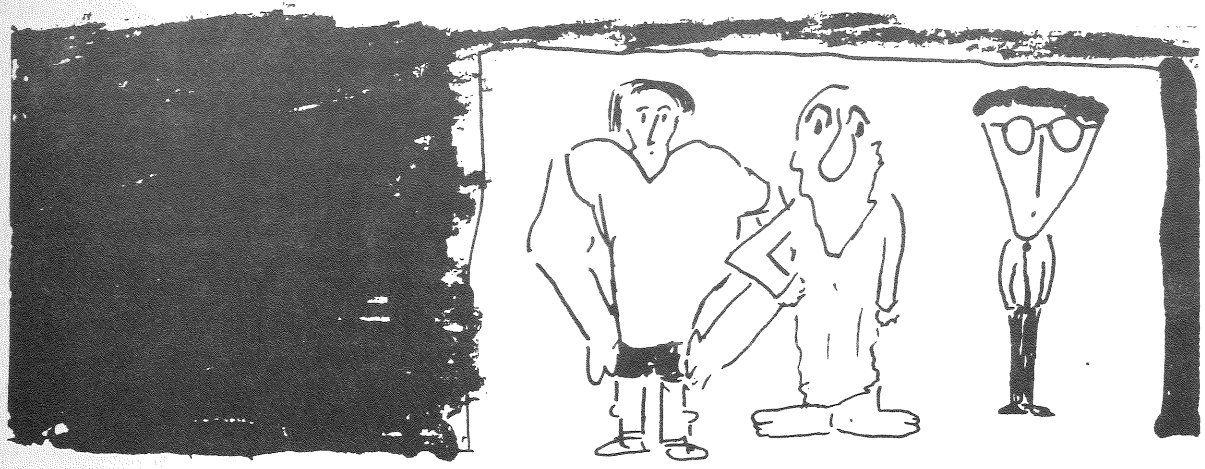
THE GADFLY

Special Edition

LOVERS



Christopher Bruell, this week's Friday night lecturer, is an associate professor of political philosophy at Boston College. He has published important articles on Thucydides and on Plato. Much of his work has been an attempt to understand the original, or Socratic, meaning of political philosophy, i.e. the philosophy concerning how human beings should live. His lecture, entitled "On the Original Meaning of Political Philosophy", is a product of this work.

Mr. Bruell's lecture will take the form of an interpretation of Plato's Lovers. The best preparation for his lecture is to read, as carefully as time allows, this very short dialogue. Since the Lovers is not included in most collections of Plato's works, I have prepared this translation, which the GADFLY has kindly consented to publish.

The translation is not a polished one, and its English is sometimes unnecessarily awkward. Moreover, although I was more concerned with fidelity to the Greek than with a natural English style, I didn't take enough time so that I could vouch for its accuracy. I believe, however, that this is the most accurate available translation of the Lovers, and that it is adequate for a first reading and several re-readings.

David Bolotin

LOVERS

Socrates: I entered the school of Dionysius, the teacher of reading and writing, and I saw there those of the young who are reputed to be most remarkable for their looks and the good repute of their fathers. I also saw their lovers. Two of the youths happened to be disputing, but I didn't very well hear what it was about. They appeared, however, to be disputing either about Anaxagoras or about Oenopides. At any rate, they appeared to be describing circles, and they were imitating certain ecliptics with their hands, and with great seriousness. And I, for I was sitting next to the lover of one of the two, nudged him with my elbow and asked him what the two youths were so serious about. And I said, "I suppose it is something great and noble to which they have bestowed such great seriousness?"

And he said, "What are you calling great and noble? They are prating about the heavenly things, and they are talking nonsense philosophizing."

And I marvelled at his answer, and I said, "Young man, does it seem to you to be shameful to philosophize? Or why do you speak so harshly?"

And the other one, who happened to be sitting near him and who was his rival in love, upon hearing my question and his answer, said, "You're not acting in your own interest, Socrates, even in asking this fellow whether he thinks that philosophy is shameful. Or don't you know that he has spent his whole life practicing the neck hold, stuffing himself, and sleeping? So what did you suppose he would answer except that philosophy is shameful?"

