

Chapter 4

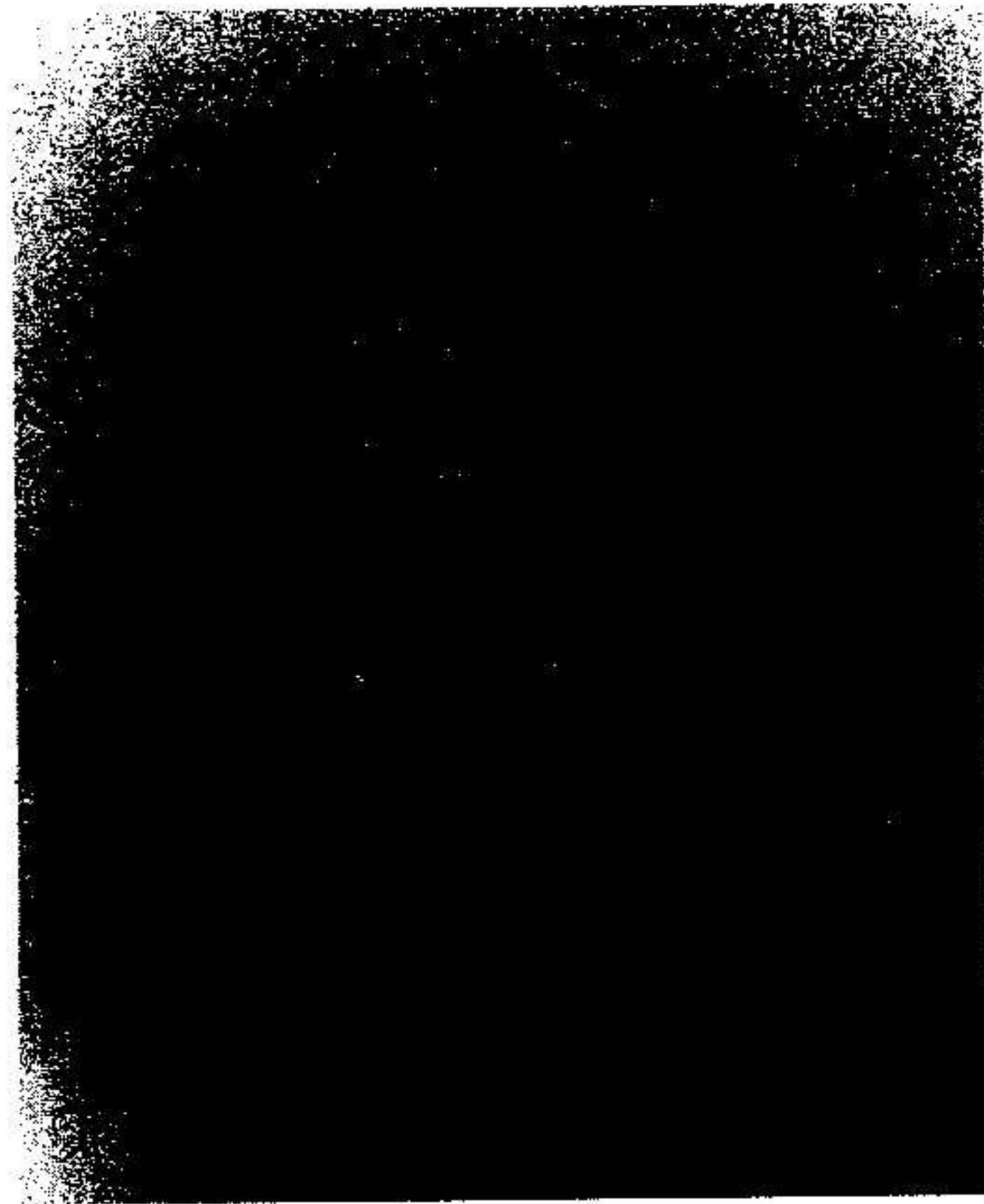


Lewis Henry Morgan and the Evolution of Society

Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) was among the leading evolutionists of the nineteenth century. Although most of Morgan's ethnological formulations have been refuted by subsequent ethnographic research, his work has had a significant impact upon anthropology and anthropological thought. This is because many of the subjects he chose to tackle, such as the evolution of the family, the incest taboo, and the rise of the state, generated questions that have occupied anthropologists for well over a century (Magli 2001: 69; Service 1985). Morgan's work also had a significant effect upon the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, whose own sociological formulations had a considerable influence in various ways upon much of twentieth-century social thought (see Chapters 10 and 14). In this chapter I shall evaluate Morgan's work and situate his contributions to evolutionary theory in the context of modern anthropological thought.

MORGAN: FROM LAWYER TO ETHNOGRAPHER

Morgan was trained in law at Union College in Albany. In 1844 he settled to practice his trade in Rochester, New York. Morgan's career as an anthropologist began as a result of his interest in the Seneca Iroquois Indians who lived on the Tonawanda reservation near Rochester. Keen to learn as much about the Iroquois as he could, Morgan paid them numerous visits. During one of these visits members of the tribe brought a legal case to his attention. The Ogden Land Company was attempting to take possession of a large portion of the reservation and have the Seneca removed to the West. Morgan, appalled by the tactics of the land speculators, took up the case and successfully thwarted the efforts to dispossess the Seneca of their landholdings. This earned him the friendship of the Seneca, who adopted him into the tribe (see Hays 1964: 14–24, 41–49).



Lewis Henry Morgan, one of the principal nineteenth-century evolutionists in the United States. Morgan was among the few evolutionary theorists to have conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork.

During the litigation against the land speculators, a young Seneca law student named Ely Parker (later Commissioner of Indian Affairs) befriended Morgan. Parker would assist Morgan in his ethnological studies. Morgan thus embarked on a career in anthropology, but a career quite unlike that of any other anthropologist then or since. As his biographer Carl Resek has noted,

