

## II 10 *Social roles as a guide to conduct*

[1] Who are you? In the first place, a human being, which is to say, a being possessed of no greater faculty than free choice, with all your other faculties subordinate to it, choice itself being unconfined and independent. [2] Next, consider the gift of reason: it sets you apart from wild animals; it sets you apart from sheep. [3] By virtue of these two faculties you are a member of the universe with full citizen rights; you were born not to serve but to govern, because you understand the divine order and its pattern.

[4] Now, what does the title 'citizen' mean? In this role, a person never acts in his own interest or thinks of himself alone, but, like a hand or foot that had sense and realized its place in the natural order, all its actions and desires aim at nothing except contributing to the common good. [5] Therefore, philosophers rightly say, 'If a good person knew that sickness, death or disability lay in his future, he would actually invite them, because he realizes that this is part of the universal plan and that the universe has precedence over a constituent, and the city over any one citizen. [6] But since we don't know the future, we're justified in sticking to things that are preferable by nature, because this, after all, is our instinct from birth.'

[7] Next, remember that you are somebody's son. What does this social role mean? It means regarding everything of yours as belonging to your father as well, always letting him have his way, never trying to hurt him with your words or actions, or griping about him behind his back. Defer to him at every opportunity, and in the same spirit cooperate with him as best you can.

[8] Next, know that you are a brother. This role also calls for deference, respect and civility. Never get into family fights over material things; give them up willingly, and your moral standing will increase in proportion. [9] Make a gift of your box seat in the theatre, or a bit of food, if that's at stake, and see the gratitude you get in return – how much greater it is than the sacrifice.

[10] Finally, reflect on the other social roles you play. If you are a council member, consider what a council member should do. If you are young, what does being young mean, if you are old, what does age imply, [11] if you are a father, what does fatherhood entail? Each of our titles, when reflected upon, suggests the acts appropriate to it.

[12] If you go off and yell at your brother, my reaction is to say, 'You've forgotten who you are and what you stand for.'  
[13] I mean, if you were a metalworker who fumbled with his tools, you would have lost touch with the metalworker you once were. If you forget what it means to be a brother and become your brother's enemy, don't think you've made a trivial exchange. [14] If you are transformed from a decent, social human being into some mean, snarling, dangerous beast, is there no loss involved? Or do you have to lose money before you feel penalized? Is losing money the only loss that counts with us?