Now this one of the two lovers had spent his time on culture (mousikēn), and the other, whom he was abusing, had spent his on athletics. It seemed to me, then, that I ought to dismiss the one who was being questioned, for he didn't even claim to be experienced in speeches, but rather in deeds, and that I ought to question thoroughly the one who claimed to be wiser, so that I might also, if I could, receive some benefit from him. Accordingly, I said that "I asked my question in common. But if you suppose that you could answer more finely than this one, I ask you the same question I asked him, whether it seems to you to be noble or not to philosophize."

133a Just as we were saying these things, the two youths, overhearing us, became silent, and they themselves ceased from their dispute and became listeners. Now what their lovers felt, I don't know; but I myself was driven wild. For I'm always driven wild by the young and beautiful. It seemed to me, however, that the one of them was in no less agony than I was; but nevertheless, he answered me like someone very eager for honor. "If ever, Socrates, he said, "I should regard it as shameful to philosophize, I would no longer consider myself to be a human being; nor, indeed, (would I consider) anyone else who was so disposed." Here he pointed to his rival in love, and he spoke with a loud voice, so that his favorite might hear him.

And I said, "So it seems to you noble to philosophize?"

"Most certainly," he said.

"Well then, " I said. "Does it seem to you to be possible for a man to know, with regard to anything, whether it is noble or shameful, if one doesn't know to begin with what it is?"

"No," he said.

"Do you know, then" I said, "what it is to philosophize?"

"Certainly," he said.

"What is it, then?" I said.

"What else than (what it is) according to Solon? For Solon said somewhere, 'I grow old always learning many things,' and it seems thus to me, that the one who is going to philosophize should always be learning some one thing at least, both when he is younger and when he is older, so that he may learn as many things as possible in his life." And at first it seemed to me that he had said something; but afterwards, upon some reflection, I asked him whether he regarded philosophy as being much learning (polymathy).

And he said, "Certainly."

"And do you," I said, "consider philosophy to be merely noble, or also good?"

"Also good," he said. "Very much so."

"Do you see this as something peculiar to philosophy, or does it seem to you to be the case also in the other things? For instance, do you consider love of athletics to be not merely noble, but also good? Or don't you?"

To this he said, very ironically, two things. "Let it be said to this fellow that it is neither. But to you, Socrates, I grant it to be both noble and good. For I think (it) truly (is)."

So then I asked, "Do you also think that much exercise, in the case of athletics, is love of athletics?"

And he said, "Most certainly, just as I think that much learning, in the case of philosophizing, is philosophy (i.e. love of wisdom)."

And I said, "Do you think, then, that those who love athletics desire anything else than that which will cause them to be in good bodily condition?"

"It's that," he said.

"And do many exercises," I said, "cause the body to be in good condition?"

"Yes," he said. "For how could

134a someone be in good bodily condition from few exercises?"

Here it seemed to me that the lover of athletics should be stirred up, so that he might help me because of his experience in athletics. And then I asked him, "Why are you being silent, O excellent one, while this fellow is saying these things? Does it seem to you, too, that human beings are in good condition, with regard to their bodies, from many exercises, or is it from the measured amount?"

"As for me, Socrates," he said, "I supposed that even a pig--as the saying goes--would have known that the measured amount of exercise causes (human beings) to be in good condition with regard to their bodies. So how wouldn't a man know who is sleepless and unfed, whose neck is unchafed and who is thin from anxious thoughts?" And the youths were pleased as he said this, and they laughed. But the other one blushed.

And I said, "Well, then, do you now concede that neither many nor few exercises cause human beings to be in good condition with regard to their bodies, but the measured amount? Or will you fight it out with the two of us concerning the argument?"

And he said, "I would very gladly contend against this fellow, and I know well that I would be capable of supporting the thesis which I had put forward, even if I had put forward one still weaker than this; for he is nothing. Against you, however, I don't want to compete contrary to (my) opinions. And I agree that not many, but the measured amount of exercises produces good condition in human beings."

"And what about food?" I said. "Is it the measured amount, or much?"

And he agreed in the case of food.

Then I compelled him to agree that also in the case of all the other things having to do with the body the measured amount was most beneficial, and neither much nor little. And he agreed with me that it was the measured amount.

"What then," I said, "about the things having to do with the soul? Is it the measured amount of things or those without measure which, when administered, are beneficial?"

"The measured," he said.

"And are things (that can be) learned one (kind) of the things administered to a soul?"

He agreed.

"Then of these things, too, the measured amount, but not many, is beneficial."

He assented.

"Asking whom, then, would we ask justly which exercises and foods, with regard to the body, are measured?"

