

## Two Different Ways of Believing in Ideology in Henry James's *The Bostonians*

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### I

In this paper on *The Bostonians* I want to look into the different ways of believing in ideology. Coming to the point at once, we can see two kinds of ideologies conflicting in the novel. One is feminism formed by the reformist tradition in New England. And the other is masculine conservatism formed by the higher classes of the South. The former is blindly believed in by Olive Chancellor, man-hater of oldmaidish type, who has been under the influence of the humorless spiritualism of Protestant tradition in New England. And the latter is firmly held by Basil Ransom, Olive's distant relative from the South, who comes to New York to start a law office. As is easily seen, the former offers a striking contrast with the latter, for the former is progressive and on the side of women, while the latter is conservative and on the side of proud masculinists.

But the progressiveness of the former does not necessarily mean that it is superior to the latter. The superiority or acceptability of ideology is decided not only by its substance but by the way of its being believed in. The way of Olive's believing in ideology is fanatical and lacks latitude, while Basil's is free and relaxed and deviates easily from the ideological rut. For this reason Basil's ideology seems more acceptable than Olive's in spite of its anachronistic conservatism. Here we can acknowledge an important problem,

not of the substance of ideology, but of the way of believing in it. I want to discuss this problem in this paper and make it clear that even if ideology is generally defective, it is not that there is no possibility of getting over its defects by way of believing in it.

## II

As is generally known, Henry James was educated out of any fixed ideas from his childhood. This educational course was determined by his father, Henry James Sr., who opposed himself strongly to a fixed idea because he had been tortured by his father William James's unshakable faith. William was a dogmatical presbyterian who always exercised authority over his family and bound them by rigid rules. It is said that on Sundays he did not allow his children to do anything, though children in general cannot stop doing something. It was quite natural that Henry Senior should have been in great reaction to his father's home discipline. He may have thought that it was his duty to do the opposite of father's formidably consistent way of discipline. At any rate he excluded any consistency from his educational policy and taught his children not to have any fixed idea. For the purpose of carrying out this policy he often changed not only the private instructors of his children but also the abode of his family. Moreover, he sent his children to Europe so that they could widen their field of vision. But, as Henry Junior pointed out in his later years, his father allowed formidable consistency to slip into his educational policy unknowingly, because of or in spite of his set notion that any consistency must be eliminated. Though he knew well that his presbyterian father had been wrong in the way of drilling his children, he made the same kind of error, too, for he had narrowed the range of his children's life as the

result of seemingly inconsistent but really consistent educational policy. It may be said that he was unable to cast off the yoke of New England protestantism which his father had borne willingly.<sup>1</sup>

What Henry James Sr. did not understand is that every kind of set notion is not negative to life and that even if a set notion in general seems to be against life, there is a way of making it more congenial to life. And what the way is is the theme this paper is going to elucidate. Anyway, it may be said that we need not avoid every kind of fixed idea or every form of consistency, for it is simply impossible. Sometimes we will be possessed with some idea and become consistent and sometimes we will not. This natural way of living should not be denied but watched at intervals so that we can know where we are being led by it.

But this is not so easily done as said. For seeming naturalness of consistency is apt to be considered to be truth itself and blindly believed in by us. Both the father and the grandfather of Henry James Jr. were not able to have a clear critical insight into their ideas because of the seeming naturalness and truthfulness of them. The reason why their ideas became natural and truthful is that they were part of the ideology in New England. That is, they were produced by the traditional spiritualism in New England. And this spiritualism of rigid type is the very thing James made the target of ridicule and criticism in *The Bostonians*. As was said before, Olive Chancellor is ridiculed and criticized because of her rigid way of believing in feminism. It may be said that she has a similarity to Henry Junior's father and grandfather not only in that they are all under the yoke of Protestant tradition but also in that their ways of believing in it are all rigidly fixed and inelastic. All possessed with fixed ideas, the three are uncompromisingly determined to reach their own goals in their own unpliant ways.

