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**Review Essay: Rabil, Albert Jr, ed, trans. *Knowledge, Goodness, and Power: The Debate over Nobility among Quattrocento Italian Humanists***

De Lamar Jensen  
*Brigham Young University*

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Rabil, Albert Jr, ed, trans. *Knowledge, Goodness, and Power: The Debate over Nobility among Quattrocento Italian Humanists*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Binghamton, N.Y. 1991. 410 pp. \$30.00.

*Knowledge, Goodness, and Power* presents, in English translation, the texts of thirteen treatises on the nature of nobility, written by nine humanists of quattrocento Italy. The issue of true nobility was basic to much of humanist discourse because it related to how they perceived good and evil, truth and error, wisdom and ignorance, as well as valor, wealth, birth, and activity. The Renaissance placed a high premium on the hierarchy of values and thus on the definition and ranking of qualities such as nobility. The texts presented here initiated discussion that continued to have an impact on European thought for centuries.

While all of the treatises focus on the nature of nobility, they reveal a great diversity of opinions. The pivotal treatise is Poggio Bracciolini's dialogue *On Nobility* because it underlines the ambivalence both of Poggio's personality and of humanist thought. Couched in a discussion between Lorenzo de' Medici, who sees the importance of wealth as crucial for true nobility, and Niccolò Niccoli, who argues against it, the dialogue opened a Pandora's box of options that elicited a flurry of controversy, as in the discourse *On True Nobility against Poggio the Florentine* by Leonardo of Chios and in Lauro Quirini's *On Nobility against Poggio the Florentine*. Although Poggio affirms, through Lorenzo, that nobility comes from achieving honor and glory through great deeds, he has Niccolò make a stronger case for virtue being the basis of true nobility. The issue that seemed to arouse both Leonardo and Quirini most was Poggio's implicit exalting of Florentine nobility above all others.

The lengthiest discussion is Cristoforo Landini's *On True Nobility*, which develops the view — more unequivocally than did Poggio — that nobility comes from virtue, especially virtue of mind and soul, that is, from the cardinal virtues of wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage. Baptista Platina concurs in his dialogue *On True Nobility*, adding the virtue of poverty. Tristano Caracciolo's *Defense of Neapolitan Nobility* expands a more traditional view of nobility deriving from good birth, superiority of mind and body, and fame and property attained through the application of industry and courage in performing services to great princes and pontiffs. He particularly defended the highborn Neapolitan nobles against charges of indolence and incompetence made by Poggio, and by the Venetian ambassador.

Albert Rabil is to be commended for producing this excellent collection of humanist writings. They will be useful resources for students and established scholars alike. The book is made even more valuable by its general introduction, which places the selections in the context of the classical tradition from which they emerged, and by introductions of each author and text. In addition, Rabil provides at the end of the collection a marvelous thirty-four-page glossary of classical writers and persons mentioned in the texts, a useful bibliography, and a carefully made index.

De Lamar Jensen  
Emeritus Professor of History  
Brigham Young University