Morgan's story . . . is one of the strangest in American intellectual history. It is that. No other American in his own time or since has looked at human society in quite the manner that Morgan did, and few have wandered down the path of scholarship that he charted. He fits no customary interpretation of the nineteenth-century mind and will not allow any tidy explanation of his views and motives. Some writers have called him a conservative Social Darwinist, though he deeply suspected that body of doctrine and only partially understood it.

Passing over his fervent career as a Whig and Republican politician, other scholars have thought him a spokesman of socialism. Some cite his magnum opus as a defense of American capitalism, although it contains the severest censures of the profit motive. A few view Morgan as an apologist for imperialism. But he supplied the strongest single argument against the white man's burden philosophy. His mind, in short, cannot be pinned down nicely without being divested of its rich and many-sided character (Resek 1960: vii).¹

MORGAN AND THE PEOPLING OF THE NEW WORLD: FROM ETHNOGRAPHER TO EVOLUTIONIST

Morgan spent considerable time among the Iroquois and it is clear from his writings that he had great admiration for them. His writings also reveal that he was a keen observer of ethnographic detail. Thus, unlike many other nineteenth-century ethnologists, who could rightly be described as "armchair philosophers," Morgan was unique in the depth and extent of his fieldwork. As his modern admirer Leslie White (1951: 11) put it, Morgan was not only a major theoretician, but he was also "an industrious, critical, versatile and productive field worker."

Morgan's anthropological efforts led to the publication of *The League of Ho-dé-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* in 1851, in which he describes Iroquois religion, language, social and political structure, family organization, marriage, kinship terminology, descent rules, as well as material culture. John Wesley Powell (1834-1902), the noted scholar of Native American cultures, praised Morgan's work as the "first scientific account of an Indian tribe ever given to the world" (in White 1948: 139).

Morgan's career as an anthropologist may have been a result of his interests in the Iroquois, but his career as an evolutionary anthropologist started when he delved further into the investigation of Native American "systems of consanguinity" or kinship terminology systems (naming of relatives).