Of course, there is nothing abnormal about having a goal. For good or ill, having a goal has become our second nature. We all set a goal at something in our life and try to attain it with utmost effort. Though this kind of earnest effort is proper to man and may be considered to be artificial, it has become quite a natural habit for us. So that it is more difficult for us to live without a purpose than with one. And if we are not careful, trying to live without a purpose becomes a rigid purpose itself, just as Henry Senior's strenuous opposition to his father's consistent way of drilling became a rigidly consistent purpose. It is only now and then that we are released from purposes. And such a released time is one of the most valuable in our life and how to enjoy it becomes a very important problem. But, for such a person as Olive, the state of being careless and purposeless is far from being precious and valuable, because it is incompatible with her way of living. Though there are times when she is fascinated by the spellbinding power of a purposeless state, she tries to get rid of it as promptly as possible. For instance, there was a time when she forgot all her purposes, hearing Schubert and Mendelssohn. And feeling all at ease as if her strenuous life had ceased to be "a battle," she goes "so far as to ask herself why one should have a quarrel with" human life.<sup>2</sup> But this is only a moment's peace for her. She soon recovers her usual sense of duty and feels she must make a strenuous effort to help "the unhappy women of the world" (p. 149).

After all, Olive's firm belief has blocked all the sideways of her life, making only one straight path of justice in her life's journey. This is rather a dreary and monotonous form of life, but she never gets weary of it. On the contrary, she feels herself energetically living because it gives free play to her deep-rooted rancor against men. This personal feeling of hate sustains her connection with

feminist movement strongly at all times. In spite of her wealth and privileged station in life she hates men so intensely that she feels as if downtrodden women's hatred against men were the very feeling she has experienced personally. And almost as if to intensify her own hatred of men, she approaches "two or three pale shopmaidens" (p. 31) and tries to make friends with them so that she may know the reality of their miserable life. But to Olive's great disappointment, they don't show any interest in the problems of women. All that they take interest in is their common boy friend named Charlie. They are almost crazy about him and it disgusts Olive, for their foolish infatuation seems to her never to end women's subordination to men.

And Olive doesn't understand at all why these shopgirls can take great enjoyment in serving a man full of faults. Why and how they can enjoy it remains a permanent mystery for Olive, who thinks to accuse a man severely of his faults is the only way of treating him fairly. She does not know there is a more effective way of making a man succumb to a woman. This is the opposite way of Olive's, that is, the way of captivating a man's heart by serving him devotedly. This way can be adopted, not by a woman like Olive, but one like Verena Tarrant, beautiful young woman of the lower classes, who is to be united with Basil Ransom at the end of the story. Verena is almost opposite to Olive in nature, for she can love a man truthfully and faithfully. But in spite of their radical difference in nature, the two women get on very well with each other at first. For Olive, fascinated by the charming personality of Verena, tries to cultivate friendship with her on the pretext of women's common cause, feminism. Verena is a daughter of a mesmeric healer, and from her tenderest years has been taken about from place to place in the various districts of America by her father. And she has

met various kinds of people when wandering, and learned unknowingly the thought of feminists, which she finds herself able to give utterance to in public like a spiritualistic medium. Though the contents of her speech are common and her way of delivery is childish, an inexplicable charm radiates from her when she is delivering a speech. Olive, fascinated by the charm, asks her to call on her as soon as possible so that she can make intimate friends with her.

It is piteous that she should not perceive that she is making an absurd misstep by this act. She takes it seriously that she will be able to cooperate with Verena for the cause of feminism. She cannot realize that Verena is the same ordinary girl as the shopgirls in that she is also susceptible to masculine charms. It is evident that if feminism is necessary for Verena, it must take a different course from that of Olive's. But this is the very thing Olive cannot perceive by any possibility, for she believes blindly that only one way is possible for attaining the purpose of feminism. So when she finds Verena talking cheerfully with men, she cannot help feeling displeasure, thinking "Verena's vocation" is not "to smile and talk with young men who bent towards her," because she is a "gifted being . . . sent into the world for a very different purpose" (p. 113). And she cannot help feeling hurt, too, when she is let to know that Verena has been proposed marriage to by Mr Pardon, interviewer of the Boston press and given his word for her future success on the condition of her marrying him. Olive questions Verena cynically: "He promises you success. What do you call success?" To this Verena replies humorously: "Producing a pressure that shall be irresistible. Causing certain laws to be replaced by Congress and by the State legislatures, and others to be enacted" (p. 139). Truly, this is the very end of Olive's feminism and it is undeniable that it has nothing to do with a private person's being made famous by

the pen of a newspaper interviewer like Mr Pardon with some private end in view . But this great aim of feminism is told by Verena as if it were "a joke." She cannot "deny herself" the jocular and flip-pant tone even when she is speaking the grave truth (p. 139). She is too vivacious and lively to keep straight on along the fixed way of truth. It is her nature to deviate from a monotonous rut, even if the rut is a course of so-called truth.

