CHAPTER 3

Lewis Henry Morgan and ancient society

An American, Lewis Henry Morgan, was to prove the most influential of those who developed the anthropological idea of primitive society. His influence on his immediate successors was so great, indeed, that it forms a serious barrier to a fresh reading of his work today. His theory was appropriated early on by Engels, whose particular interpretation still has committed supporters. Later, Boas made Morgan the special target of his critique of evolutionism. In consequence, Morgan's theses became the battleground for two generations of American anthropologists. Precisely on account of this intense controversy, Morgan's ideas have very often been misrepresented and misunderstood.[1]

In order to recapture the intended meaning of what Morgan wrote, one must try to ignore what was to come, and to concentrate upon the immediate sources and contexts of his thinking; to recreate his intellectual milieu, which he assumed his readers would share. This is an intriguing exercise in itself, and it is an essential preliminary if one wishes to specify the kinds of transformation which characterize his work. Morgan reacted to his contemporaries, but not in the radical way which led Maine and McLennan to select particular adversaries and then to turn their ideas on their heads. He collected enormous quantities of data and drew with considerable expertise upon a variety of theories (including McLennan's); but in the end he reworked his materials to fit the models which had become current among the British scholars in his field.

1 Cf. E. Service (1985), *A Century of Controversy*, Chapter 3.

Yankees, Presbyterians and Darwinism

Morgan's immediate intellectual circle is perhaps best approached by way of his closest friend during his early adult years in Rochester, New York, the Rev. J. S. McIlvaine, who was the Presbyterian minister of Rochester from 1848 until 1860. McIlvaine was intimately associated with Morgan's research, and he was instrumental in securing the eventual publication of Morgan's *Systems of Consanguinity* (1871). A formidable intellectual, he was a philologist, and a recognized authority on Sanskrit. McIlvaine was associated with the Smithsonian Institution, and when he left Rochester it was to take up an academic appointment at Princeton.

He was also a minister of religion. He did his best – with the support of Morgan's wife – to ignite Morgan's Christian faith, but with only partial success, though he claimed that Morgan's heart lay in the end with the Christian religion; and Morgan was certainly at the least a Deist, and was prepared to respect McIlvaine's faith. An earlier generation sometimes represented McIlvaine as a censor, who checked the free expression of Morgan's Darwinian beliefs for theological reasons. This interpretation derived some plausibility from McIlvaine's own claim:

> that whilst his great work on 'Ancient Society' was passing through the press, I called his attention to a passage which inadvertently might have found its place there, and which might be construed as an endorsement of these materialistic speculations in connection with evolution; and he immediately cancelled the whole page, although it had already been stereotyped.[2]

This view of McIlvaine's role altered as the context of the evolutionist debate in the United States was better appreciated. Indeed Morgan's second biographer, Carl Resek, concluded that on the contrary McIlvaine had inspired Morgan's evolutionist hypothesis.[3]

Morgan and McIlvaine's branch of the Presbyterian church participated in a markedly liberal movement within New England-Calvinism in the second half of the nineteenth century.[4] It repudi-

2 McIlvaine (1923), 'The life and works of Lewis H. Morgan, LL.D.: an address at his funeral', p. 57

3 Resek (1980), *Lewis Henry Morgan: American Scholar*.

4 For discussions of contemporary American Calvinism, its attitudes to slavery and to Darwinian theory, see: Winthrop Hudson (1965), *Religion in America*; James

ated slavery and affirmed a faith in democracy and Utilitarian political ideas. On scientific matters, it was equally determined to accommodate the most enlightened modern theories. Nor was the theory of evolution a special problem. Evolution might even be reconciled with Calvinist ideas of predestination – 'Evolution', as one divine explained, 'is God's way of doing things'.[5] The new chronology could also be taken on board. 'I cannot find sufficient data in the Scriptures for a revealed chronology', McIlvaine commented. 'Neither, as I read the first chapters of Genesis, does it appear that man was created in a high state of development, though certainly in a state of innocence.'[6]

The northern Presbyterians in fact welcomed Darwin's witness with respect to one very sensitive political issue. This was the question of the unity of origin of the human species. They were up in arms against their southern Presbyterian brethren, who justified slavery on the grounds that God had created several distinct species of man, each with a particular destiny. During the Civil War an 'American school of anthropology' developed in the South which propagated this view. It drew the support even of Agassiz, the eccentric Lamarckian biologist of Harvard.[7]

According to the northern Presbyterians, this 'polygenist' thesis was a denial of the truth, to which both the Bible and the Declaration of Independence bore witness, that all men were created equal. Darwin unequivocably supported the view that all the races were simply varieties of one species, with a common origin. This aspect of Darwinian theory was particularly stressed by Asa Gray, Agassiz's rival at Harvard, and the leader of the American Darwinians.

On one vital matter, however, Darwin's views were unacceptable to many, indeed most, Christians. He posited the mutability of species and – despite his inital caution – it became evident that he believed man had evolved from non-human primate forebears. This theory of the transmutation of species was clearly irreconcilable with the Book of Genesis, but there were many respectable scholars who believed that it was also at odds with biological facts. A great number of mainstream biologists in the 1860s believed that the species were fixed. Agassiz's version of Cuvier's typology even allowed for the separate creation of each individual species. Morgan, a competent amateur biologist, sided with Agassiz on this issue. He wrote a naturalist's study of the American beaver (which won Agassiz's admiration) in which he strongly affirmed his faith in Cuvier and in the separate creation of the human species.[8]

One could, however, believe that the species were fixed without having to believe that they were changeless. Agassiz and many of his colleagues might rule out 'transmutation', the change of one species into another; but they still believed that a species could develop along appropriate lines. Each species might realize an inner potential, which gradually unfolded. Those who thought in this way commonly conceived of the development of species on the analogy of the evolution of the embryo. The tadpole might become a frog, but that did not amount to a change of species. Indeed, ontogeny, the development of an individual, might recapitulate phylogeny, the history of a species. The term 'evolution' itself was generally used in this embryological sense until about 1880, and neither Darwin in *The Origin of Species* (1859) nor Morgan in *Systems* (1871) or *Ancient Society* (1877), used the word 'evolution' at all.[9]

Agassiz's version of evolution assumed that the world had been designed by God. Particular species had been created in order to fit into particular ecological relations. They were, moreover, programmed to develop as the whole cosmological order itself progressed. Adaptation was a sign of planning rather than of selection. Agassiz was quite explicit that evolution was comprehensible only as the gradual unfolding of a divine plan. Species were incarnations of a divine idea. 'Natural History must, in good time,

Moore (1979), *The Post-Darwinian Controversies*; H. Smith *et. al.* (1963), *American Christianity*; and R. Wilson (1967), *Darwin and the American Intellectuals*.

5 Quoted in Hudson (1965), *Religion in America*, p. 267.

6 McIlvaine (1923), 'The life and works of Lewis H. Morgan', p. 56.

7 See especially William Stanton (1960), *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America 1815–1859*.

8 Morgan (1868a), *The American Beaver and His Works*.

9 See Bowler (1975), 'The changing meaning of "evolution"'. Morgan's first biographer, Stern, wrote:

> It was undoubtedly out of deference to the pressure of McIlvaine ... that Morgan nowhere in his books uses the word 'evolution' or has a word of praise for the writers on this subject, although his works are permeated by their influence'. (1931, *Lewis Henry Morgan: Social Evolutionist*, p. 23)

This was a complete misrepresentation of the true situation.

become the analysis of the thoughts of the Creator of the Universe, as manifested in the animal and vegetable kingdoms.'[10]

Agassiz's theory of development was the biological equivalent of a common New England Calvinist belief that human history, since Christ, was a record of progress and moral improvement inspired by God, in which every group had its preordained rôle. This idealistic view was in stark contrast to the scepticism of Darwin or the pessimism of Malthus. 'I believe in no fixed law of development', Darwin had written in *Origin*, and when Christian intellectuals attacked his 'materialist' theory they meant in particular his view that history is contingent, unplanned, without a goal, the product simply of random mutation and natural selection. McIlvaine, similarly, objected to the thesis of Malthus because it left no place for divine planning.[11]

This belief in progress according to a divine plan had a political counterpart in American political thought, which commonly represented political 'development' as a series of progressive approximations to the principles of government which had been set out in the Declaration of Independence. This was perhaps Morgan's most important theme. McIlvaine rightly emphasized it in his funeral oration, praising Morgan's

> demonstration that progress is a fundamental law of human society, and one which has always prevailed – progress in thought and knowledge, in industry, in morality, in social organization, in institutions, and in all things tending to, or advancing, civilization and general well-being.[12]

But these were only the broadest considerations which informed Morgan's thinking. His more immediate concern was with questions of American ethnology, and his initial inspiration was drawn from philology and history rather than biology. These intellectual roots of the early Morgan are similar to those which sustained Maine.