Morgan was especially intrigued by the discovery of what he called a **classificatory kinship terminology**. In this system, members of an individual's nuclear family (lineal relatives) are classified along with more distant collateral kinfolk in each generation. The Iroquois child refers to his mother's sister with the term Morgan glossed as "mother," his father's brother as "father," mother's sister's sons and daughters and father's brother's sons and daughters are called by the same terms as brothers and sisters, and mother's brother's sons and daughters and father's sister's sons and daughters are called cousins. Morgan contrasted this system with the **descriptive kinship terminology system**, such as that in English in which collateral and lineal kin are kept separate (Figure 4.1). Father and father's brother are referred to by different terms, as are mother and mother's sister. The children of these categories of relatives (the off-

spring of uncles and aunts) are referred to by different terms (i.e., cousins) than those used to refer to ego's siblings (brothers/sisters).

In 1858 Morgan obtained kinship data from the Ojibway wife of a fur trader in Marquette, Wisconsin and discovered to his surprise that the Ojibway also used a classificatory kinship terminology system. Having discovered a terminology system he at first thought to be unusual and unique to the Iroquois among another Native American group, Morgan began to consider the possibility that both systems had a common source or origin. A review of the literature on the Dakotas suggested to Morgan the possibility that the Creek Indians also possessed a similar system.

These findings opened up a new possibility. If Morgan could show that all Native Americans used a classificatory kinship system, and further,

