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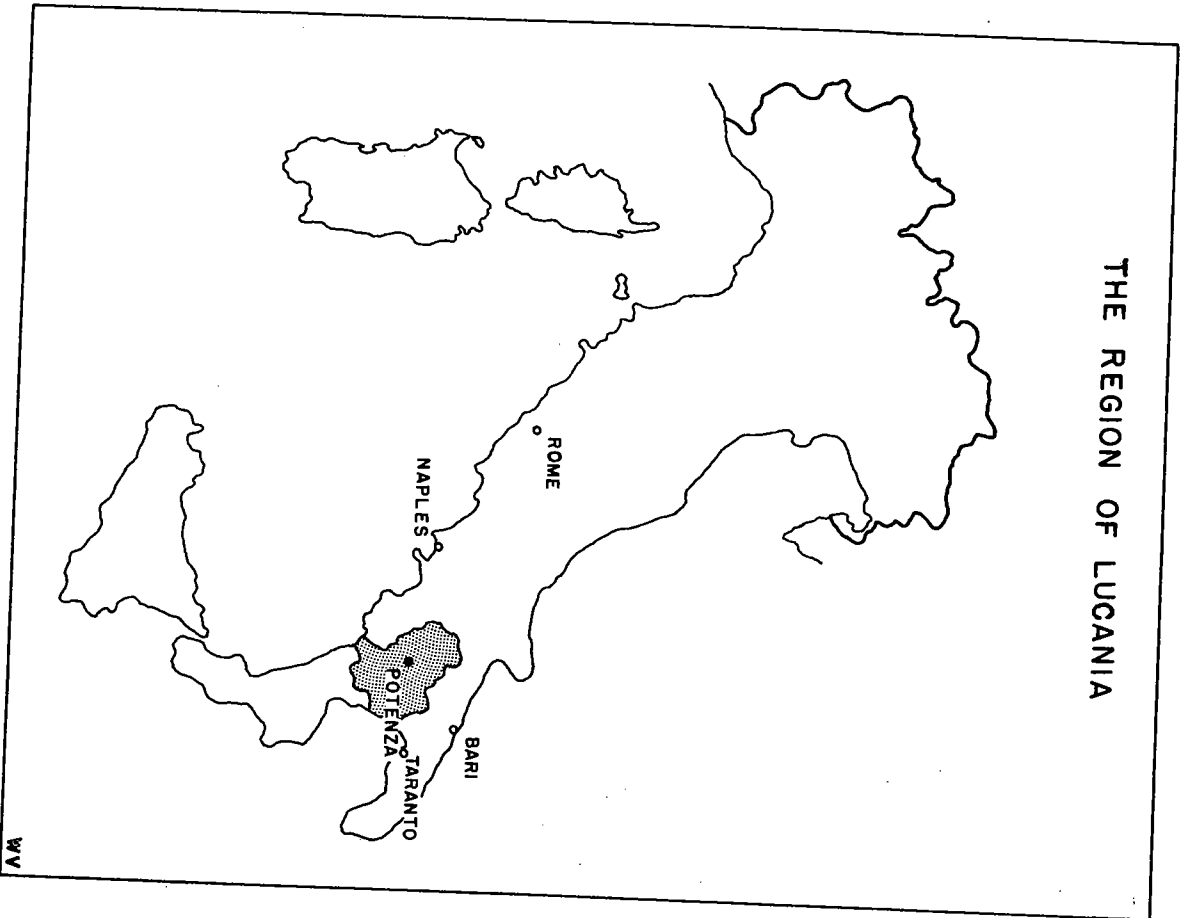
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In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

-- Hobbes

THE REGION OF LUCANIA



# The Moral Basis of a Backward Society

By EDWARD C. BANFIELD

WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF LAURA FASANO BANFIELD

Photographs by the Author

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Research Center in Economic  
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The University of Chicago

