion, could we also say the resulting feeling of shame thus becomes false? That is, if we have the feeling of shame and later discover the other which caused the shame, does it show that the shame also is false and the resulting situatedness of the being-for-itself is also a pseudo question? Sartre says, ‘no’. The objectiveness or facticity of other is not necessary to establish shame, real shame in the for-itself; other-as-object may appear to me as a probable other; while my relationship to him as subject is apodeictic. The objectification of me by the other is no error, for I remain affected by the other in any case. The other may in fact be absent. My shame is a reaction to the consciousness or freedom of other. We must remember that like me the other consists of a being-in-itself or facticity (Body) and a being-for-itself. The being-in-itself in the external world guarantees existence. To say the look, which was experienced, was actually non-existent implies that the other’s facticity or being-in-itself was non-existence. But the non-existence of the Other does not nullify my
experience of being looked at. My experience of being looked at does not necessarily depend on the activity of the other or on the being-in-itself of the other. So even if the other is not where it is experienced still there are others. The physical presence of an other is not prerequisite for a look. A slight movement of the curtain or the creaking of a branch may create a situation in which I, for example, am left with an impression of being spied upon. And in which I feel I am the object of a look. Even if I do not direct my attention at the eyes of the one looking at me, I am under the impression of being looked at. “The Other’s look hides his eyes; he seems to go in front of them.”

The very possibility of an other-consciousness is quite enough for me to achieve a sense of my object hood. It is an absolute boundary on my world and thus a limitation on me. As Sartre says, “...... I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am pure reference to the other.” From this it should not be inferred that the other’s look originate from a disembodied persons. What Sartre means is that though the look may not at present be traced to a spatiotemporal locus but since in previous occasions we have experienced located looks the present consciousness reaction of being looked at may be entirely in place. The absence of the agent of the look does not falsify the consciousness of being looked at. One may rightfully react in pride, shame or fear without
really being looked at. Such reaction should not be regarded as solipsistic or as erroneous knowledge.

There are then other causes of my feeling of shame. So in case of my experience of shame there will exist another subject, though the particular one I have assumed may be non-existent. I am always in relation to an indefinite other, and the particular instances of my feeling of shame, fear and pride are only a concrete version of this relation. “The fact of being-looked-at cannot therefore depend on the object which manifests the look.” I have definite reactions of pride, shame and fear, which result from definite experiences of expected others. But it depends on which other subject other I am expecting. Any possible expectation would fail to bring about definite reaction in me unless and until those possibilities were envisaged by me. Unanticipated possible experience could never produce definite reaction in me. But the reactions of pride, shame, etc. are definite deterrents to my freedom. Had they been vague reactions, they would only vaguely curb my freedom, whereas in reality it is through these reactions, that I lose all freedom and consequently I am defeated in the conflict with others. The defeat does not come about after a simultaneous assertion of freedom by both individuals involved. On the contrary, the non-operation of one’s freedom makes room for the determinism imposed by the other.
At first the other person appears as a mere being-in-itself which is nothing but what it is, coincides with itself and is not subject to any becoming, change and temporality in the mode of utter contingency and determination. It is only through his gaze that the other person reveals himself to me as a being-for-itself. This being-for-itself, as I have already mentioned is a human consciousness, is nihilation of a particular being, is a free subject which is always in a position of creating its own existence and is able to transcend all prior given data to actualize his possibilities, according to his own preference. On the other hand, it is through his gaze that the other person can transcended me. When I am thus transcended, my being-for-itself changes into a being-in-itself, where I, who am a free subject to create my world, am turned into a solidified determined object. When I am thus determined, my freedom and transcendence are enslaved and all my possibilities are collapsed. In the same manner when the other people are transcended by my look they are reduced to the status of thing-in-itself and in that case I get my freedom back. The project other entertains as his possibilities assume object-status within my world. The look of mine makes him an object, i.e. “I recognize his transcendence, but I recognize it not as a transcendence transcending, but as a transcendence transcended.” Being-for-others is a constant conflict or struggle between two transcendences both of which try to transcend
each other or define each other as a fixed self by their look. “Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others.”

When I am situated through the gaze of other, I am evaluated and judged through other’s look. “The other is the hidden death of my possibilities in so far as I live that death as hidden in the midst of the world.” So my experience of myself is inseparable from the totality of other’s existence. The other’s existence causes my experience of being looked at. “In relation to this intrusive ‘other’ I can adopt either of two courses of action. I can try to dominate it and suppress its transcendence by which my own is threatened, or I can try to make myself into an object to be dominated by the liberty of the other person. In either case, I am destined to fail because I must recognize my liberty (or that of the other) in order to suppress it.”