The three of us agreed that it was a doctor or a trainer.

"And whom concerning the sowing of seed, how much is a measured amount?"

And about this, we agreed that it was the farmer.

"And asking whom would we ask justly, concerning the planting and sowing in a soul of things (to be) learned, how many and which sort are measured?"

135a Here, we were all full of perplexity. And I, playing with them, asked, "Are you willing, since we are in perplexity, for us to ask these youths here? Or are we perhaps ashamed, as Homer said that the suitors were, who didn't deign that there be another who would string the bow?"

Then, since they seemed to me to be disheartened about the argument, I tried to consider it in another way, and I said, "Which especially of the things (that can be) learned do we guess are those which 136a the one philosophizing must learn, since it isn't all or many?"

Then the wiser one responded by saying that "These would be the noblest of the things (that can be) learned, and the fitting ones, from which someone would have the highest reputation for philosophy. And he would have the highest reputation if he were reputed to be experienced in all the arts; or if not all, in as many as possible and especially in the noteworthy ones, through having learned the portions of them which are fitting for the free to learn, the portions which belong to the understanding, rather than to manual work."

"Well, do you mean," I said, "in the same way as in carpentry? For there you could buy a carpenter (as a slave) for five or six minae; but you couldn't buy a first-rate architect even for ten thousand drachmas (i.e. one hundred minae). Indeed, there are few of them even among all the Greeks. Is it something like this that you mean?"

And when he heard me, he conceded that he too meant this kind of thing. Then I asked him whether it wasn't impossible for the same one to learn only two arts in this manner, much less many great ones. And he said, "Don't think that I am saying, Socrates, that the one philosophizing must know each of the arts precisely, like the one who has the art himself; but rather, as is seemly for a free and educated man, to able to follow what is said by the craf man better than the others who are pres and to contribute a judgment himself, s as to be reputed to be most refined and wisest among those who are present at any time when things are said and done concerning the arts."

And I, for I was still uncertain about his argument, as to what he inten said, "Do I have in mind the sort of ma you mean by the philosopher? For you seem to me to mean those who are like t pentathletes, in relation to the runner and the wrestlers, in competition. For they are also inferior to those others in their events, and they are second to them; but they are first among the othe athletes, and they are victorious again them. You probably mean that to philos phize also brings about something like this in those who practice this pursuit that they are inferior to the first-rat in understanding of the arts; but by having the second place they are superi to the others, and thus the one who has philosophized becomes a sort of second-best man in everything. You seem to me to be pointing to someone like this."

"You appear to me, Socrates," he said, "to have a fine conception of wha has to do with the philosopher, in like him to the pentathlete. For he is simp (atechnōs) the sort of person who is no a slave to any matter, and who hasn't labored at anything to the point of precision, so as not to be deficient in all the other things, as the crafts-men are, because of his concern for thi one, but to have touched upon everythi to a measured degree."

After this reply I was eager to kn with certainty what he meant, and so I inquired of him whether he conceived o those who are good as being useful or u less.

"Useful, surely, Socrates," he sa

"Then if the good are useful, are wicked useless?"

He agreed.

"Well, then. Do you regard the

philosophic men as being useful, or not?"

He agreed that they were useful, and moreover he said that he regarded them as being most useful.

"Come now, let us judge, if what you say is true, where these second-best men are also useful to us. For it is plain that the philosopher is inferior to each of those who possess the arts."

He agreed.