10 See Mayr (1959), 'Agassiz, Darwin and evolution'. The passage from Agassiz is cited on p. 171.
11 McIlvaine (1867), 'Malthusianism'.
12 McIlvaine (1923), 'The life and works of Lewis H. Morgan'.

'The League of the Iroquois'

Lewis Henry Morgan, the ninth of thirteen children, was born in 1818 in Aurora, New York (then 'still a wilderness surrounded by Indians'[13]). His father, a wealthy farmer, a state senator, and a devout Presbyterian, died when Morgan was a boy of eight. In 1838 he went to Union College, a school distinguished for its Whig politics, which found fashionable expression in the idealization of the democratic civilization of Athens.[14] In 1844 he received a licence to practise law, and established himself in practice in Rochester, New York.

In Rochester, Morgan set up a fraternity. There was an Iroquois reservation nearby, and the fraternity took the name Iroquois and considered organizing itself on the lines of the Iroquois League. Morgan began to visit the nearby reservation and to collect ethnographic information. He also intervened successfully with Washington on behalf of an Iroquois group on a land question.[15] Eventually he wrote up his ethnographic findings, so discharging an undertaking which, he thought, had now come to an end.

> With the publication [of *The League of the Iroquois*] in January 1851 I laid aside the Indian subject to devote my time to my profession. My principal object in writing this work, which exhibits abundant evidence of hasty execution, was to free myself of the subject.[16]

Although primarily a descriptive work, *The League of the Iroquois* is informed by a progressive spirit. Like Maine, Morgan was impressed by a model of ancient history, and his particular inspiration was Grote's vastly influential Utilitarian study of Greece. The Greeks, according to Grote, had evolved from a family-based polity to city-states. Initially there were separate, independent families. These then joined together in groups, the gens, phratry and tribe. The gens was particularly significant, and Grote described it as a kinship and political unit, democratic in nature, and with religious

13 Stern (1931), *Lewis Henry Morgan*, p. 3.
14 See Resek (1960), *Lewis Henry Morgan*, p. 9.
15 See R. Bieder (1980), 'The Grand Order of the Iroquois: influences on Lewis Henry Morgan's ethnology', and E. Tooker (1983), 'The structure of the Iroquois League: Lewis H. Morgan's research and observations'.
16 Quoted in White (1957), 'How Morgan came to write *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*', p. 257.

functions. In their political evolution the Greeks passed from a democracy based on kinship groups to a stage of monarchy and despotism, eventually in the case of Athens achieving a higher democratic form.

In *Ancient Society* (1877) Morgan was to reject the priority of the family over the gens and phratry. He also came to deny that all societies had to endure a stage of monarchy and despotism. In *The League of the Iroquois* (1851), however, he accepted Grote's argument. Echoing Grote, Morgan asserted that:

> there is a regular progression of political institutions, from the monarchical, which are the earliest in time, on to the democratical, which are the last, noblest, and the most intellectual. This position can be established by the rise and development of the Grecian institutions, and may be further illustrated by the progressive change in the spirit and nature of other governments.[17]

Despotic monarchy was a form of government 'natural to a people when in an uncivilized state, or when just emerging from barbarism'.

The Iroquois represented a yet earlier condition, in which 'Family Relationships' still provided the fundamental scheme of government.

> These relations are older than the notions of society or government, and are consistent alike with the hunter, the pastoral and the civilized state. The several nations of the Iroquois, united, constituted one Family, dwelling together in one Long House; and those ties of family relationship were carried throughout their civil and social system, from individuals to tribes, from tribes to nations, and from the nations to the League itself, and bound them together in one common, indissoluble brotherhood.[18]

Morgan also described the unfamiliar Iroquois terminology for kin, which was 'unlike that of the civil or canon law; but was yet a clear and definite system. No distinction was made between the lineal and collateral lines, either in the ascending or descending series'.[19] He linked this system with the use of consanguineal relationships to build up large political units. There is no suggestion of his later theory that the kinship terminology reflected exotic

17 Morgan (1851), *League of the Iroquois*, p. 122.
18 *Op. cit.*, pp. 56–7.
19 *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

forms of marriage or family relationships. Indeed, Morgan clearly described the Iroquois marriage forms, remarking mainly on the absence of affection between man and wife. Marriage was in essence a contract arranged between the mothers of the couple, who acted for larger family units.

The American Indian

With the publication of his book, Morgan believed that he had put Indian ethnography behind him. He now concentrated on business, and prospered. In 1855 he became a director of the Iron Mountain Rail Road Co., and he soon extended his interest to other railway companies. 'From the close of 1850 until the summer of 1857,' he recorded in his Journal, 'Indian affairs were laid entirely aside'.[20]

As he became rich, Morgan was able to devote more time to outside interests. He took up politics, serving as Republican congressman and then senator in the state assembly between 1861 and 1869, and became chairman of the Indian affairs committee of the assembly. He also angled for federal preferment, but it never came. At the same time, he maintained his intellectual interests. With McIlvaine he founded the Pundit Club in Rochester, at which papers were read dealing with such matters as Lyell's geology, Sanskrit, and ethnology.

In 1856 Morgan was elected to the Association for the Advancement of Science. This encouraged him to return at last to his Iroquois notes in order to prepare a paper for the following annual meeting. The paper he wrote, entitled 'Laws of descent of the Iroquois', dealt mainly with their system of classifying kin, which he considered a unique invention of the tribe. Soon, however, a fresh discovery was to change his mind.

In the summer of 1858 Morgan found that the Ojibwa, who spoke a different language from the Iroquois, nevertheless had essentially the same system of classifying kin.

> Every term of relationship was radically different from the corresponding term in the Iroquois; but the classification of kindred was the same. It

20 White (1957), 'How Morgan came to write *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*', p. 262.

was manifest that the two systems were identical in their fundamental characteristics.[21]

In the following year he recorded in his journal the extraordinary hypothesis which this discovery suggested to him.

> From this time I began to be sensible to the important uses which such a primary institution as this must have in its bearing upon the question of the genetic connection of the American Indian nation, not only, but also on the still more important question of their Asiatic origin.[22]

It was now – at the age of forty – that his most important research began.

To appreciate what Morgan had in mind, it is necessary first to consider the state of play in American ethnology at the time. This had just been thoroughly and critically reviewed by Samuel Haven, in his *Archaeology of the United States*, which was published by the Smithsonian Institution in 1856, precisely at the moment when Morgan's interest in American ethnology was quickened once again.