Thus the gaze of the other person makes us slaves and looking at the other person we are masters of the situation. So the essence of human relations, Sartre says, is a constant conflict; it is not a conflict between two bloodless categories; but it is a real conflict between two beings-for-themselves, where each-for-itself tries to be the foundations of his own being, i.e., the essence of his own being, but what he discover is that his ‘foundation' lies in the freedom of another. Thus we find that for Sartre, at this period, not only the “Unity with the other is …unrealizable” but “the essence of the relation between consciousness is not the Mitsein; it is in conflict.” (By the term Mitsein, Heidegger referred
to the nature of relations of an individual with the others as co-existence. Unlike Sartre, both Heidegger and Gabriel Marcel maintained that the existence of the other is not a threat to the for-itself’s existence.) “Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others.”\(^5\) Although the for-itself can regain his freedom from the clutch of the others; yet, for Sartre, the existence of the other remains a permanent threat to the for-itself and thereby the relation between the self and the other is one of perpetual tension. Towards the end of In Camera, one of Sartre’s famous plays, we hear the voice of the male character Garcin saying, “Hell is the other people.” Three characters, Garcin, Estelle and Inez are trapped in the hell of moral or erotic impasses where none is able to allow others to escape. Each demands of the other that he or she would be interpreted by the other, or he or she would want to be interpreted through the eyes of others. But as it is impossible to do this, each is forced to see himself or herself through the eyes of others and acquires an identity imposed from without. So “Hell is the other people” is a symbolic structure in which we are related to others and from these structures there is no exit. All the relationship Sartre discusses fails to achieve the end they seek and even fail to sustain themselves. That is why, any relation with others gives rise to conflict or tension. But whatever circle is created around the individual, he is a maker of his own being; he also makes him responsible for all his actions.
It is here that we find an other-oriented dimension of Sartre’s freedom. According to Sartre, I am obliged to will the freedom of others at the same time as mine. It is true that the ‘other’ limits my freedom. I may appear to be an object in front of another individual, but I regain my freedom in my struggle with the other. An irreconcilable conflict between my freedom and other’s freedom leads to a complete stalemate in the interpersonal domain of freedom. But according to Sartre “These considerations do not rule out the possibility of an ethics.” As Sartre himself observes, “Human reality springs up among others. This is translated into anthropological terms by the statement that man exists in society”

“In order to remain an ethical agent, no man can act in complete disregard for the agency of other individuals. Perhaps, it is only an utterly despotic man who can be pure freedom for himself. In fact, as it should be obvious, an absolute indifference to other’s freedom would render freedom itself as a futile tool for exercising one’s interpersonal agency. No man, on the other hand, can refuse to be born among others and hence can possibly completely escape from living among others.” Though conflict, tension and ambiguity remain permanent in relation of for-itself with the other as he declares in Being and Nothingness “…respect for the others freedom is an empty word ;even if we could assume the project of respecting this freedom, each attitude which we adopted with respect to the other would be a violation of that freedom which we claim
to respect." But by accepting the existence of others, "who is internally related to the for-itself not as a knowledge but as another for-itself, a conscious subject, Sartre avoided solipsism"

In Being and Nothingness Sartre speaks about commitment and engagement of the for-itself to achieve its meaning. This concept of commitment refers to the fact that man's freedom can hardly float free of its connection to other human individuals as being completely isolated from the interpersonal world. Sartre maintains that it is individual's choice, nor desire or will, which plays a primary role in an act of an individual. That is, desire, will, motive etc., are all secondary to human being's choice. That is because the choice is nothing other than the being of each human reality; this amounts to saying that a particular partial behaviour is or expresses the original choice of this human reality since for human reality there is no difference between existing and choosing for itself. This original choice or the fundamental project, is the unification of a being-for-itself with the in-itself and with the other. So in Existentialism and Humanism Sartre says, "In willing ....freedom, we discover that it depends entirely upon the freedom of others and that the freedom of others depends upon our own. Obviously freedom as the definition of a man does not depend upon others, but as soon as there is a commitment, I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as mine. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of the others equally my aim."
“This entails that humans do not have total, unconditional freedom to achieve their ends in just any way they please. Interpersonal freedom allows me to do what I like without being constrained by others and yet not impinging on others’ abilities to act similarly. By the same token, this sort of freedom not only leaves no scope for anyone to take wide advantages over others which frequently results in selfish and dehumanizing behaviour, but also tends to unite us, in that exercising freedom with the awareness of its aforesaid interpersonal dimension would help to produce a sense of togetherness in us, thereby helping us to move toward a human community in which there would hardly be any domination and exploitation.”