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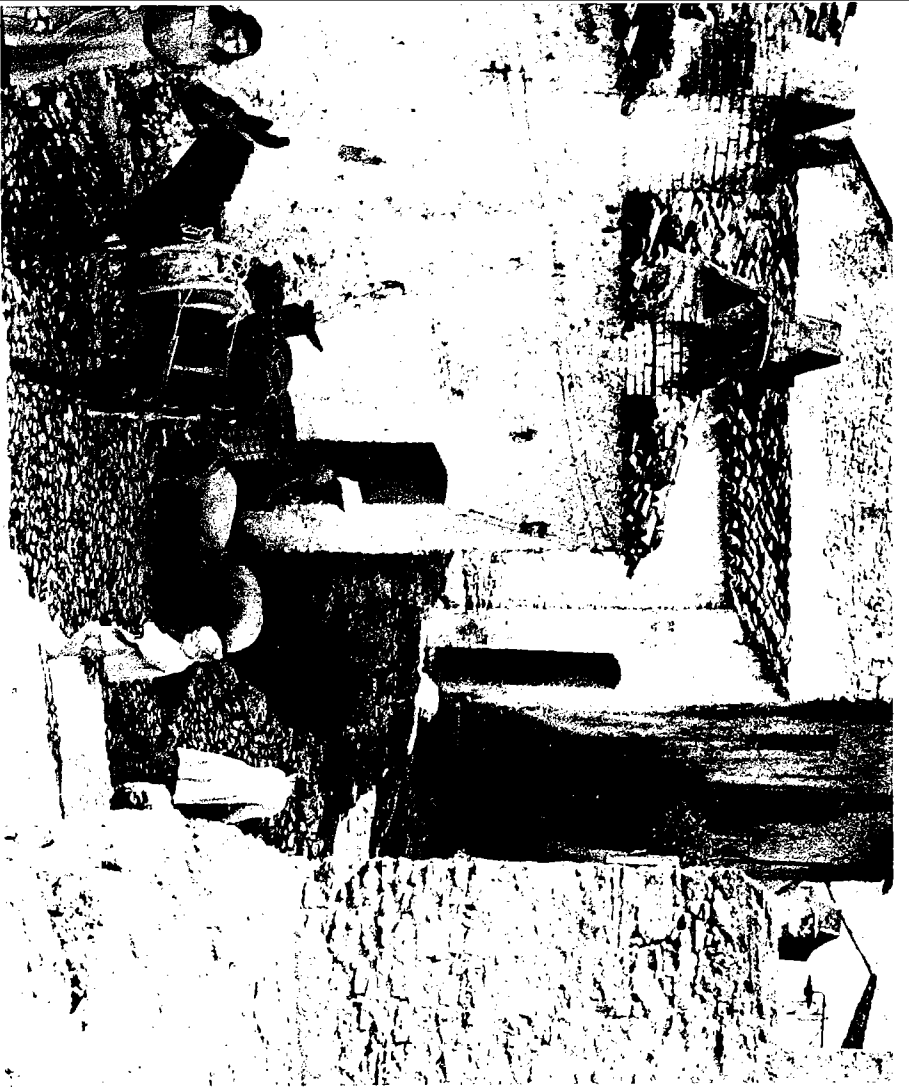
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## INTRODUCTION

In democratic countries the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made.

-- Tocqueville

Most of the people of the world live and die without ever achieving membership in a community larger than the family or tribe.

Except in Europe and America, the concerting of behavior in political associations and corporate organization is a rare and recent thing.

Lack of such association is a very important limiting factor in the way of economic development in most of the world. Except as people can create and maintain corporate organization, they cannot have a modern economy. To put the matter positively: the higher the level of living to be attained, the greater the need for organization.

Inability to maintain organization is also a barrier to political progress. Successful self-government depends, among other things, upon the possibility of concerting the behavior of large numbers of people in matters of public concern. The same factors that stand in the way of effective association for economic ends stand in the way of association for political ones too. "The most democratic country on the face of the earth", Tocqueville observed, "is that in which men have, in our time, carried to the highest perfection the art of pursuing in common the object of their common desires and have applied this new science to the greatest number of purposes."<sup>1</sup>

1. Democracy in America, Knopf edition, Vol. II, p. 107.

We are apt to take it for granted that economic and political associations will quickly arise wherever technical conditions and natural resources permit. If the state of the technical arts is such that large gains are possible by concerting the activity of many people, capital and organizing skill will appear from somewhere, and organizations will spring up and grow. This is the comfortable assumption that is often made.

The assumption is wrong because it overlooks the crucial importance of culture. People live and think in very different ways, and some of these ways are radically inconsistent with the requirements of formal organization. One could not, for example, create a powerful organization in a place where everyone could satisfy his aspirations by reaching out his hand to the nearest coconut. Nor could one create a powerful organization in a place where no one would accept orders or direction.

There is some reason to doubt that the non-Western cultures of the world will prove capable of creating and maintaining the high degree of organization without which a modern economy and a democratic political order are impossible. There seems to be only one important culture--the Japanese--which is both radically different from our own and capable of maintaining the necessary degree of organization. If there is to be more than a superficial overlay of industrialization in China, India, and the other underdeveloped countries, their ethos must be such as to allow the establishment of corporate forms of action.