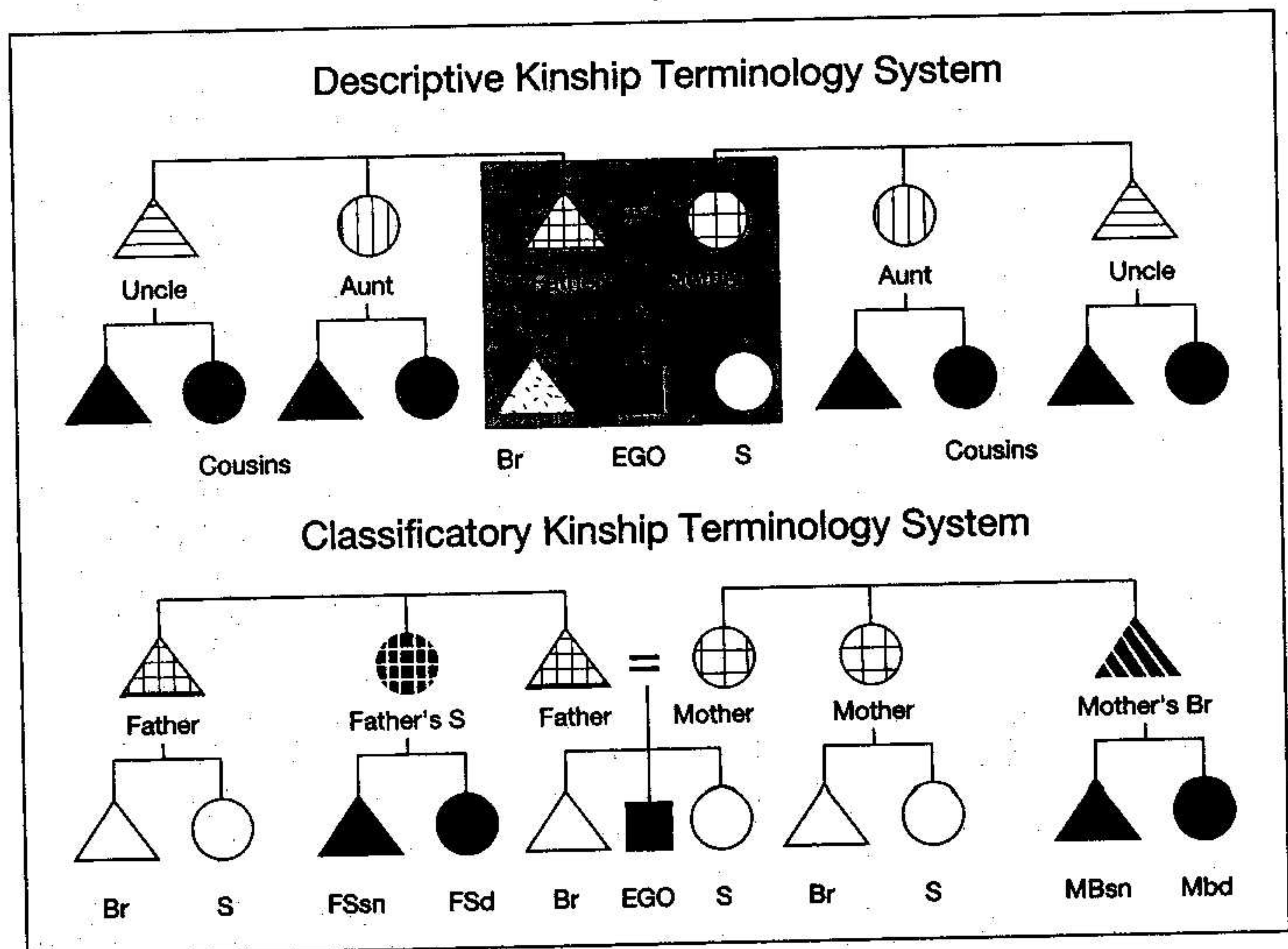


Figure 4.1 Descriptive and classificatory kinship terminologies.

if he could find evidence of this system in Asia, he could settle one of the pressing ethnological debates of the time, namely the Asiatic origins of the American Indians.

The peopling of the Americas has been the subject of ongoing research among anthropologists and archaeologists since Morgan's days. Today, we know that the **Paleoindians** (the most ancient inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere) arrived by way of a now submerged land bridge called **Beringia** (Figure 4.2) that linked Siberia and Alaska sometime around 12,000 years ago during the last Ice Age (Harris 1997: 156; Hoffecker et al. 1993). The land bridge was uncovered because a large quantity of water was locked in the form of ice, resulting in a drop in sea levels. Beringia was actually partially exposed

during the interval between 60,000 to 12,000 years ago (Hoffecker et al. 1993), but the undisputed archaeological evidence suggests that humans were in Americas by 12,000 years ago. There is also some evidence to suggest the presence of humans in the Americas as early as 20,000 to 50,000 years ago, although these dates are not widely accepted.

Archeological evidence has revealed similarities in the stone tools found in Siberia and Alaska (Kunza and Reanier 1994). In addition, there are the **phenotypical** similarities between Native Americans and East Asians, such as epicanthic eye folds, straight black hair, and certain dental features (Harris 1997: 156). In other words, the question of the Asiatic origins of Native Americans, which was a highly debated