3.4 Freedom and Foundation

In Sartrean being-for-itself, there is nothing that he is in this changing world. Being beyond any change, temporal location and permanency, the Sartrean subject is always in the making. He continually creates his own essence, which ceases only in death. He is always in being ‘what he is not and not being what he is.’ So any search for foundation on the part of the Sartrean agent is a misguided search, which is an initial step towards bad faith. In Sartre’s philosophy a man is to be judged for his actions alone, his intentions do not count. A man can establish his foundation in either of the two ways. (a) by fleeing from his own freedom and possibilities, i.e., by denying his transcendences or (b) by attributing to
him fixed properties. This leads to reactions like shame, fear, pride, etc; these are reactions that depend on a foundation. But both the paths, as I have already argued, in chapter-II, are strategies of bad-faith. The being-for-itself does not possess any determinate property and any attribution of determinate property to him is deceptive. He is a structured being to whom any quality manifests itself as a possibility. A man is not a ‘café waiter’ or ‘soldier’ in the way a tree is a tree. It is only when a person is in bad faith and is solidified by other’s look that he behaves in those ways in which other people expected him to do so. So it is only in bad faith that a café waiter can behave like a waiter. In bad faith he achieves the status of in-itself and the property of being a waiter is attributed to him by others. The ‘foundation’ of for-itself is therefore can never be established. For-itself repeatedly encounters with his own otherness, which denies his freedom to be what he wishes and introduces an inescapable facticity and permanence of the in-itself to what he desires himself to be. So the denial of transcendence and the establishment of foundation transform one from a structured being into a concrete being where he acts as a slave to the freedom of others.

3.5 Freedom Conflict and Love

The conflict arises due to the fact that man cannot enjoy mutual subjectivity or mutual objectivity. Man’s relation to other is such that when one is in the subjective attitude the other is in the objective attitude and vice-versa. Love is commonly thought to be a paradigm of mutual
subjectivity or reciprocity and brutality represents the other extreme where
the other is treated as pure object. Sartre’s understanding is based on the
idea of an alternative exclusion of subject and object. Whether in love or
in brutality, Sartre argues, I always attempt to capture the consciousness
of the other by making the other an object and in the reverse pole others
only have access to me as a subject. When he is an object for me and is
prevented from making me an object, I regain my freedom and
transcendence. What happens really is that while I attempt to deny the
‘look’ of the other to keep my own freedom, the other tries to deny my
‘look.’ While I attempt to assert my power over the other, other too seeks
to do the same. It is a tension where each demands the enslavement of
the other but since neither succeeds and can never succeed to attain it,
the process of conflict goes on. To use a phrase of Hobbes, it is “a restless
striving for power after power which ceaseth only in death.”

Though Sartre’s account of a for-itself’s reference to the other is
based on the idea of a reciprocal exclusion of subject and subject, Hegel
does not believe in such reciprocal exclusion. One of the most important
issues of epistemology is, whether cogito is able to reach other’s
subjectivity, i.e., whether through our cognition we know the other as
subject Sartre’s basic idea is that cogito can reach only being-in-itself and
not being-for-itself. I can never have any cognitive access to the other, as
subjectivity and I can never recognize myself in the other. To be sure of
myself as subject presupposes an awareness of other's awareness of me as object. Sartre says that it is Hegel's 'epistemological optimism' that leads him to believe that I can have cognition of other's subjectivity though not directly but through an inferential process when his body is given to me.