Olive feels a sense of incompatibility with the flippant jocular-ity of Verena. She thinks of herself as made of "one piece," while Verene seems to her to be "of many pieces" with "little capricious chinks, through which mocking inner lights" seem "sometimes to gleam." This momentary thought shows how accurately she was perceiving her difference from Verena. But her keen perception is good for nothing, for immediately after that she tries to think their difference as trivial as possible, regarding Verena's "aberrations as a phase of youth and suburban culture" (p. 140). This way of thinking shows how provincial Olive is, for she cannot realize the centrality of her culture does not guarantee its superiority. However, possessed with the idea of cultural superiority, she tries to bring back wavering Verena to the right course of feminism. Taking it for granted that Verena's aberrations are worthless, Olive never casts a doubt on the value of her culture and her way of thinking.

But Olive is never allowed to regain her peace of mind because, as was said before, Basil Ransom, her distant relative from the South, appears before her and contends with her for Verena. Basil is a native Mississippian, so it is very natural that he should be possessed with the ideology of the South. It is needless to say that the masculine conservatism of the South forms a striking contrast to the equalitarian progressivism of the North. But Basil's profound

antagonism is not against the substance of the North ideology but the rigid way of its being believed in by many New Englanders. The rigidity can be seen typically in Olive Chancellor's way of thinking and she is naturally criticized severely by Basil. And moreover it is not that Basil denies all feminists and all their thoughts. It sometimes seems to me that James is proposing Basil's pliant attitude should be made the most use of by feminists to push a feminist movement forward. I consider it difficult to think that Basil, who wishes women's happiness and wants to be helpful to them, does not understand the real object of feminism. This problem will be discussed in some detail in the following chapters.

### III

Though *The Bostonians* has been acknowledged as one of the masterpieces of Henry James, the critics have expressed sharply divided opinions about the personality of Basil Ransom. For instance, Lionel Trilling and Gordon Pirie estimated Basil highly for his being active and positive, while Irving Howe and some others criticized him severely as selfish and fanatical.<sup>8</sup> Recently, opinions unfavorable to him have increased, perhaps because of the thriving of feminist criticism. Possessed with the masculine ideology of the South, Basil is apt to regard women as inferior to men, which tendency has become the inevitable target for severe criticism of feminists. For instance, the following quotation shows clearly why Basil's way of thinking about women becomes such a target :

He was addicted with the ladies to the old forms of address and of gallantry ; he held that they were delicate, agreeable creatures, whom Providence had placed under the protection of the

bearded sex ; and it was not merely a humorous idea with him that whatever might be the defects of the Southern gentlemen, they were at any rate remarkable for their chivalry. He was a man who still, in a slangy age, could pronounce that word with a perfectly serious face.

This boldness did not prevent him from thinking that women were essentially inferior to men : and infinitely tiresome when they declined to accept the lot which men had made for them. He had the most definite notions about their place in nature, in society, and was perfectly easy in his mind as to whether, it excluded them from any proper homage. The chivalrous man paid that tax with alacrity. He admitted their rights ; these consisted in a standing claim to the generosity and tenderness of the stronger race. The exercise of such feelings was full of advantage for both sexes, and they flowed most freely, of course, when women were gracious and grateful. (p. 184)

Basil unfolds this view of women when he feels disgusted at the disagreeable personality of Mrs Luna, Olive's willful and self-indulgent elder sister. It is when he is confronted with the odiousness of this modernized woman that he remembers the old-fashioned masculine view of women in his native place. Moreover, the masculinity of his view seems inevitably emphasized and exaggerated against the general atmosphere of female dominance he has recently experienced in the Nothern cities. Or it may be said that he is too much disgusted at the impertinence of Mrs Luna to become aware of the selfishness of his view of women which is nothing but the ideology produced in the male-dominated Southern society. At any rate, he seems here to be deprived of his usual humor and flexibility of character.

Besides, we must remember here that we do not always act up to our own notion. Sometimes we do the opposite of what we have thought of doing or realize slightly different things from our original intention. Critics who criticize Basil severely for his view of women think there is no gap between his ideology and his actual conduct. Of course it cannot be denied that there is a person whose conduct is almost identical with his intention. For instance, Olive Chancellor is such a person, who follows the direction of ideology faithfully. But Basil Ransom must not be regarded as the same type of a person as Olive. Basil is too full of life to be simply submissive to his own ideology. A man of flexibility, humor and intelligence like him cannot help changing his relations with ideology almost unknowingly.