The central issue raised in Haven's summary was familiar and of vital importance. This was the polygenist–monogenist controversy. Haven conceded with some reluctance that 'The subject of American ethnology passes ... insensibly into the general question of the original unity or diversity of mankind.'[23] He reviewed in detail the linguistic studies of American languages, emphasizing Gallatin's conclusion that the Indian languages shared a common and distinct character, probably resulting from a very long period of isolation. This unity existed despite wide variations in vocabulary: 'however differing in their words, the most striking uniformity in their grammatical forms and structure appears to exist in all the American languages'.[24] According to Gallatin, the most characteristic structural feature of the Indian languages was what Von Humboldt had called 'agglutination', i.e. glueing together; 'a tendency to accumulate a multitude of ideas in a single word', as Haven defined it.[25]

21 Morgan (1871), *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*, p. 3.
22 Quoted Stern (1931), *Lewis Henry Morgan*, p. 73.
23 Haven (1856), p. 81.
24 *Op. cit.*, p. 65.
25 *Op. cit.*, p. 67. This was a simplification of the then current technical linguistic notion of agglutination, but Morgan was at best an amateur philologist, and his own semantics of 'classificatory systems' fit in well with Haven's definition of agglutination. For a sophisticated (essentially grammatical) definition of agglutination by a contemporary, see Max Müller's (1861) *Lectures on the Science of Language*, especially Chapter 8.
26 Haven, *op. cit.*, pp. 158–9.

Haven then covered the physiological studies which had been carried out, dealing very fairly with the polygenist school, though finally rejecting their conclusions. He also surveyed the discoveries of the archaeologists. His final conclusion was that:

> The deductions from scientific investigations, philological and physiological, tend to prove that American races are of great antiquity. Their religious doctrines, their superstitions ... and their arts, accord with those of the most primitive age of mankind. With all their characteristics affinities are found in the early condition of Asiatic races.[26]

The evidence therefore apparently supported the monogenist argument, while (in Haven's view) not necessarily contradicting the received chronology.

Haven's most striking data came from philology, and this was a field which Morgan must have learnt from McIlvaine. McIlvaine was a Sanskritist, but this meant that he was an Indo-European man, and the models of Gallatin and other American linguists had been taken over directly from the Indo-Europeanists.

The Indo-European philologists had established relationships between languages hitherto regarded as completely distinct. They agreed that most of the European languages were distantly related to Sanskrit, and that their point of origin was in India. The Semitic languages were similarly interrelated, and they too had an Asian point of origin. In the 1860s some scholars mooted the possibility that the Indo-European and Semitic language stocks were also ultimately related to each other.

The Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, Max Müller, propagated the view that there was a third stock, which he called 'Turanian'. It was divided into a European, northern branch (Turkish, Finnish, Mongolian, Basque, etc.) and a southern, tropical branch. This tropical language family included most if not all of the other languages in the world, including Tamil (the main Indian language which is not related to Sanskrit) and the languages of the American Indians.

It seemed a very diverse group. Superficially at least, its members

had few linguistic features in common. But then Müller did not expect these languages to be very similar. He believed that the people who spoke Turanian languages were typically nomads, with the consequence that their languages were liable to rapid change and much dialectical variation. He instanced the terms for kin, explaining that these were stable in Aryan languages but not in Turanian. Yet although words themselves changed, underlying concepts might be constant. At this level the Turanian languages

> share much in common, and show that before their divergency a certain nucleus of language was formed, in which some parts of language, the first to crystallize and the most difficult to be analysed, had become fixed and stationary. Numerals, pronouns, and some of the simplest applied verbal roots belong to this class of words.[27]

They had something else in common, too, for Müller believed that they all exhibited Von Humboldt's 'agglutinating' tendency.

Were these three linguistic stocks – all, probably, ultimately of Asian origin – independent? Were there any traces of an original language spoken by a once-united human race? (If this, too, was located in Asia, perhaps the Book of Genesis was accurate after all!) Müller could find no philological basis for such a conclusion, but he proposed an alternative resolution of the issue. Using Von Humboldt's typology, which classified languages according to grammatical principles that he termed 'isolation, agglutination and inflexion', Müller argued – as indeed Schleicher had argued before him – that language stocks could be ordered on a scale of progressive development. The most primitive languages were 'isolating'. Each word consisted of a single, stable root. At a more advanced level they were characterized by 'agglutination' – roots were 'glued together' to form new words. The most developed languages went in for 'amalgamation', developing inflected forms in which the original roots, once simply glued together, merged to form quite new words.

There were difficulties with this scheme. Chinese, for instance, was classified as an 'isolating language' (i.e. each word consists of a single, stable root). Yet it was hard to believe that Chinese was exceptionally primitive. Müller tried to resolve this particular difficulty by providing Chinese with its own private evolutionary

27 Müller in Bunsen (1854), *Outlines of the Philosophy of Universal History Applied to Language and Religion*, vol. 1, p. 478.

track. But for the rest, the southern Turanian languages could be classified as 'agglutinating', while the northern (or European) Turanian languages could be classified with the Semitic and Indo-European languages as 'amalgamating'. They had, however, once been 'agglutinating' themselves. 'Amalgamation' was a direct advance on 'agglutination'. The classification therefore cross-cut the established boundaries of language families and yielded a new classification, in which the languages of Europe, the Middle East and North India were associated together and opposed to most of the languages spoken in the tropics. But this did not contradict the idea that all men – and all languages – had a common origin. The languages of Europe were certainly more advanced, but they had once been 'agglutinating', and even 'isolating' themselves.

Müller also linked this scheme of linguistic development with the models of technical and social progress constructed by the writers of the Scottish Enlightenment, borrowing their famous four-stage model. ('The four stages of society are hunting, pasturing, farming and commerce' to quote Adam Smith's classic formulation.) These economic stages had from the first been associated with a model of political development from anarchic communism to private property and the state.[28] Müller now added a theory of linguistic progress.

Some Indo-European scholars had tried to find philological clues to the early condition of the Indo-Europeans. Had they been nomads or agriculturalists? At what stage might they have shifted from nomadism to agriculture? Müller's synthetic model opposed a category of primitive, anarchic, dispersed nomads, speaking agglutinating languages in a state of continual dialectical flux, and civilized, centralized, agricultural societies, with literate élites and, consequently, more stable and advanced languages characterized by 'amalgamation'. In the long essay on these issues, which he contributed to a book by his patron, Bunsen, he summarized his ideas (see Figure 3.1).

The beauty of Müller's model was that it both divided and united humanity. Müller endorsed the division of humanity into 'higher' Aryan and Semitic and 'lower' southern Turanian people. At the same time, his model assumed that all men had a single origin.

28 See Meek (1975), *Social Science and Ignoble Savage*. These ideas were becoming very fashionable at the time in America. See Stevens (1975), 'Adam Smith and the colonial disturbances'.