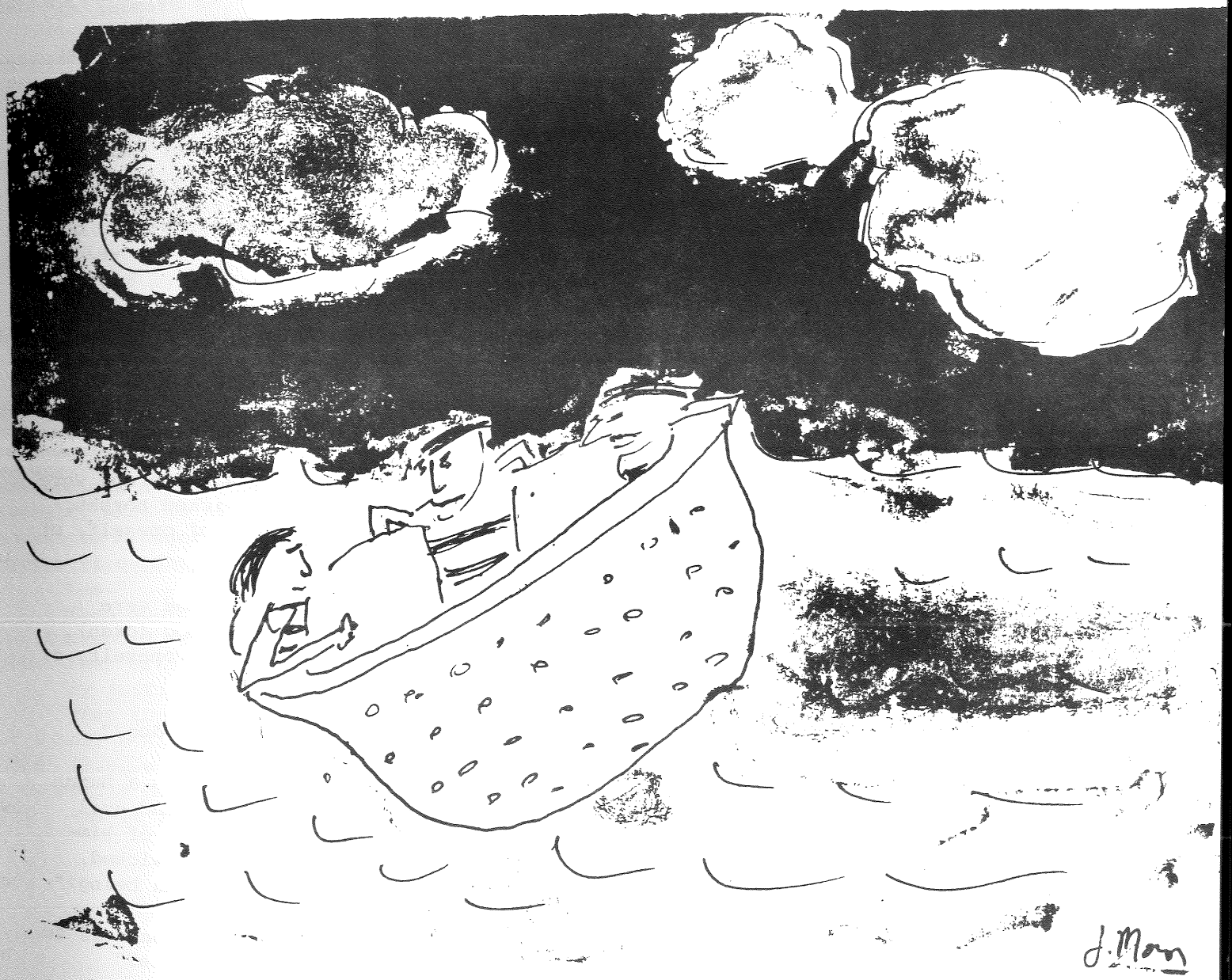
"Come now," I said, "if either you yourself or one of your friends, whom (pl.) you regard with great seriousness, were sick, would you, in your wish to acquire health, bring that second-best man, the philosopher, into your household, or would you get the doctor?"

"For my part, both," he said.

"Don't say 'both'," I said, "but tell me which one you would rather have, and which one first."

"No one," he said, "would dispute about this, that he wouldn't rather have the doctor, and him first."

"Well, then. In a storm-tossed ship, to which one would you rather entrust yourself and your property, to the pilot or to the philosopher?"



"I would prefer the pilot."

"And is it also like this in everything else, that as long as there is some craftsman, the philosopher is not useful?"

"It appears so," he said.

"And therefore do we now see that the philosopher is somebody useless? For surely we have craftsmen. But we have agreed that the good are useful, and the evil useless."

He was compelled to agree.

"Then what comes next? Shall I ask you, or is it too rude to ask?"

"Ask what you want."

"Well," I said, "What I seek is nothing else then to summarize what we've agreed
137a upon. And the matter stands somewhat like this. We agreed that philosophy is noble and that we ourselves are philosophers; that philosophers are good, the good are useful and the wicked useless; again, we agreed that philosophers are useless as long as there are craftsmen, and that there are always craftsmen. Haven't all these things been agreed upon?"

"Certainly," he said.