The picture of human relationship as sketched in Being and Nothingness shows that we can never view the other as subject and therefore all human relationships are born in conflict and result in frustration. The other's look through which I am alienated and reified gives rise to two fundamental attitudes which are conducive to two interpersonal relationship: (1) Masochism (2) Sadism. In Masochism one attempts to sacrifice one's own liberty and assimilates other's liberty to offer oneself to the liberty and mastery of other who possesses him. Masochism is the attempt to seek the foundation of one's own freedom in the freedom of other. But Masochism Sartre thinks is a paradigm of bad faith and so love relationship, which is essentially masochistic, ends in frustration. In case of love relationship the two edges attempt to respect each other's freedom and sacrifice their own freedom and self-interpretaion. But such an attempt to retain the concept of mutual subjectivity in any human relationship, Sartre thinks, can never succeed. Love requires the possession of one by the other. But if free ego is thus possessed, he loses his freedom and is transformed into a solidified
determined object since only a determined object and no free subject can be possessed.

In case of sadistic attitude, on the other hand, one attempts to deny the freedom and existence of other and attempts to reduce him into an object determined by his mastery and liberty. But this sadistic attitude is also doomed to failure because when the subject is looked at by the other the ‘look’ denies his freedom, transforms him into a thing, annihilates him as an independent subject and steals his world. If in order to avoid the threat or look of the other the subject kills the other, he cannot even escape the ‘look’ because the fact being looked at by the other haunts him even after the murder is committed.

If all inter-personal relationships are one of conflict and subjugation one may wonder how any political movement towards co-operation and communism is possible on the basis of Sartrean Existentialism. Sartre deals with the problem in his later works. There he suggests that all human beings are situated in a world ridden with scarcity. This scarcity of natural resources is what unites men to take up a programme of co-operative praxis.

In Sartre’s theory there is no ideal point of freedom to be got as the absolutists’ premise. The essential freedom of man, as Sartre sees it, remains the same, before, during and after the totalitarian enslavement
of man. Through conflict we proceed to richer and richer dimensions of freedom, greater self-expression, better understanding of the infinite perspectives of the world and others. Perhaps that is why Sartre thinks the final goal of humanity is the freedom of all and men's ultimate end is “founding a reign of concrete freedom” or “the human realm”; “he also calls this realm and goal a city of ends, where each individual treats any other individual as an end and all individuals live in interpersonal unity.”

“Since the individual is defined not only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals, he exists only by transcending himself, and his freedom can be achieved only through the freedom of others. He justifies his movement which, like freedom, springs from his heart, but which leads outside him.” So each individual treats any other individual as an end and all individuals live in interpersonal unity. “If every individual values not just his own freedom but that of other human individuals as well,” “a city of ends” may not seem to be an impossible goal and by the same token “an ethics without oppression” may seem viable. If both I and any one else choose our mutual freedoms as our goal, our objectification of each other would not be oppressive nor a source of conflict but a positive enhancement of our existence. We can then cooperatively work together, adopting each other’s free projects, in interpersonal relationship, which would contribute to the emergence of the “city of ends”, which as Sartre puts toward the end of his life in tape-recorded
interviews with Benny Levy, would be the existence of men who live for one another."

So though there is no absolute goal to travel towards, there is a definite movement from a less free life-style to a more free life-style, a movement from bad faith to a better understanding of authenticity. It is only in the face of challenge that our best possibilities get a chance of expression, whether the challenge is one posed by perception to imagination or a challenge posed by the other to self-expression. In this way both literature and communication help to evolve a life-style of praxis. So it would be wrong to say that a detailed analysis of Sartre’s ontology of freedom betrays an underlying pessimism. Though he is not an optimist in an absolute sense of the term, he is neither a pessimist. It would be unfair to use either label of pessimism or optimism for a philosophy, which exposes the infinitude of existence. “What is at the very heart and center of existentialism is the absolute character of the free commitment, by which every man realizes himself.” Perhaps if one takes the subjective attitude and the objective attitude of being with equal seriousness and at the same time wants to avoid a commitment to Cartesian Dualism, one is bound to end up in a dialectics between being-in-itself and being-for-itself resulting in a perpetual conflict, a conflict which is both the location for freedom and the location for definition vis-à-vis determinism. While trying to avoid transcendentalism and absolute mechanism, Sartre gives us a
world view, he tries to make the best of both approaches. While making room for dynamism and stasis, he makes us wonder whether such a compromise could bear the desired result of communication, which he seeks. One wonders whether his programme ends up in a paradox or not and if it does, then what are the possible avenues of overcoming it.

Anthony Giddens in his book *Central Problems in Social Theory* writes, “Sartre preserves a gulf between past and present, in the sense that while the past is ‘given and necessary’ the present is a realm of free, spontaneous creation: in that sense he fails to escape from a dualism of ‘materiality’ and ‘praxis.’”65