

### **From Leon Battista Alberti's *On the Family* (1443)**

[Man] comes into this world in order to enjoy all things, be virtuous, and make himself happy. For he who may be called happy will be useful to other men, and he who is now useful to others cannot but please God. He who uses things improperly harms other men and incurs God's displeasure, and he who displeases God is a fool if he thinks he is happy. We may, therefore, state that man is created by Nature to use, and reap the benefits of all things, and that he is born to be happy . . . .

I believe it will not be excessively difficult for a man to acquire the highest honors and glory, if he perseveres in his studies as much as is necessary, toiling, sweating, and striving to surpass all others by far. It is said that man can do anything he wants. If you will strive with all your strength and skill, as I have said, I have no doubt you will reach the highest degree of perfection and fame in any profession . . . .

To those of noble and liberal spirit, no occupations seem less brilliant than those whose purpose is to make money. If you think a moment and try to remember which are the occupations for making money, you will see that they consist of buying and selling, lending and collecting. I believe that these occupations whose purpose is gain may seem vile and worthless to you, for you are of noble and lofty spirit. In fact, selling is a mercenary trade; you serve the buyer's needs, pay yourself for your work, and make a profit by charging others more than you yourself have paid. You are not selling goods, therefore, but your labors; you are reimbursed for the cost of your goods, and for your labor you receive a profit. Lending would be a laudable generosity if you did not seek interest, but then it would not be a profitable business. Some say that these occupations, which we shall call pecuniary, always entail dishonesty and numerous lies and often entail dishonest agreements and fraudulent contracts. They say, therefore, that those of liberal spirit must completely avoid them as dishonest and mercenary. But I believe that those who judge all pecuniary occupations in this manner are wrong. Granted that acquiring wealth is not a glorious enterprise to be likened to the most noble professions. We must not, however, scorn a man who is not naturally endowed for noble deeds if he turns to these other occupations in which he knows he is not inept and which, everyone admits, are of great use to the family and to the state. Riches are useful for gaining friends and praise, for with them we can help those in need. With wealth we can gain fame and prestige if we use it munificently for great and noble projects.