"We were agreeing then, as it looks, according to your argument at least, that if to philosophize consists in their being knowledgeable about the arts in the way you say, they are wicked and useless as long as there are arts among human beings. But I suspect, my friend, that this isn't so, and that to philosophize isn't to have become serious about the arts, nor to live as a busybody, stooping down and learning many things, but rather something else. Since I supposed that this was in fact a (matter of) reproach and that those who have become serious about the arts were called illiberal ("banausic"). But we shall know with more certainty, whether what I say is true, if you answer this: Who know how to punish horses correctly? Is it those who make them better, or others?"

"Those who make them better."

"Well, then. With dogs, don't those who know how to make them best also know how to punish correctly?"

"Yes."

"Then the same art makes them best and punishes correctly?"

"It appears so to me," he said.

"Well, then. Is the art that makes them better and punishes correctly the same as that which judges the (ones who are) good and the (ones who are) evil, or is it some other?"

"The same," he said.

"Will you be willing, then, in the case of human beings as well, to agree that the art that makes human beings best is the one that both punishes correctly and distinguishes (judges thoroughly) the good and the evil?"

"Certainly," he said.

"Then does that which (applies) to one also (apply) to many, and does that which (applies) to many also (apply) to one?"

"Yes."

"And so too with horses and all the others?"

"Yes, I say."

"What then is the science that correctly punishes the unrestrained and unlawful in the cities? Isn't it the judicial?"

"Yes."

"And do you call any other (science) justice than this one?"

"No, but this one."

"Then don't they also judge the good and evil by means of this one, by which they punish correctly?"

"By this one."

"And he who judges one will also judge ("know") many?"

"Yes."

"And he who is ignorant of many is also (ignorant) of one?"

"Yes, I say."

"If, then, one were a horse and were ignorant of the good and wicked horses, would one also be ignorant of oneself, of what sort one is?"

"Yes, I say."

"And if one were an ox and were ignorant of the wicked and good (oxen), would one also be ignorant of oneself, of what sort one is?"

"Yes," he said.

"And so too if one were a dog?"

He agreed.

"Well now. When one who is a human being is ignorant of the good and evil human beings, isn't he ignorant of himself, of whether he is good or wicked, since he himself is also a human being?"

He conceded this.

"And is to be ignorant of oneself to be moderate or not to be moderate?"

"Not to be moderate."

"So then to know ("judge") oneself is

to be moderate?"

"Yes, I say," he said.

"This, then, as it looks, is what the writing in Delphi (i.e. "Know Thyself") exhorts, to practice moderation and justice."

"It looks like it."

"And by this same (science) do we also know how to punish correctly?"

"Yes."

"Then isn't it justice by which we know how to punish correctly, and moderation by which we know how to judge thoroughly both oneself and others?"

"It looks like it," he said.

"Then both justice and moderation are the same thing?"

"It appears so."

"Moreover, cities too are well-managed whenever those doing injustice pay the penalty."

"What you say is true," he said.

"And so this is also a political (science)."

He concurred.

"And what about when one man manages a city correctly, isn't his name tyrant and king?"

"Yes, I say."

"Then does he manage by the kingly and tyrannic art?"

"Just so."

"And so are these the same arts as those?"

"They appear to be."

"And what about when one who is a man manages a household correctly by himself, what is his name? Isn't it household manager (i.e. economist) and master (i.e. despot)?"

"Yes."

"Then would this one, too, manage the household well by justice, or also by some other art?"

"By justice."

"Then they are the same (thing), as it looks, a king, a tyrant, a political (man) (i.e. a statesman), an economist, a despot, a moderate (man), and a just one. And it is one art that is kingly, tyrannic, political, despotic, economic, justice, and moderation."

"It appears to be that way," he said.

"Then is it shameful for the philosopher, when a doctor says something about the sick, neither to be able to follow what is said nor to contribute anything concerning what is said or done, and likewise whenever any other of the craftsmen (is involved)? Yet when a judge or a king or any other of those we've just now gone through is involved, is it not shameful for him neither to be able to follow nor to contribute concerning these things?"

"How is it not shameful, Socrates, to have nothing to contribute, especially with regard to such great matters?"

"So then," I said, "shall we say that he should be a pentathlete and second-best about these things too, and that the philosopher, though he has second place in all (portions) of this, is indeed good-for-nothing, as long as one of them is (available)? Or else is it for him, first, not to entrust his own household to another, nor to have second place in this, but to sit in judgment and punish correctly himself, if his household is going to be well managed?"