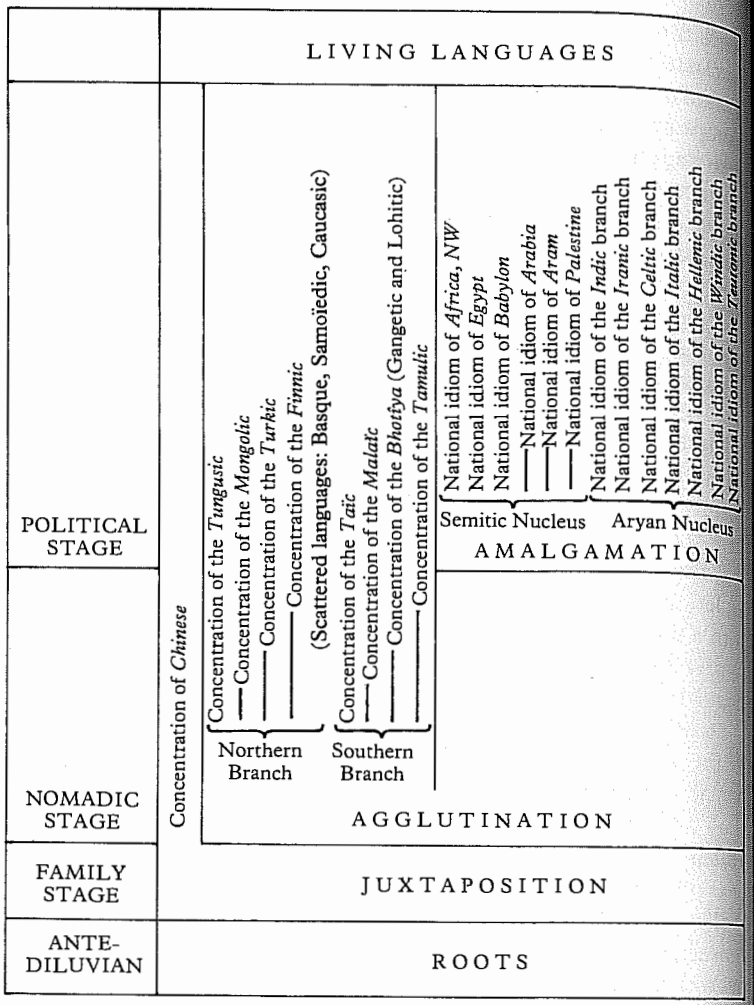

Figure 3.1 Müller's summary of linguistic progress (from Max Müller's contribution to C. C. J. Bunsen (1854), *Outlines of the Philosophy of University History applied to Language and Religion*, 2 vols, London, Longman).

This was the paradigm which Morgan referred to most often in his 1871 *Systems*.

Asian origins

After stumbling upon the fact that the Ojibwa had substantially the same system of classifying relatives as the Iroquois, Morgan checked with Rigg's lexicon of the Dakota language and found that they lumped relatives together in the same 'classificatory' manner as the Iroquois and Ojibwa. The question now arose: How widely was the system distributed? In December 1858 he sent schedules out to Indian areas to be filled in by missionaries and Indian agents. The results were disappointing, perhaps not surprisingly, since the questionnaire ran to eight printed pages and its completion demanded considerable time and effort. But a few satisfactory schedules were returned, and Morgan carried out his enquiries in person in reservations in Kansas and Nebraska. By mid-1859 he was convinced that the system of classifying relatives was fundamentally uniform throughout North America. This he took as evidence that the North American Indians had a common origin.

But if the Indians were ultimately one group, where had they come from? Morgan was inclined to accept the hypothesis of Schoolcraft and other specialists, supported by Haven, that they were ultimately of Asian origin. Obviously they were not 'Aryan', and so Morgan looked for connections among Müller's prototypical Asian Turanians, the Tamils. Accordingly, he invited an American missionary, Dr Scudder, to prepare a schedule for Tamil and Telugu.

McIlvaine testified that at this time Morgan:

> lived and worked often in a state of great mental excitement, and the answers he received, as they came in, sometimes nearly overpowered him. I well remember one occasion when he came into my study, saying, 'I shall find it, I shall find it among the Tamil people and Dravidian tribes of Southern India'. At that time I had no expectation of any such result; and I said to him, 'My friend, you have enough to do in working out your discovery in connection with the tribes of the American continent – let the peoples of the old world go'. He replied, 'I cannot do it – I must go on, for I am sure I shall find it all there'.[29]

29 McIlvaine (1923), 'The life and works of Lewis H. Morgan', pp. 50–1.

When the Tamil-Telegu schedule came back, Morgan laid it side by side with the Seneca-Iroquois system and concluded that it had the same structure. He wrote to Scudder 'that we had now been able to put our hands upon decisive evidence of the Asiatic origin of the American Indian race'.[30] In *Systems* he expressed the same conclusion more grandiloquently:

> When the discoverers of the New World bestowed upon its inhabitants the name of *Indians*, under the impression that they had reached the Indies, they little suspected that children of the same original family, although upon a different continent, stood before them. By a singular coincidence error was truth.[31]

Classificatory and descriptive systems of consanguinity

Morgan concluded that all the members of Müller's southern Turanian family had what he called 'classificatory' kinship systems. The Aryans, Semites and northern Turanians all had 'descriptive' systems. These two types of systems were quite distinct. Indeed, they were virtually inversions of each other.

In descriptive systems there are different terms for father and mother, husband and wife, brother and sister, and son and daughter, and none of these terms is applied outside the nuclear family. Morgan argued that such systems mirror the reality of biological kinship, clearly marking the degrees of blood relationship.

Classificatory systems, in contrast, did not reflect the natural degrees of kinship. They lumped relationships of different kinds together under one term. The same word might refer, for example, to father, father's brother, father's father's brother's son, and also perhaps to other relatives, confusing different kinds and degrees of biological relatedness. 'It thus confounds relationships, which, under the descriptive system, are distinct, and enlarges the signification both of the primary and secondary terms beyond their seemingly appropriate sense.'[32] The classificatory principle immediately suggested the mechanism of 'agglutination'. Moreover, the languages which according to Morgan applied one kin term to various degrees of relationships were precisely those which Müller regarded as 'agglutinating'.

But if classificatory systems did not properly describe biological relationships, they were by no means incoherent. Like the man who thought he was Napoleon, the systems made perfect sense if their underlying axioms were granted. If, for example, father's brother was 'father', then, quite properly, father's brother's wife was 'mother', father's brother's son 'brother', etc. Morgan concluded that

> a system has been created which must be regarded as a domestic institution in the highest sense of this expression. No other can properly characterize a structure the framework of which is so complete, and the details of which are so rigorously adjusted.[33]

The opposition between descriptive and classificatory systems was not always clear-cut. Morgan was aware that the 'descriptive' systems often had 'classificatory' elements. For example, discussing the Dutch kinship terminology, he commented that 'The terms *neef* and *nicht* are applied indiscriminately to a nephew and niece, to a grandson and granddaughter, and to each of the four classes of cousins.'[34] This was the sort of lumping together one might expect to find in a classificatory system. But Morgan argued that the history of the Germanic systems showed that they were originally purely descriptive in form, as some of the Scandinavian systems have remained. The introduction of classificatory terms for 'uncle' and 'aunt', subsequently for 'nephew' and 'niece', and finally for 'cousin', were later rationalizations, which simplified the system while not transgressing its fundamental opposition between lineal and collateral kin. In this particular instance the argument was made more difficult by the fact that the Dutch classified nephews, male cousins and also grandsons together, so indeed confusing lineals and collaterals. Morgan's comment was that the Dutch system 'is defective in arrangement, and imprecise in the discrimination of relationships', which placed the error firmly with the Dutch rather than in his theory.[35]

Nor did the classificatory systems constitute a uniform set.

30 Stern (1931), *Lewis Henry Morgan*, p. 27.
31 Morgan (1871), *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*, p. 508.
32 *Op. cit.*, p. 12.
33 *Op. cit.*, p. 472.
34 *Op. cit.*, p. 35.
35 *Op. cit.*, p. 35. It is perhaps worth remarking that the use of the terms *neef* and *nicht* for grandchildren is now obsolete in Dutch.

Morgan divided Müller's southern Turanian group into three, on the basis of a typology of classificatory systems. The three types were termed respectively the Turanian, the Malayan, and the Ganowanian (the American Indian group). He was, of course, particularly interested in the Ganowanian, and his discussion of the American systems is the longest and most detailed, running to 135 pages of text plus 100 pages of tables, or almost 40 per cent of the whole of *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*. But he was convinced that the Ganowanian system was closely related to the Turanian, of which the Tamil and Dravidian systems were typical. Chinese and Japanese were also 'Turanian'. The 'Malayan' systems were, however, very different from them.

In both the Turanian and Ganowanian systems, only one set of cousins was identified with siblings and termed 'brother' and 'sister'. These were children of father's brothers or mother's sisters. Other cousins (children of father's sisters or mother's brothers) were distinguished from siblings. The Malayan systems, in contrast, classed all cousins together with siblings, and all parents' siblings together with parents. This category included not only the peoples of the Pacific but a number of far-flung peoples, and even the Zulu, Morgan's only African group.

'Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family'

When his argument had reached this stage, Morgan believed that he had successfully completed a type of philological study. It demonstrated the unity and the ultimately Asian origin of the American Indian languages, and suggested the existence of two great linguistic stocks, one European and north-west Asian, and the other southern, tropical and firmly non-European. Within this framework Morgan wrote up his massive materials, tabulating and analysing 139 kinship schedules from all the over the world, listing over 260 kin-types for each.

In 1865 he submitted the manuscript for publication to the Smithsonian Institution. Joseph Henry, the director of the Smithsonian, was reluctant to accept it, writing to Morgan that 'the first impression of one who has been engaged in physical research is that, in proportion to the conclusions arrived at, the quantity of your material is very large'[36]; but he sent it for consideration to two philologists and Sanskritists – Whitney at Yale, and McIlvaine.

36 Quoted by Resek (1960), *Lewis Henry Morgan*, pp. 96–7.

McIlvaine was prepared to accept that the analysis was incomplete. Morgan had demonstrated the inner coherence of classificatory systems, but their meaning remained a mystery. He remarked that at this stage:

> our friend had not perceived any material significance or explanation of the immense body of entirely new facts which he had discovered and collected. He could not at all acount for them. In fact, he regarded this system, or these slightly different forms of one system, as invented and wholly artificial, so different was it from that which now prevails in civilized society, and which evidently follows the flow of the blood. During all these years, he had not the least conception of any process of thought in which it could have originated, or of anything which could have caused it so universally to prevail. He treated it as something which must throw great light upon pre-historic man, but what light he had not discovered.[37]

And yet, a year before the submission of the manuscript, McIlvaine had discussed with Morgan a plausible explanation of the classificatory systems. In a letter dated March 1864, he wrote:

> I have just lighted upon certain references which throw some light upon the origin of your Tamilian or Indian system of relationships; at least on some parts of it. You remember we were talking about whether it did not point back to a state of promiscuous intercourse. You will find in Aristotle's politics Book II chapter 3 where he is refuting Plato's doctrine of a community of wives this sentence, 'Some tribes in upper Africa have their wives in common', and in a note in Bonn's translation of it the following references, 'For example the Masimanes (Herodotus IV, 172) and the Ayseuses (ib. IV, 180)'...
>
> I am inclined to think that this state of society might, upon a full and minute investigation of the remains of antiquity, be found more extensively to have prevailed than is commonly supposed.[38]

The hypothesis was, then, that the mysterious 'classificatory' designation of kin was based on real parent-child relationships, as was the descriptive system. Both described a consanguineal reality, but the realities were differently ordered. In societies with 'classificatory' terminologies, wives were held in common. A child would therefore not know who its father was. Accordingly, all potential fathers were 'father', all their children 'brother' or 'sister',

37 McIlvaine (1923), 'The life and works of Lewis H. Morgan', pp. 51–2.
38 Quoted in Resek (1960), *Lewis Henry Morgan*, p. 94.

etc. Similarly, all the women who were actually or potentially the mates of a 'father' were termed 'mother'.

Morgan did not immediately develop this suggestion. It was only after Joseph Henry's rejection of his manuscript that he returned to the idea, and then only after studying, with some jealousy, McLennan's new theory.[39] McLennan's *Primitive Marriage*, which appeared just at this moment, in 1865, described an initial state in which fatherhood was uncertain, since women were held in common. An original condition of promiscuity was later replaced by polyandry, which at least fixed motherhood, and so allowed the tracing of kin ties in the female line. In a higher form, a group of brothers held one wife in common, so permitting the tracing of kinship through men also. Gradually 'gentes' of related men emerged. 'Most probably contiguous tribes would be composed of precisely the same stocks – would contain gentes of precisely the same names, and thus be in the strictest sense akin – kindred', McLennan wrote. These units would eventually unite in a state. 'The order of social development, in our view, is then, that the tribe stands first; the gens or house next; and last of all, the family.' (As he pointed out, this inverted Maine's and Grote's postulated line of development.) Gradually clan property appeared; finally, in the wake of Barbarism, individual property, and consequently the family. As the family became the vital social unit, so modern forms of marriage emerged. The crucial factor in this shift was the emergence of private property:

> the laws of succession which had sprung up with family property – which were springing up with individual property – were training the people to consider a few persons only as their kinsmen in any special sense ... However strongly implanted the principle of exogamy may have originally been it must have succumbed to the influences which thus disintegrated the old bonds of kinship.[40]

In May 1867 Morgan wrote a paper in which he linked the types of kinship classification with specific modes of marriage, and the following February he presented it to a meeting of the American Academy of Art and Sciences, under the title 'A conjectural solution to the origin of the classificatory system of relationship'.

39 *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

40 Citations can be found in McLennan (1876), *Studies in Ancient History*, pp. 221, 222 and 225.

His audience included Agassiz and Asa Gray, and Morgan was evidently tense. He left hurriedly after the lecture, convinced he had failed, and wrote to a friend that 'Agassiz does not know, nor could the other members present fully appreciate the remarkable character of the system ... I was afraid to show more lest they would not bear it.'[41] But in the event the Academy requested the text of his lecture for publication and elected him to its membership. This paper provided the basis for a new final chapter for *Systems*. Morgan added a lengthy review of the possibility that diffusion and borrowing might account for common elements of classification, but concluded that the facts pointed to the common origin of structurally similar systems. With the addition of this chapter *Systems* was at last accepted for publication by the Smithsonian, although problems of format and expense delayed its appearance until 1871. It was the most expensive book which the Smithsonian had published up to that time.

The argument Morgan developed was a variant of that sketched by McLennan. McLennan had posited an original condition of promiscuity, which had evolved into polyandry. Morgan rejected McLennan's emphasis upon polyandry. He lighted rather on an institution which had been briefly described by some missionaries in Hawaii, and which he called the 'Hawaiian custom'. This was 'a compound form of polyginia and polyandria', whereby a set of brothers was married collectively to their own sisters. Within this group, husbands and wives were held in common. Such a form of marriage would logically generate a 'Malayan' system of classificatory kinship terminology. For example:

> All the children of my several brothers, myself a male, are my sons and daughters, Reason: I cohabit with all my brothers' wives, who are my own wives as well (using the terms *husband* and *wife* in the sense of the custom). As it would be impossible for me to distinguish my own children from those of my brothers, if I call any one my child, I must call them all my children. One is as likely to be mine as another.[42]

Similarly, a man's sisters were his wives, and so their children were counted as his own; and so forth.

The next step was the prohibition of intermarriage between

41 Quoted in Resek (1960), *Lewis Henry Morgan*, p. 98.

42 Morgan (1868b), 'A conjectural solution of the origin of the classificatory system of relationship', p. 465.

siblings – in other words, McLennan's 'exogamy'. This abolition of marriage between brothers and sisters did not necessarily imply the total abandonment of the 'Hawaiian custom'. A group of brothers would now marry someone else's set of sisters. Marriage would remain a combination of polyandry and polygamy. But the practice of exogamy would result in the separation of the children of brothers and the children of sisters into distinct categories. A man's brothers' children would still count as his children; and a woman's sisters' children as her children. But:

> All the children of my several sisters, myself a male, are my nephews and nieces. Reason: Since under the tribal organization my sisters ceased to be my wives, their children can no longer be my children, but must stand to me in a different and more remote relationship. Whence the relations of nephew and niece.[43]

In the jargon of a later generation, cross-cousins were distinguished from parallel cousins, and parallel cousins were identified with siblings. Other classifications were similarly explained with reference to group marriage arrangements. Problematic features were said to represent survivals of an earlier state of affairs.