As is said before, ideology should not be denied because of its being ideology but what kind of relation with it is possible should be considered. Though Henry James had been taught by his father not to have any fixed idea, he became aware later on of the negative side of his father's policy and came to understand the importance of having positive relation with some ideology. This may have been one of the reasons why he formed a slightly negative estimation of having no ideology by creating a character named Ralph Touchett in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Ralph is said to have the greatest resemblance of all the characters in the novel to the author, because he always keeps a safe and comfortable distance from almost all just as Henry James did. Ralph is a man of mild disposition and keeps his genial and tolerant temper in any situation. And this excellent disposition is at once his merit and demerit, because it tends continually to keep him out of any harm's way and make his world complete and closed comfortably. Though he loves his cousin Isabel Archer genuinely, the love does not change his

non-committal attitude, partly because he suffers from a fatal disease. It is this disease after all that explains most convincingly his sadly detached attitude toward life.

Henry James must have known the sadness of Ralph's way of living, for he himself had been taught to keep a proper and adequate distance from everything. But such a distance is not always desirable since it makes difficult for him to lose himself in anything. For instance, he cannot lose his heart to a pretty enchanting woman. Irving Howe says love can be ideological because "the biological, or the sense of it, can also become imbued with ideology."<sup>4</sup> But it goes without saying that love does not stop being the truth of life even if "imbued with ideology." Nothing is more foolish than denying love because it is ideological. Henry James seems to have recognized truthfulness in ideological love, for he represented Basil as a man worthy of the faithful love of Verena Tarrant. It is undeniable that his love for Verena is "imbued with ideology" but the love is the very truth of his life and he never repents venturing his life for it.

Now it must be emphasized here that it is for the purpose of winning the love of Verena that Basil sticks to his conservative view of women. That is, his conservative masculine ideology (which is a product of a society) is made use of for attracting Verena (which intention is "biological" and can be considered another kind of ideology). In other words, Basil's "sociopolitical" ideology is utilized for his "biological" ideology. And moreover, Basil is always unknowingly making the best use of the former ideology when he wants to have friendly relations with women. The reason his conservative view of women can be utilized for the friendship with them is that it contains chivalry, or the spirit of knighthood, that is, "high-minded disinterested consideration to women."<sup>5</sup> Basil always

takes a courteous attitude toward a woman almost unconsciously, the naturalness of which usually makes his relations with a woman friendly and cordial.

The fact that Basil is utilizing his conservative ideology makes it clear that he is its master and not its servant. On the other hand, this kind of relation with ideology cannot be found between Olive and her feminism. This is because she believes in her feminism so blindly that she cannot relativize it. She has got her ideology so firmly in her mind that for her it is the one and only form of truth. She cannot realize that there are various kinds of feminism according to the variety of women's personality. She has no elasticity in her way of thinking, which is chiefly responsible for our unacceptability of her feminism, though feminism has nothing to blame for in itself.

In marked contrast to Olive, Basil is magnanimous enough to accept good points of his opponents' thoughts. Even if he sometimes sticks to his ideology just as Olive does, it is because he wants to put more importance to human relationship than to his "sciopolitical" ideology. It must not be forgotten that his actual attitude toward feminists is never rigidly negative. He does not discriminate against them because their ideology is unacceptable. On the contrary, he is always as polite to them as to other women, when they are not dogmatic and fanatical. For instance, he does the civil to Dr Prance who is an unmarried woman doctor. At first Basil thinks she is "a perfect example of the 'Yankee female' . . . produced by the New England school-system, the Puritan code, the ungenial climate, the absence of chivalry" (p. 36). In short, Dr Prance has the same Puritan tradition behind her as Olive. But the two women are quite different types of women. Dr Prance is no less a person than an embodiment of a feminist idea. That is, she has become as good

a doctor as any male doctor so that she does not need any instruction from a male doctor. It may be said that she has realized one of feminist ideals, that is, the independence of women. The ideal is of course Olive's, too, but Dr Prance and Olive never become intimate with each other, though they have had frequent occasion to be in each other's company. Being of frank and simple disposition, Dr Prance tries to understand what a man before her is made of, while Olive believes bigotedly on the pretext of the history of male tyranny that every man is an enemy to women. And Dr Prance's open-hearted attitude impresses Basil favorably. He finds her unprejudiced and kind in spite of her lack of femininity and grace.