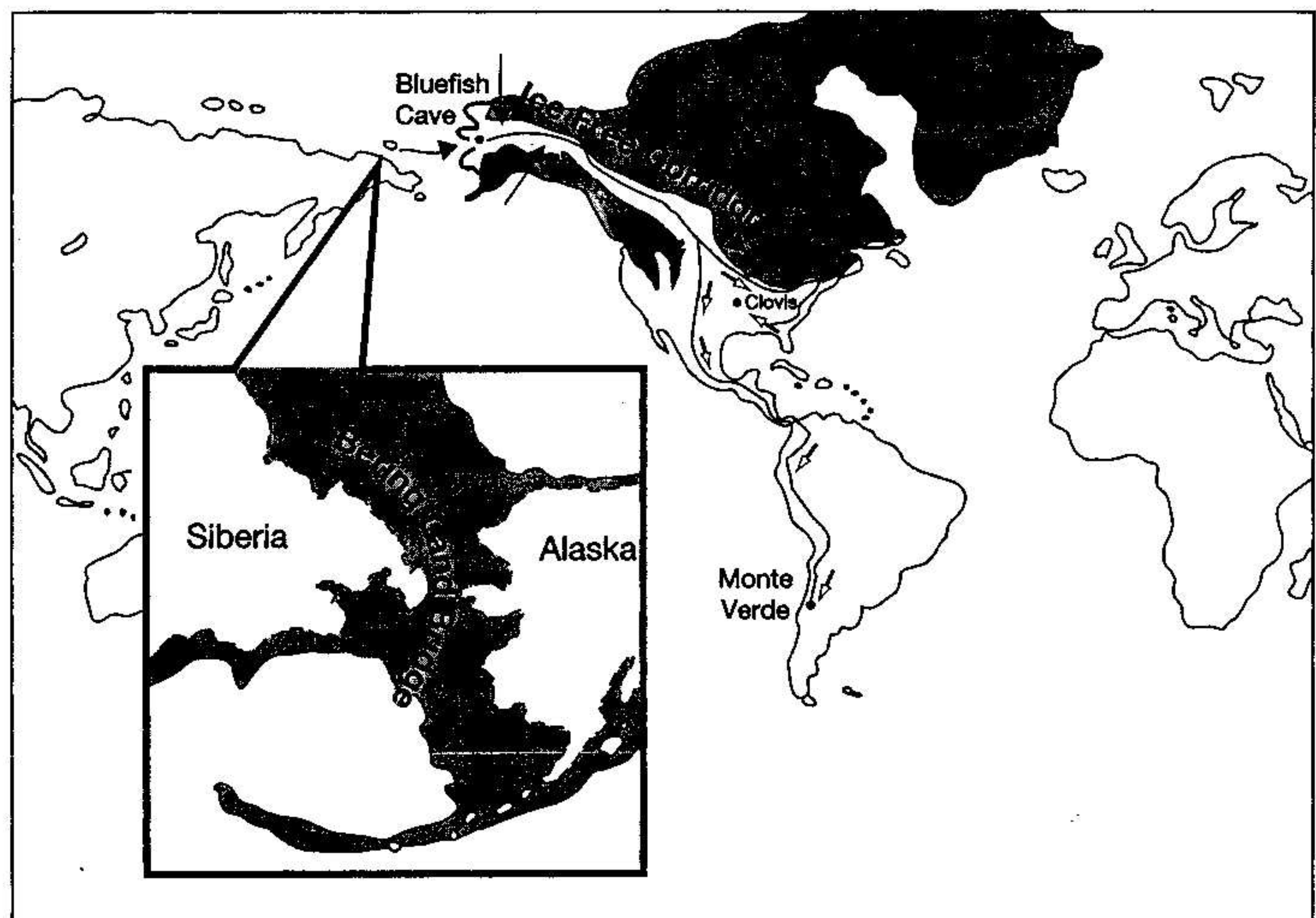


Figure 4.2 Beringia and the peopling of the Americas. In Morgan's time the ancestry of Native Americans was a major ethnological puzzle. Morgan attempted to solve this puzzle and conclusively demonstrate the Asiatic origins of Native Americans by contrasting kinship terminology systems

problem in Morgan's day, has been laid to rest. Today the problem is not from *where* did the ancestors of Native Americans come, but rather *when* they first arrive in the Americas.

The possibility of solving the great anthropological puzzle of the day led Morgan into the direction of a comparative study of kinship systems. He visited a number of Native American groups during extensive travels. His objective was to gather information on kinship systems from as many groups as possible. Between 1859 and 1862, Morgan made trips to Kansas and Nebraska, visited Fort Gary, near Winnipeg Lake, and finally traveled up the Missouri River, past Yellowstone, to Fort Benton (White 1951: 12).