The other stages in the development of the family were sketched in the most casual fashion. In conclusion, Morgan presented a fifteen-stage evolution (see Table 3.1)[44] rather like a magician drawing rabbits out of a hat, remarking:

> It may be confidently affirmed that this great sequence of customs and institutions, although for the present hypothetical, will organize and explain the body of ascertained facts, with respect to the primitive history of mankind, in a manner so singularly and surprisingly adequate as to invest it with a strong probability of truth.[45]

The one principle which apparently operated throughout human history was a tendency to moral progress. For example:

> the Hawaiian custom still embodies the evidence of an organic movement of society to extricate itself from a worse condition than the one it produced. For it may be affirmed, as a general proposition, that the principal customs and institutions of mankind have originated in great reformatory movements.[46]

43 Ibid.

44 This table occurs in Morgan's (1868b) 'A conjectural solution. . . .', p. 463 and his (1871) *Systems in Consanguinity and Affinity*, p. 480.

45 Morgan (1868b), 'A conjectural solution of the origin of the classificatory system of relationship', pp. 463–4.

Table 3.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY TYPES

I	Promiscuous intercourse
II	The intermarriage or cohabitation of brothers and sisters
III	The communal family (first stage of the family)
IV	The Hawaiian custom, giving
V	The Malayan form of the classificatory system of relationship
VI	The tribal organization, giving
VII	The Turanian and Ganowanian system of relationship
VIII	Marriage between single pairs, giving
IX	The barbarian family (second stage of the family)
X	Polygamy, giving
XI	The patriarchal family (third stage of the family)
XII	Polyandria
XIII	The rise of property with the settlement of lineal succession to estates, giving
XIV	The civilized family (fourth and ultimate state of the family), producing
XV	The overthrow of the classificatory system of relationship, and the substitution of the descriptive

Similarly, the tribal organization 'was designed to work out a reformation with respect to the intermarriage of brothers and sisters', and 'it seems extremely probable that it can only be explained as a reformatory movement'.[47]

More specific mechanisms, however, might explain the change from one stage to another – the need for mutual defence leading to tribal organization, genetic advantages favouring exogamy, and so forth. The only mechanism which Morgan handled in any detail was the development of private estates, which explained the emergence of the 'civilized family' and the final 'Overthrow of the classificatory system of relationship, and the substitution of the descriptive'. Morgan ascribed this very last stage of man's social development to the influence of property relationships. Indeed, the emergence of property relationships was the mark of civilization.

46 Morgan (1871), *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*, p. 481.

47 *Op. cit.*, p. 490.

> With the rise of property, considered as an institution, with the settlement of its rights, and above all, with the established certainty of its transmission to lineal descendants, came the first possibility among mankind of the true family in its modern acceptation ... It is impossible to separate property, considered in the concrete, from civilization, or for civilization to exist without its presence, protection, and regulated inheritance. Of property in this sense, all barbarous nations are necessarily ignorant.[48]

This view was commonplace in the Scottish tradition,[49] and was essentially identical to that of McLennan and of Maine.

Encountering the British anthropologists

Morgan visited Europe in 1871, taking delivery of his first copies of *Systems* in London. He visited Maine, McLennan, Lubbock (whom he found playing cricket), and even Darwin and Huxley; and found himself welcomed as a colleague into the inner circle of the new anthropology.

And 1871 was the year in which Darwin published his *Descent of Man*. This book was, of course, of capital importance to all anthropologists. Darwin paid attention to McLennan's theory of matriarchy, and he raised the question of intellectual development, which was to become the central issue in anthropology in the following decades. Also in 1870–1 Tylor and Lubbock each published his most important book – Tylor his *Primitive Culture*, and Lubbock his *Origin of Civilization*. Both profoundly affected Morgan's thinking.

Lubbock had been responsible for popularizing the new prehistory.[50] He had translated the crucial Scandinavian texts, which introduced a three-stage model of development through stone, copper (or bronze) and iron 'ages'. Following Nilsson, he had identified these archaeological phases with the classical Scottish 'stages of progress' – through savagery (hunting and gathering), barbarism (nomadism and pastoralism, and then agriculture) and finally industrial civilization. On the basis of this proven technological advance he and Tylor rejected the hypothesis that men had degenerated from a higher state. The fossils and survivals of human industry demonstrated, on the contrary, a regular progress.

48 *Op. cit.*, p. 492.
49 See Meek (1975), *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*.
50 See Daniel (1950), *A Hundred Years of Archaeology*.

Lubbock and Tylor also argued that this unmistakable technological progress was matched by a 'mental' progress – physically, in that man's cranial capacity actually expanded, and also in the sense that there was improvement in the beliefs and institutions which man developed. Tylor was particularly interested in the development of religious ideas, but Lubbock recognized the potential interest of the conjectural histories of marriage and the family proposed by McLennan and Morgan. He discussed them at length, and in a friendly, though not uncritical, fashion. Morgan, in turn, took the Lubbock-Tylor model back to America, and applied it to his own ends. He now became a universal historian.

Ironically, however, just as Morgan embraced the British school, it was preparing a rejection of his major theses. In 1876, McLennan published an attack on Morgan entitled 'The classificatory system of relationships'.[51] He poured scorn on Morgan's notion that even early man might have been ignorant of his mother (and he pointed out that Darwin had expressed puzzlement on this score in the second edition of *The Descent of Man*). On the contrary, recognition of the tie to the mother was very primitive, and formed the basis of the original condition of matriarchy. Further, Morgan's reliance on the evidence of kinship terminologies was methodologically unsound. The classificatory system 'is a system of mutual salutations merely'.[52] These lines of criticism persuaded most of the leading British scholars, at least for a while, but they did not reach Morgan in time to influence the writing of *Ancient Society*.

'Ancient Society'

Ancient Society, Morgan's most famous book, appeared in 1877. It begins with a resounding affirmation of the antiquity of human history and the uniformity of man's progress through the ages that could well have come from either Tylor or Lubbock. 'It can now be asserted upon convincing evidence that savagery preceded barbarism in all the tribes of mankind as barbarism is known to have preceded civilization. The history of the human race is one in source, one in experience, and in progress.'[53]

51 This paper appeared in McLennan's new volume (1876), *Studies in Ancient History*, which included a reprint of *Primitive Marriage*.
52 McLennan (1876), *Studies in Ancient History*, p. 366.
53 Morgan (1877), *Ancient Society*, p. 6.

Progress had been made on two levels, one technical, the other social. In each field it exhibited different characteristics. Broadly speaking, technical development resulted from invention and diffusion and exhibited sharp discontinuities. Social development, on the other hand, was the product of steady growth.

Part I of *Ancient Society*, entitled 'Growth of intelligence through inventions and discoveries', was taken over directly from Lubbock and Tylor. The development of subsistence techniques provided the basis for the classification of cultures into seven distinct 'ethnical periods' (see Table 3.2). These ethnical periods had

Table 3.2 MORGAN'S 'ETHNICAL PERIODS'[54]

I	Lower status of savagery	From the infancy of the human race to the commencement of the next period
II	Middle status of savagery	From the acquisition of a fish subsistence and a knowledge of the use of fire, to etc.
III	Upper status of savagery	From the invention of the bow and arrow, to etc.
IV	Lower status of barbarism	From the invention of the art of pottery, to etc.
V	Middle status of barbarism	From the domestication of animals on the eastern hemisphere, and in the western from the cultivation of maize and plants by irrigation, with the use of adobe-brick and stone, to etc.
VI	Upper status of barbarism	From the invention of the process of smelting iron from ore, with the use of iron tools, to etc.
VII	Status of civilization	

a direct relationship to stages of social progress, for 'the great epochs of human progress have been identified, more or less directly, with the enlargement of the sources of subsistence'.[55]

54 *Op. cit.*, p. 12.
55 *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

Technical and social progress were in turn matched by a correlative growth in the human brain, 'particularly of the cerebral portion'.[56]

The different human groups progressed at different speeds, the Aryans taking the lead. 'The Aryan family represents the central stream of human progress, because it produced the highest type of mankind, and because it had proved its intrinsic superiority by gradually assuming the control of the earth.'[57] But inventions are commonly borrowed, and so the Aryans – and Semites – drew others in their wake as they advanced.