And Basil is polite to another feminist, Miss Birdseye, too. Miss Birdseye is now very old and a little feeble-minded, but in her young days she was actively engaged in a reform movement with the great Transcendentalists of that time. Though she is even now an ardent and unselfish devotee of reformism, she is getting rather silly with age, and the silliness seems fitly to reflect the childishness of her lifelong activity. Perhaps, Henry James, who was very sensitive to the evil aspects of human nature, expressed by the simple character of Miss Birdseye his unsatisfied feeling toward the unseeing innocence of the Transcendentalists. Miss Birdseye, who can rise above herself and disregard material gains, is unable to confront the difficult problems raised by men's lust for power, wealth and the like.

But Basil feels no reluctance in acknowledging that her weak point is at the same time her strong one. After all is considered, she is greatly different from self-centered Olive, who wants to justify her personal ill feeling toward men by thinking of it as righteous indignation against the tyranny of men. About Miss Birdseye Basil "had said to Verena, more than once, that he wished he might have met the old lady in Carolina or Georgia before the war — shown

her round among negroes and talked over New England ideas with her." It is true that New England ideas are now not so acceptable, "but at that time," says Basil, "they would have been tremendously refreshing" (pp. 381-82). Though he is dissatisfied with the New England ideas after the Civil War, he never grudges acknowledging their positive value before the War. He is magnanimous enough to estimate highly some of reformist thoughts, to say nothing of the unselfish character of Miss Birdseye.

However, there may be a suspicion that Basil is showing his elastic attitude only to the women who have rather detached relations with him. Can he take elastic attitude toward Verena with whom he wishes to have the most intimate relations? Doesn't he force his masculine ideology upon her shamelessly? This is one of the questions to be answered in the next chapter.

#### IV

Basil is charmed at first sight by Verena as strongly as Olive is. But he cannot approach her immediately like Olive can, because Verena is taken abroad by Olive and has been absent from America for many months. And during that time he has been also busy opening a law office in New York. But the office never enjoys a large custom. Moreover, his partner has run away with his money, which drives him to despair and almost makes him give up his success in that city completely. In despair of his economic independence, he goes so far as to think, though temporarily, that submitting himself to the selfish will of Mrs Luna might enable him to devote himself to the academic studies he has cared for. But such thinking is dismissed the instant he hears from Mrs Luna about the return of Verena from abroad. He begins immediately to think that to see her

again will be refreshing and that the stagnant state of his present life may be put an end to. He perceives the possibility of new activity and recovers his usual spirits.

And three weeks later, Basil visits Verena in Boston. Though in the past she met him only twice and that for a very short time, she remembers him clearly, for she received vividly agreeable impressions from him at both times. And the third time she meets him, the two are to develop very friendly relations with each other. Because, while having a pleasant talk with him, she on the spur of the moment offers herself as a guide for him to Harvard University near her house. And it is while she is acting as a guide that it becomes clear that she is getting to like him increasingly and unconsciously. Showing him through the university, she secretly decides to conceal from Olive the fact of his visitation and her acting as a guide. The subtle workings of her mind by which she has made this decision shows clearly her growing love for him. And Basil, too, finds her still more charming and pleasing. The charm of her personality induces Basil to express rather lightly both his growing love for her and his critical feeling against feminism by saying that the "use of a truly amiable woman is to make some honest man happy" (p. 228). Basil said these words "with a sententiousness of which he was perfectly aware." To this jocular comment, Verena makes a surprisingly smart and agreeable response: "See here, Mr Ransom, do you know what strikes me? . . . The interest you take in me isn't really controversial — a bit. It's quite personal!" (pp. 228 — 29). Acting as a spokesman of Basil, the author says about the charm of this Verena in the following way:

She was the most extraordinary girl; she could speak such words as those without the smallest look of added consciousness

coming into her face, without the least supposable intention of conquest, or any visible purpose of challenging the young man to say more. (p. 229)

This is the very charm of Verena, whose vivacious self-expression is fresh and balmy like a fragrant breeze of spring.