During this time Morgan became increasingly aware of the rapid disappearance of traditional Native American cultures and he appealed to scholars to collect as much information about these cultures before it was too late. Morgan wrote,

The ethnic life of the Indian tribes is declining under the influence of American civilization, their arts and languages are disappearing and their institutions are dissolving. After a few more years, facts that may now be gathered with ease will become impossible of discovery. These circumstances appeal strongly to Americans to enter this great field and gather abundant harvest (Morgan 1877: viii).

The importance of recording information on disappearing groups, what present-day science critics call "salvage ethnography," has been a long standing concern among ethnographers and was undertaken with great vigor by the next generation of American anthropologists under the tutelage of Franz Boas. This was no imperialistic butterfly collecting exercise, as the postmodern interpretivists wish people to think (e.g., Marcus and Fischer 1986: 24), but an attempt to address a genuine and pressing issue, the loss of information about humankind's cultural heritage. Such efforts should be lauded and even encouraged, especially in our own time when cultural forms are undergoing rapid transformations. The reason for this is simple: The more we learn about

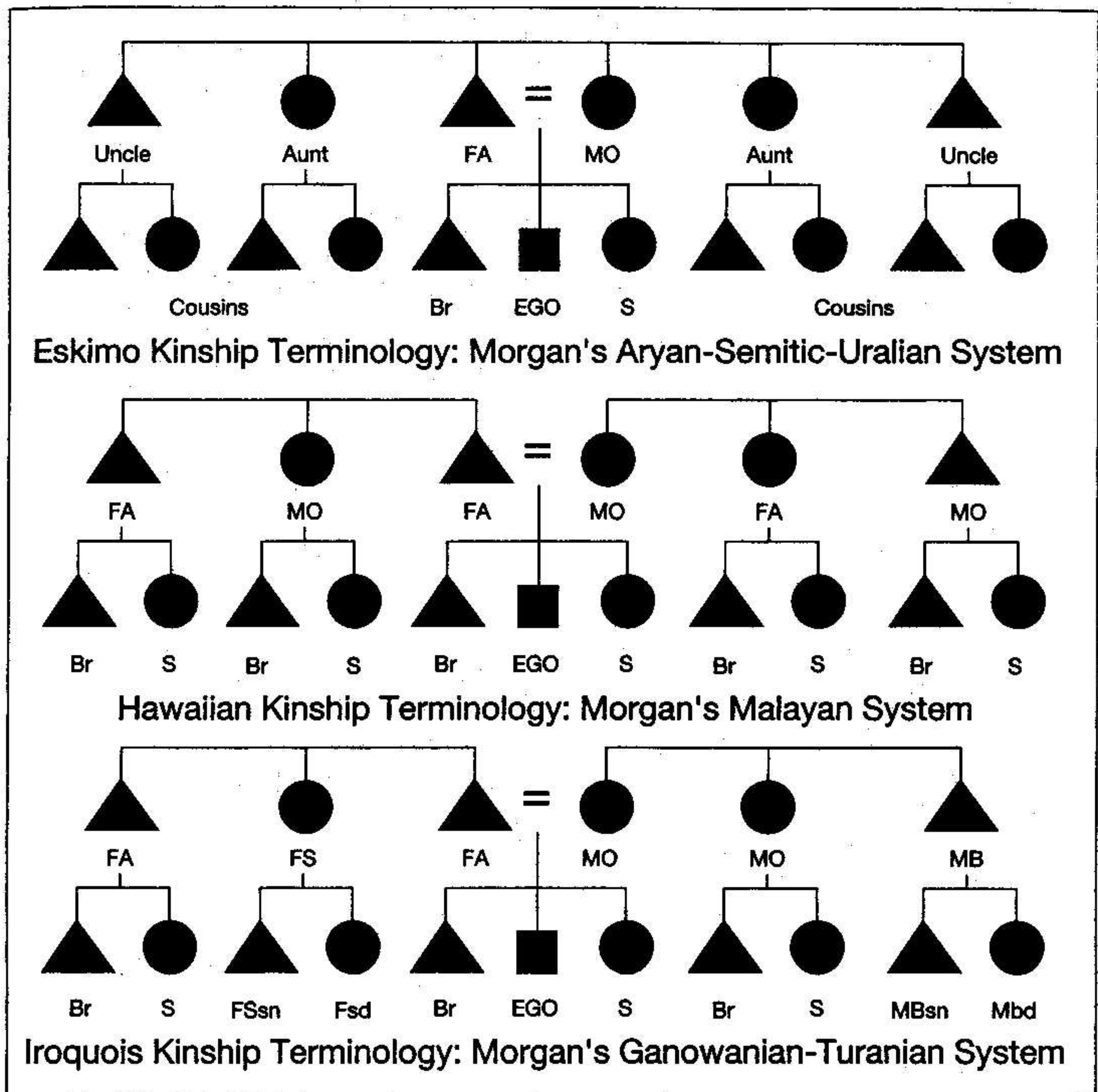
the range of variability and human possibilities, the closer we come to understanding the nature of sociocultural phenomena.