The ability of a culture to maintain organization cannot meaningfully be measured simply in number or size of organizations. An organization may have many members and cover a large area and yet do very little. In appraising the capacity of a culture to maintain

organization, it is necessary to consider not only numbers and size of organizations but their efficiency, i.e., the rate at which they convert valued input to valued output. In doing this, one must ask how exacting are the purposes or values being served: obviously it is less of a feat to be efficient in the attainment of a purpose which imposes few demands than in the attainment of one which imposes many. That a culture is able to maintain an effective military force, for example, does not imply that it can succeed in the infinitely more difficult task of creating an industrial society in which human values are preserved and improved. If these most difficult and important purposes are taken as the standard, it is even more difficult to see how most cultures of the non-Western world can attain a high level of organization unless they are changed drastically or potentialities now latent in them find expression.

While it is easy to see that culture may be the limiting factor which determines the amount and character of organization and therefore of progress in the less developed parts of the world, it is not obvious what are the precise incompatibilities between particular cultures, or aspects of culture, and particular forms or levels of organization. Even with respect to our own society we know very little about such matters. What, for example, is the significance for organization of various class, ethnic, or sexual attributes within our own culture?

This book is a study of the cultural, psychological, and moral conditions of political and other organization. The approach is that of detailed examination of factors which impede corporate action in a culture which, although not radically foreign to ours, is nevertheless different from it and in some respects closely similar to that of the Mediterranean and Levantine worlds.

The book is about a single village in southern Italy, the extreme poverty and backwardness of which is to be explained<sup>2</sup> largely (but not entirely) by the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family. This inability to concert activity beyond the immediate family arises from an ethos<sup>3</sup> -- that of "amoral familism" -- which has been produced by three factors acting in combination: a high death rate, certain land tenure conditions, and the absence of the institution of the extended family.

Our family -- my wife and I and our two children, then eight and ten years old -- lived among the peasants of Montegrano (the name is fictitious, as are all local ones) for nine months in 1954 and 1955. With the help of an Italian student, my wife interviewed about 70 persons, most of them peasants. (My own knowledge of the language was non-existent to start with and rudimentary later.) In addition, we gathered data from census schedules and other official sources, from record books and autobiographies kept by peasants at our request, and from thematic apperception tests.

It was not practical to employ sophisticated sampling techniques. (To have done so would have left no time for interviewing.) Therefore, we do not know how representative our interviews were; our

2. An explanation, Hume said, is a place where the mind comes to rest. Some of the explanations discussed (Chapter Two) or offered (Chapter Eight) in this book are causal, i. e., they are places where the mind comes to rest when it looks for conditions antecedent to an event and necessary to its occurrence. Others (Chapter Five) are at least superficially of a different sort: they are places where the mind comes to rest when it looks for a principle of identity in seemingly unrelated facts.
3. The concept "ethos" is used in Sumner's sense: "the sum of the characteristic usages, ideas, standards, and codes by which a group is differentiated and individualized in character from other groups." Folkways, p. 36.

impression is, however, that they were highly representative of that part of the population which lives in the town and reasonably representative of the nearby country dwellers. We are not competent to say how representative Montegrano is of southern Italy as a whole; there is some evidence, however, that in the respects relevant to this study, Montegrano is fairly the "typical" south, viz., the rest of Lucania, the regions of Abruzzi and Calabria, the interior of Campania, and the coasts of Catania, Messina, Palermo, and Trapani.<sup>4</sup>

Since our intention is not to "prove" anything, but rather to outline and illustrate a theory which may be rigorously tested by any who care to do so, we think our data -- meager though they are -- are sufficient. There are enough data, at least, to justify systematic inquiry along these lines. Until such inquiry has been made, the argument made here must be regarded as highly tentative.

Some readers may feel that amoral familism, or something very much akin to it, exists in every society, the American no less than the southern Italian. Our answer to this is that amoral familism is a pattern or syndrome; a society exhibiting some of the constituent elements of the syndrome is decisively different from one exhibiting all of them together. Moreover, the matter is one of degree: no matter how selfish or unscrupulous most of its members may be, a society is not amorally individualistic (or familistic) if there is

4. An Australian demographer, J. S. McDonald, has shown that emigration rates in these areas "where economic aspirations were integrated only with the welfare of the individual's nuclear family" have been higher than in other rural districts (i. e., the Veneto, Centre, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, and Marches) "where aspirations for material betterment were expressed in board associative behavior". "Italy's Rural Social Structure and Emigration", Occidente, Vol. XII, No. 5 (September-October 1956), pp. 437-455.

somewhere in it a significant element of public spiritedness or even of "enlightened" self interest.