It may be said that ideological masculinism can be seen in the above-cited mild expression of Basil, and that it is the sententiousness of its expression that stimulated Verena into this remarkably charming response. Though he is well aware of his own sententious masculinism, the awareness may not necessarily mean his objectifying his own ideology. It may be regarded as his cunning pretense of self-criticism. But this seems to me too perverse way of viewing, because what Basil wants to convey here is no less than his mild feeling of love for Verena, the expression of which may be sometimes made in a masculine way and sometimes not. The happiness of one's beloved is what one wishes from the bottom of his heart and the expression of the wish can take a good many different forms. But some feminists deny a masculine way of expression of love, not knowing that this denying naturally leads to the limitation of the general expression of love. Of course it is needless to say that the ways of expressing love ought to vary from a masochistic one to a sadistic. And moreover we may safely say that some feminists are certainly wrong if they think approving a masculine way of loving makes it impossible to solve the institutional problems of feminism.

Basil is well aware of his ideological masculinism because he has been forced to recognize it by his various experience of recent years. First, he has gone through the collapse of the agricultural system in the South. In short, he has lost the foundation of his

ideology. And secondly, both Verena and Olive toward whom Basil entertains the strongest, though antithetical, feelings happen to be feminists and this fact inevitably makes him notice the conservative and masculine nature of his ideology. Lastly, Basil, who has been very fond of books, must have known the anachronistic masculinity of his ideology by reading a lot of books of history and thoughts in which he has been very interested. And at the same time he must have realized the positive value of his conservatism, by reading the books of Tocqueville and Thomas Carlyle, both of whom he likes very much. In short, Basil is able to place his ideology among the relative positions in the world thought. Sometimes he detaches himself from his ideology so that he can understand its relative value accurately. He knows the merits and demerits of his ideology and consequently it becomes very easy for him to make an effective attack on Olive who blindly believes in the absolute value of her feminism.

And it is inevitable that the closer his relation with Verena becomes, the severer his attack on Olive grows. Olive intends to make Verena speak in public for the benefit of women's happiness, for she thinks young and beautiful Verena has a good chance of becoming "an immense power for good" (p. 90). Basil flatly opposes this scheme of Olive and says to her that Verena is in danger of becoming not "an immense power for good" but "for quackery." Olive will have to give proper consideration to the criticism of Basil if she wants to forward her movement, because she has a strong tendency to escape from the realities of life. To be more precise, her deep-rooted aversion to men makes it impossible for her to face the ordinary realities of men and women's living together sometimes in harmony and sometimes in discord. As those who devote themselves to a reform movement have a strong tendency to be blinded

by the beauty of their ideal, so Olive is liable to consider her ideal to be the only truth of life, and this tendency to falsehood is in constant danger of becoming strengthened by her uncontrollable dislike of men.

Olive cannot realize that in the world there is such a man as Basil who never becomes a suitable target of feminists' criticism. Basil is radically different from those men who are as unconscious as ever of their self-centeredness in spite of their knowledge of the feminist trend in the New England thought. It may be said that the real enemy of feminists is not Basil but those men, because the former is conscious of his masculinity and makes the best use of it to have friendly relations with women, while the latter cannot perceive their own egoism and consequently cannot help being helpless to the gradual worsening of their relations with women. Of course, it is undeniable that even Basil sometimes becomes uncritical of his self-centeredness and comes to be offensive to women. But it must be noticed here that Basil's masculinity is not his end of life but a mere means to an end, while Olive's feminism is her very end of her life. What Basil wishes from the bottom of his heart is not the achievement of his masculinity but the cultivation of lively relations with women. Though he usually sticks to the ideology of the South, he doesn't want to marry a Southern woman, who will be sure to make a good wife for him, observing the conventions of her native province. Basil is too positively extrovert to be satisfied with a typical Southern woman. It is very natural that Basil, who always reads various kinds of books and wants to extend his own world, should choose Verena as his companion for life, for she never resigns herself to following rigidly to the established course of conventions. Though she may be as obedient as a Southern woman, she is so full of life that she cannot help deviating from a conventional

way of living and creating something new in her life.

Basil recognizes the increasing value of Verena but cannot propose marriage to her because of his poverty. Moreover, he is cornered by the thought that Verena is going to be carried away out of reach by Olive. Therefore we should not laugh at him because it is only the acceptance of one of his papers by the journal called "The Rational Review" that has determined him to propose to her. Nevertheless, Irying Howe and Tony Tanner cast scorn on Basil for his too optimistic way of viewing of the future.<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly, this is a very ungenerous and one-sidedly severe criticism. For both of the critics don't realize that Basil is the very person that is the most conscious of the undependability of his optimistic prospect.