The bulk of the book was devoted to the growth of 'ideas' of civil institutions – the 'growth of the idea of government' (Part II), of the family (Part III) and of property (Part IV). While movement from one phase to another might be triggered by a technical advance, the lines of social development are predetermined and inevitable. Here Morgan adopted the idiom of Agassiz – evolutionary development expressed God's thoughts. The content of these divine ideas was, however, already familiar enough.

The 'growth of the idea of government' recapitulated the phases defined by Maine and by Grote; the movement from a kinship-based polity to a territorial state which ordered property relations.

> It may be here premised that all forms of government are reducible to two general plans, using the word plan in its scientific sense. In these bases the two are fundamentally distinct. The first, in the order of time, is founded upon persons, and upon relations purely personal, and may be distinguished as a society (*societas*). The gens is the unit of this organization; giving as the successive stages of integration, in the archaic period, the gens, the phratry, the tribe, and the confederacy of tribes, which constituted a people or nation (*populus*). At a later period a coalescence of tribes in the same area into a nation took the place of a confederacy of tribes occupying independent areas. Such, through prolonged ages, after the gens appeared, was the substantially universal organization of ancient society: and it remained among the Greeks and Romans after civilization supervened. The second is founded upon territory and upon property, and may be distinguished as a state (*civitas*).[58]

56 *Op. cit.*, p.57.
57 *Op. cit.*, p. 553.
58 *Op. cit.*, pp. 6–7.

The gens formed the basis of social organization even as late as the final stages of barbarism, since successively more complex kin-based units developed in its image – 'the gens, the phratry, the tribe, and the confederacy of tribes'. This model is once again traceable to Grote, and Morgan cited Grote's description of the Greek gens at length. Another source was obviously McLennan, as both Tylor and Lubbock commented in their reviews.[59]

Since the gentile system survived for most of human history, Morgan devoted over half his book to detailing its development. The stages of its progress were illustrated by five crucial case-studies, dealing respectively with the Australians, the Iroquois, the Aztec, the Greeks and the Romans. Each of these cases had a special relevance for Morgan.

The Australian case represented the most primitive extant system, only a step away from the initial condition in which brothers married their sisters in an incestuous form of group marriage. The Australians had introduced the improvement which in *Systems* (Morgan, 1871) had been termed the 'Hawaiian custom' and now appeared as 'the Punaluan custom', whereby a group of brothers had wives in common, a group of sisters husbands in common, but brothers could not marry sisters. This division of the sibling group by sex into marriage classes provided the potential for the development of the gens, since it allowed the unilineal reckoning of descent. Initially the maternal line was used for counting descent and so matrilineal gentes were generated. Once the rule of exogamy was introduced into the gens, the way was prepared for the gentile system itself.

This model was a slight variant of that presented in *Systems*, but the new version was greatly enriched by new Australian materials, provided by the Rev. Lorimer Fison, one of the first converts to Morgan's thesis as presented in *Systems*. Fison was a missionary who had been inspired to conduct anthropological research as a consequence of filling in Morgan's questionnaire for *Systems*. His fieldwork in Australia was conducted with Morgan's detailed guidance, and although he later mildly criticized aspects of Morgan's rendition of the Australian case, he was on the whole fiercely loyal, and was vituperative about McLennan's critique of Morgan.[60]

59 Stern (1931), *Lewis Henry Morgan*, p. 141.
60 Chapter 5 of this book takes up Fison's story.

Morgan's own Iroquois material was used to illustrate the next stage of evolution, in which the democratic gentes were associated in larger federations.

The following level of development was represented by the Aztecs. Morgan's reanalysis of the Aztec case was extremely influential. Indeed, one of his biographers has suggested that 'Morgan's recognition in America by his contemporaries came primarily through his work on a critical reconstruction of the culture of Mexico and Central America'.[61] His particular concern was to discredit the Spanish chroniclers, who had 'adopted the erroneous theory that the Aztec government was a monarchy, analogous in essential respects to existing monarchies in Europe'.[62] He rejected this judgment on *a priori* grounds. The Aztecs were clearly only at the level of 'the middle status of barbarism'. If they were indeed monarchical, then monarchy was an early and basic form of political organization. But if monarchies were primitive human institutions, then they should perhaps continue to exist in a modified form (on the Lamarckian theory that primitive stages of evolution were overlaid rather than displaced). Such a line of argument might even justify the survival of European monarchies themselves. But such a conclusion was abhorrent to Morgan. His recent European journey had confirmed him in his detestation of monarchical and aristocratic institutions.[63]

Morgan's solution was to reinterpret the Aztec materials. His criterion for using or rejecting his Spanish sources is very telling:

> The histories of Spanish America may be trusted in whatever relates to the acts of the Spaniards, and to the acts and personal characteristics of the Indians; in whatever relates to their weapons, implements and utensils, fabrics, food and raiment, and things of a similar character. But in whatever relates to Indian society and government, their social relations, and plan of life, they are nearly worthless, because they learned nothing and know nothing of either. We are at full liberty to reject them

61 Stern (1931), *Lewis Henry Morgan*, p. 109.
62 Morgan (1877), *Ancient Society*, p. 186.
63 See his repeated diatribes in White (1937), *Extracts from the European Travel Journal of Lewis Henry Morgan*. Stern (1931), commented: 'Throughout Morgan's writings, from the first in 1843 to the last in 1880, ran the theme of contrast of American republican institutions with those of the aristocratic institutions of Europe' (*Lewis Henry Morgan*, p. 35).

in these respects and commence anew; using any facts they may contain which harmonize with what is known of Indian society.[64]

Using this convenient formula, he was able to recast the Aztec state as a more advanced version of the Iroquois federation. Once again he inspired an ethnographer, in this case Adolphe Bandelier, who produced data which apparently supported his argument.

Turning to the Greeks, Morgan based his case on Grote's description of the gens, which he quoted at length, commenting that 'The similarities between the Grecian and Iroquois gens will at once be recognized'.[65] This was not surprising, since Grote's model of the Greek gens had from the first provided Morgan with his model of the Iroquois system. Indeed, all the characteristics of the gentile system had been defined by Grote.[66] But Morgan now differed from Grote on two counts. First of all, Grote had erred in placing the family early on in Greek development – even making it anterior to the gens. Morgan had no doubt that he was mistaken, and did not hesitate to pit his theories against the conclusions of one of the leading classical scholars of the day.

Secondly, Morgan disputed Grote's view that the Greek state had begun as a monarchy. Once more he resorted to *a priori* argument, phrased in a particularly enlightening form:

> The true statement, as it seems to an American, is precisely the reverse of Mr. Grote's; namely, that the primitive Grecian government was essentially democratical, reposing on gentes, phratries and tribes, organized as self-governing bodies, and on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. This is borne out by all we know of the gentile organization, which has been shown to rest on principles essentially democratical.[67]

Finally, Morgan discussed the Romans. He had to admit that their political development had ended in a form of undemocratic government, though he refused to accept that such a development was either desirable or inevitable. The Roman Empire 'was artificial, illogical, approaching a monstrosity; but capable of wonderful achievements ... The patchwork in its composition was the product of the superior craft of the wealthy classes.'[68]

64 Morgan (1877), *Ancient Society*, pp. 186–7, fn.
65 *Op. cit.*, p. 222.
66 *Op. cit.*, pp. 221–2.
67 *Op. cit.*, p. 247.

In general, however, the development of political institutions demonstrated that a democratic order which builds upon the gentile tradition is natural to humanity.