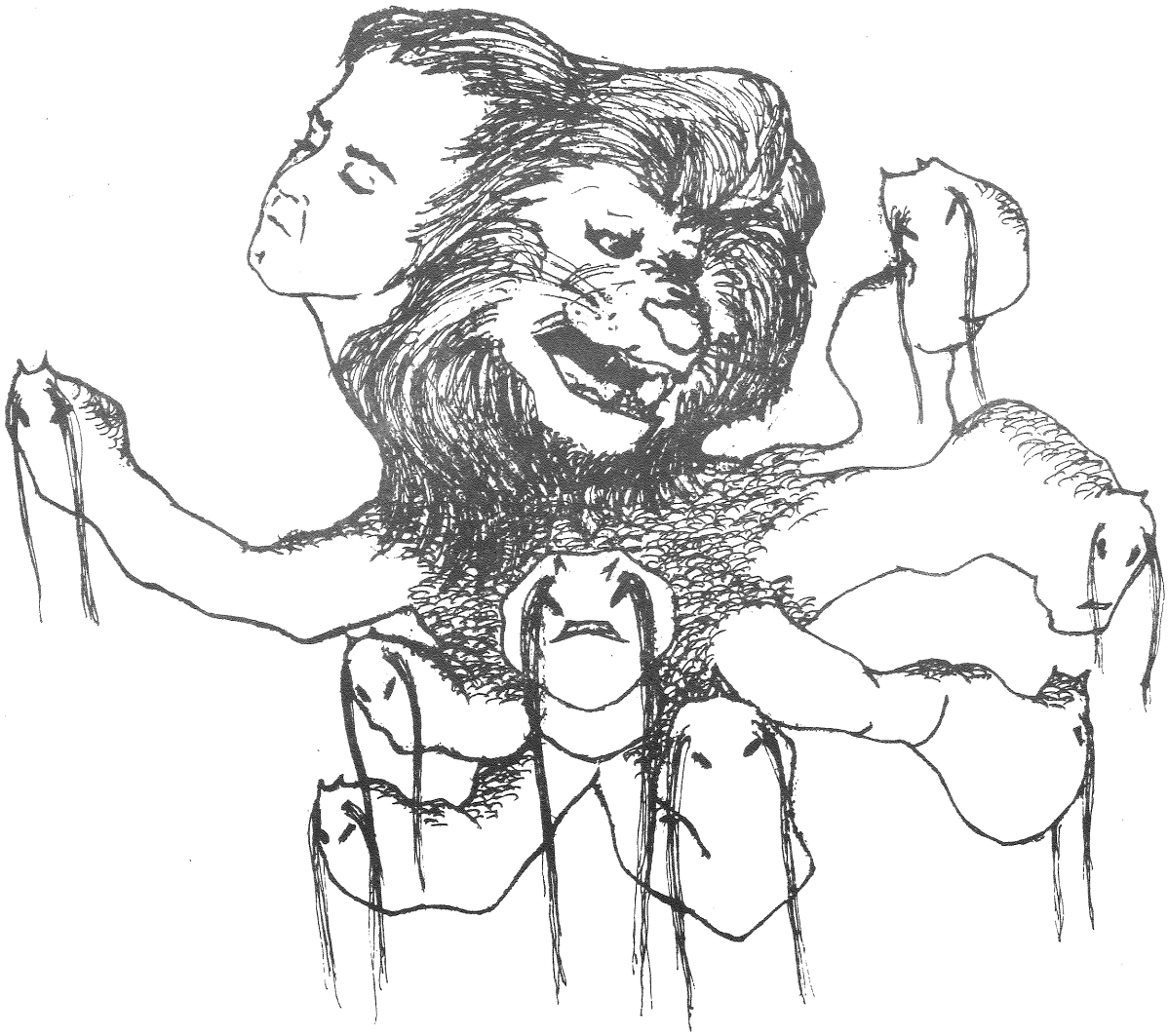
He went along with me.

"Next, I presume, if his friends entrust matters for arbitration to him, or if the city orders him to decide or give judgment about something, is it shameful, comrade, to come to light as second or third in these affairs, rather than to lead?"

"It seems so to me."

"Therefore, you best one, to philosophize is far from being much learning (polymathy) or preoccupation with the arts."

On my saying this, the wise one, who was ashamed at what he had said earlier, was silent; but the ignorant one said that it was so; and the others praised what had been said.



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