Besides, this kind of very rudimentary failure of understanding Basil is repeated by both Howe and Tanner. For instance, Tanner doesn't understand the positive meaning of the words "aggressive and unmerciful" which are said by Verena to express the distinctive feature of Basil's conservatism. Tanner takes the meaning of these words only negatively because they are usually thought to express negative meaning. It goes without saying that this way of understanding the meaning of words is the very substantialization of words. It seems that Tanner completely forgets that a word changes its meaning according to the change of the situation it is used in.<sup>7</sup> If the phrase "aggressive and unmerciful" is put back in its context, it becomes very clear that it has a very positive meaning as if it had been used by D.H. Lawrence. The passage in which the phrase is used runs as follows: "She [Verena] knew he [Basil] was a conservative, but she didn't know that being a conservative could make a person so aggressive and unmerciful" (p. 315). According to the context of this passage, Basil is "aggressive and unmerciful" because he is now carrying on a hard strife with Olive. He feels he

must win the strife at any cost, for being defeated by Olive means not only his losing Verena but allowing her to follow a false way of living. At this point of time he is still unable to propose marriage to Verena for his poverty, so he continues making fierce attacks against Olive. It is impossible for him to make a compromise to Olive. His attack cannot help becoming "aggressive and unmerciful" but its ruthlessness is nothing less than a pleasure to Verena, who has begun to love him deeply without her knowing it.

Tanner thinks being "aggressive and unmerciful" is evil at any time. This substantialization of words naturally invites a one-sidedly unfavorable interpretation of Basil's character and his ideology. It is a matter of common knowledge that this way of interpretation can never be applied to the works of Henry James, whose views on persons and things are never simple and easy to understand. Though he was educated out of any fixed idea, he could not help having an ambivalent feeling toward some kind of ideology and especially toward the way of believing in it. That Basil's masculinism is just such a kind of ideology and his way of believing in it has some positive value is what I have contended till now. Basil's masculinism may not be justified by itself. However, he is able to vivify his activity by it because he knows the proper way of making the most of it. It may be said that the value of ideology consists in the way of its being relativized and utilized. And moreover, it seems possible to go so far as to say that Basil's way of believing in ideology is capable of achieving one kind of feminism, because it is self-evident that he will do his best to make Verena happy. So we should not form the hasty conclusion that Miss Birdseye must be mad to think of Basil as "one of the most important converts" to feminism (p. 340). Miss Birdseye is certainly hazy in her head and indulging in a pleasing illusion. But nobody can deny the possibility that her illusion

may turn out to be true in the end.

When Miss Birdseye was dying a peaceful death, three women of different characters smoothed the pillow of the dying lady. They were Olive, Verena and Dr Prance. It is evident that the three women are inheriting here ideals of feminism from dying Miss Birdseye in their own different ways. All of them are capable of attaining their own ends. Dr Prance may be said to have already attained her own. And Olive, too, has the possibility of achieving her purpose of "[c]ausing certain laws to be replaced by Congress and by the State legislatures" if she condescends to cooperate with other feminists. Lastly, Verena is going to show an orthodox example of a woman's way of living by getting married to Basil. All the three women will continue pursuing their own different course and consequently they will be following their own different kinds of feminism. In Verena's case, it is not that she will succumb to Basil's masculine assertion obediently but that she will oppose her feminine way against Basil's masculine one and find their own way of living together. She will attain her own feminism by her natural vivacity, sometimes criticizing Basil's way of thinking and acting and sometimes accepting them. In this way, the relation between a masculinist and a feminist will cease to be always inimical in the marriage life of Basil and Verena. After all we may safely say that this is the very end of Henry James's feminism, for he knows that feminism and masculinism are valuable if neither of them is put forth as the absolute truth and if many nonexclusive ways of believing in them are granted freely among all the world and his wife.

## Notes

- 1 Leon Edel, *Henry James : A Life* (New York : Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 3-16.
- 2 Henry James, *The Bostonians* (Oxford : Paperbacks, 1984), p. 147.  
All further references to this edition appear in the text.
- 3 Irving Howe, Introduction to *The Bostonians* (The Modern Library, 1956), pp. xxv-xxviii.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. xxvi-xxvii.
- 5 "chivalrous," *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1971 edn.
- 6 Howe, p. xxvi.  
Tony Tanner, *Henry James* (Amherst : The Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1985), p. 56.
- 7 Tanner, p. 55.

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