> As a plan of government, the gentile organization was unequal to the wants of civilized man: but it is something to be said in its remembrance that it developed from the germ the principal governmental institutions of modern civilized states ... out of the ancient council of chiefs came the modern senate; out of the ancient assembly of the people came the modern representative assembly ... out of the ancient general military commander came the modern chief magistrate, whether a feudal or constitutional king, an emperor or a president, the latter being the natural and logical results.[69]

The constitution of the United States is therefore the logical and natural flower of the ancient order of the gens.

Part III of *Ancient Society* described the development of the 'idea of the family', providing, in half the space given over to the gens, a summary of the argument of *Systems of Consanguinity* (1871). A brief chapter offered a revised sequence of family development, linked to the development of modes of subsistence and of gentile organization.

Only the final twenty-nine pages of this 560-page opus were devoted to the growth of the idea of property. Technical development increased the amount of property and its variety. The growth of property was a sign of progress, rather than a cause; but it stimulated the change from matrilineal to patrilineal gentile organization, and the development of the monogamous family. These institutions arose in order to deal with fixed property. They allowed a man to settle his possessions on his sons. Morgan regarded this as natural and proper, but he did not countenance the concentration of inherited wealth and privilege which characterized aristocratic societies. There was nothing natural or inevitable about institutionalized inequality.[70]

68 *Op. cit.*, p. 340.
69 *Op. cit.*, p. 341.
70 Although several thousand years have passed away without the overthrow of privileged classes, excepting in the United States, their burdensome character upon society has been demonstrated. Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which

But his was by no means a materialist theory of history. Political and social progress was ultimately a sign of God's purpose. The heroic achievements of our primitive ancestors 'were part of the plan of the Supreme Intelligence to develop a barbarian out of a savage, and a civilized man out of this barbarian'.[71]

Marx, Engels and the legacy of Morgan

In later chapters I shall be returning to Morgan's theory, since his work dominated the field of kinship studies for many years, and had direct repercussions for the ethnographic study of North America and Oceania. But another tradition also stems from Morgan's writing, for he was adopted into the Marxist canon by Marx and Engels themselves. Reinterpreted by Engels, Morgan became the most important ancestral figure for Soviet ethnology, and he is a revered – though perhaps seldom read – authority in the broader tradition of Marxist theory.

Marx himelf published little on either non-European or 'pre-feudal' societies. His best-known contribution on these subjects was his model of an 'Asiatic mode of production'. This was a type of society in which a state organization existed in a primitive form. It was concerned only with war, taxation and public works, and was superimposed upon a series of otherwise independent village communities. These village communities held land in common and redistributed their agricultural surplus internally, except for a proportion which was appropriated by the state. This model posed serious theoretical problems for later Marxists, in part because it was not evident whether Marx thought of such systems as a geographically-specific Asian development, and in part because it was not clear in what direction societies of this type might subsequently evolve.[72]

Towards the end of his life, Marx took an interest in the new anthropology. He wrote extensive notes on the work of Morgan, Maine and Lubbock, evidently with a view to using them later in a book.[73] After Marx's death, Engels used these notes as a starting-point for his own book (1884), *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and State*, which is essentially a popularization and development of Morgan's theories. It was first published in German in 1884. For present purposes it is unnecessary to enquire to what extent Engels exaggerated Marx's faith in Morgan, or to guess at the manner in which Marx himself would have reconciled Morgan's developmental sequence with the existence of an 'Asiatic mode of production'. In the event it was the Morgan as defined by Engels who became crucial for the Marxist tradition.

The element of Morgan's theory on which Engels seized was his 'rediscovery of the primitive matriarchal gens as the earlier stage of the patriarchal gens of civilized peoples'; a discovery which (so Engels claimed in his preface to the first edition) 'has the same importance for anthropology as Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology and Marx's theory of surplus value for political economy'. The evolutionary importance of this discovery was that it opened the way to a history of the development of the family, regarded not as a natural institution but as the product of historical processes. In its modern form, the family was just a way of organizing private property – it 'was the first form of the family to be based not on natural but on economic conditions – on the victory of private property over primitive, natural communal property'.[74]

No more was there anything natural or morally superior about monogamy. The civilized monogamous family was not (as Morgan in fact firmly believed) the ultimate realization of man's best instincts. It was a form of exploitation, comparable to the exploitation of one class by another. 'Within the family [the husband] is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat.' The family 'is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property as his natural heirs'.[75]

The state itself was as temporary and artificial as the family. Morgan had revealed that before the state existed, political systems had been based upon kinship. The state had emerged only as a

experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes. (Morgan, 1877, *Ancient Society*, p. 522)

71 *Op. cit.*, p. 554.

72 There is a large literature on the 'Asiatic mode of production'. See Bailey and Llobera (1981), *The Asiatic Mode of Production* for a useful review. Cf. Krader (1975), *The Asiatic Mode of Production*.

73 These have been transcribed and edited. See Krader (1974), *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*.

74 Engels (1972), *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, p. 128.

75 *Op. cit.*, pp. 137, 125.

consequence of the growth of property and the evolution of class conflict; and it would break up when production was ordered on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers.

These ideas all have a recognizable point of origin in Morgan's work, but Engels himself conceded that he had 'moved a considerable distance' from Morgan on some matters.[76] Morgan would certainly have repudiated Engels' analysis of monogamy, and he would probably have had great difficulty with other aspects of his theory. This is not in itself a criticism of Engels, but it does mean that the Morgan who took his place in the Marxist tradition was already at several removes from the historical Morgan.

In the American anthropological tradition Morgan figures especially in debates about kinship systems. The tradition of analysis which Engels inaugurated was concerned rather with stages of social evolution and with the 'origin of the state'. More recently some feminist anthropologists have found inspiration in Engels' discussion of the monogamous family, so providing yet another context in which the implications of these ideas may be worked out, but one in which the contribution of Morgan himself can hardly be discerned any longer.

Morgan's transformations

It can be argued that Morgan's greatest influence was in the accumulation of data. He himself collected a great deal of ethnographic material by fieldwork and through questionnaires. He even invented a whole new category of data, kinship terminologies, and persuaded generations of anthropologists that they were the key to defining systems of kinship and marriage. And he inspired others to do fieldwork on his behalf, notably Bandelier and Fison. In the next generation the Bureau of American Ethnology was set up in the Smithsonian Institution essentially to carry out Morgan's programme of ethnological research.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Morgan's reputation has depended largely on his theory; and on the face of it this is strange, since his organizing ideas were derivative. His theoretical progress is replete with transformations in Cohen's sense. Again and again he borrowed an established framework and adapted it to his needs. Müller's philology, the 'gens' of Grote, McLennan's exogamy and

76 *Op. cit.*, pp. 145–6.

his matriarchy, Lubbock and Tylor's intellectual and technological evolutionism; all were grist to his mill. It is almost as though he believed the person he had last read.

Reviewing his career one cannot fail to be impressed by the contingent nature of his various syntheses. The history of his 1871 *Systems*, in particular, is an extraordinary chapter of accidents. Perhaps this element of chance is intrinsic to this sort of transformation, since its author depends, like a magpie, on what others have left lying about. To borrow one of Lévi-Strauss's images, this is the science of the *bricoleur*. And yet this account seems ultimately unpersuasive; there is clearly an underlying direction behind Morgan's work, at some level at least.

His political inspiration is very evident at several points, perhaps most particularly in his insistence on monogenesis and in his revulsion from monarchies. Nevertheless it would not be easy to account for his model in terms of his politics. After all, it could be used by Engels as an argument for communism, and by Morgan himself in defence of American capitalism and democracy.

I think that the fundamental consistency of Morgan's thinking has to do with religious rather than political beliefs. His ultimate aim was to demonstrate that human history made moral sense, that it was a history of progress, and that it united all branches of the species. If he could borrow ideas so promiscuously from Müller and McLennan and Tylor, it was because they all shared this faith.