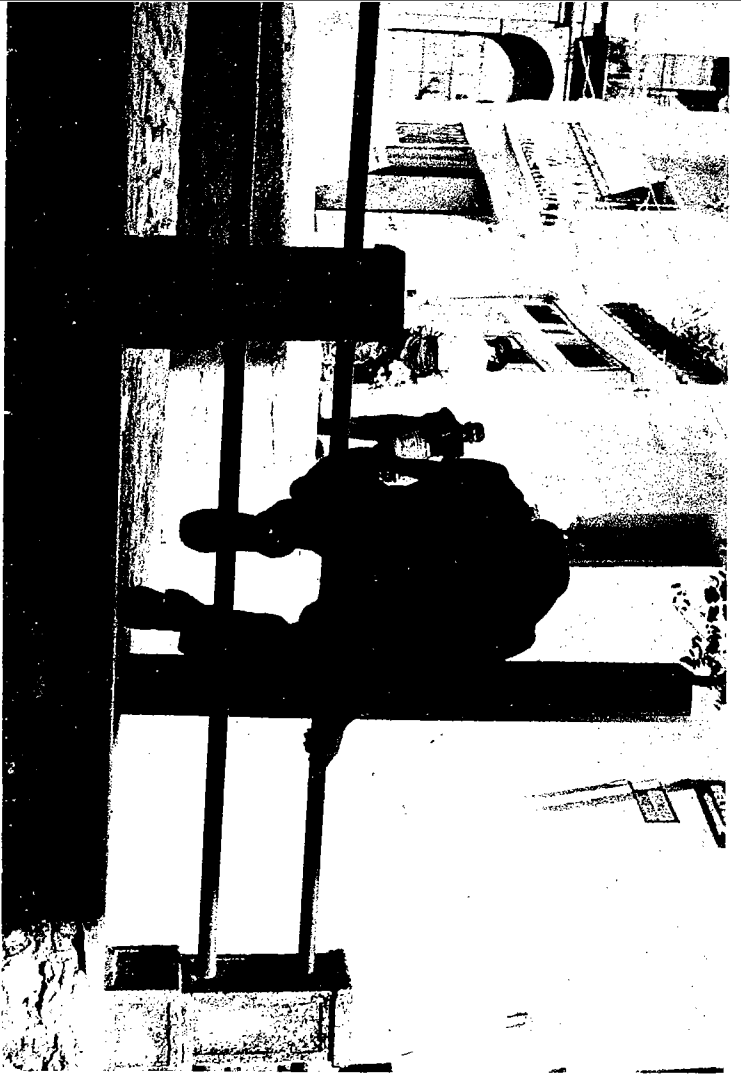
We wish to express appreciation for the interest and courtesies extended by Professor Manlio Rossi-Doria and Dr. Gilberto Marselli of the Scuola Agraria in Portici and to Drs. Giuseppe Barbero and Giuseppe Orlando of the Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria in Rome. Mr. Giovanni Giura, now of Chicago, assisted in the field work in Montegrano. Dr. Ivano Rinaldi of Perugia administered the-  
matic apperception tests in the Rovigo district and supplied information on social organization there.

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The present tense describes the situation as it was in 1955.





## CHAPTER ONE IMPRESSIONS AND QUESTIONS

Americans are used to a buzz of activity having as its purpose, at least in part, the advancement of community welfare. For example, a single issue of the weekly newspaper published in St. George, Utah (population 4,562), reports a variety of public-spirited undertakings. The Red Cross is conducting a membership drive. The Business and Professional Women's Club is raising funds to build an additional dormitory for the local junior college by putting on a circus in which the members will be both clowns and "animals". The Future Farmers of America (whose purpose is "to develop agricultural leadership, cooperation, and citizenship through individual and group leadership") are holding a father-son banquet. A local business firm has given an encyclopedia to the school district. The Chamber of Commerce is discussing the feasibility of building an all-weather road between two nearby towns. "Skywatch" volunteers are being signed up. A local church has collected \$1,393.11 in pennies for a children's hospital 350 miles away. The County Farm Bureau is flying one of its members to Washington, 2,000 miles away, to participate in discussions of farm policy. Meetings of the Parent Teachers Associations are being held in the schools. "As a responsible citizen of our community", the notice says, "you belong in the PTA".

Montegrano, a commune of 3,400 persons, most of them poor farmers and laborers, in the province of Potenza in southern