Morgan sought to supplement his own data with information solicited from Indian Agents and missionaries across the United States. Moreover, with assistance from the Smithsonian Institute Morgan expanded his field of inquiry by providing a seven-page questionnaire with over two hundred questions to United States government personnel overseas. The results of his surveys revealed that several additional Native American groups (aside from the ones for which he already possessed information) used the classificatory system as well. Moreover, it became apparent that the classificatory system of designating kin was also found among groups in Asia and Polynesia.

Based on the data he obtained, Morgan was able to identify three permutations of the classificatory system and three permutations of the descriptive system. The classificatory system included: *Malayan* (Hawaiians, Maoris, and other groups in Oceania); *Ganowanian* (native North Americans); and *Turanian* (Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, and other groups in the Indian subcontinent). The descriptive system included: *Aryan* (all speakers of Indo-European languages, such as Persian and Sanskrit); *Semitic* (Arabs, Hebrews, and Armenians); and *Uralian* (Turks, Magyar, Finn, and Estonians). In present-day anthropological terms the Malayan system corresponds to what is called the **Hawaiian kinship terminology system**, and the Ganowanian-Turanian to **Iroquois kinship terminology system**. The Aryan-Semitic-Uralian grouping corresponds to the **Eskimo kinship terminology system** (see Figure 4.3).

The presence of the classificatory kinship system in Polynesia and among Australian aborigines (discovered later) convinced Morgan that there was no merit in the attempt to use kinship terminology systems to link American Indians to Asia (Malefijt 1974: 148-149). However, what appeared more intriguing were the broader

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Figure 4.3 Morgan's kinship terminology systems.

questions about the evolution of different forms of social organization that were raised by the data. Thus, while Morgan began his research in order to gather proof for the Asian origins of the American Indians, he ended up pursuing an altogether different avenue of research.

Morgan's friend Joshua McIlvaine, a Calvinist minister and scholar of Sanskrit guided his thoughts in this direction. McIlvaine noted that

philologists had shown that linguistic forms tend to persist long after they have lost their function, the same, he argued, could be assumed of kinship terms. Kin terms were survivals, the residues of ancient patterns of social organization. If true, this would have enormous intellectual implications because kinship nomenclature could be used to reconstruct the history of humankind. The assumption behind this idea was

24 that, for example, in a system in which a child used the term for "father" to refer to collateral kin in the ascending (parents') generation, one could deduce that those individuals were indistinguishable from the child's actual father. This, according to McIlvaine's thinking, could mean that the system had its origins in "promiscuous sex involving the cohabitation of brothers and sisters" (Morgan 1871: 481). Under the circumstances of promiscuity, according to McIlvaine, it would have been impossible for a child to identify which man was his father, and so all potential fathers of the ascending generation were referred to by the same term. Similarly, women in the ascending generation, being either mother or potential stepmothers, were referred to by the same term.

The idea of a previous stage of promiscuous sex was not new, however. Johan Bachofen had already forwarded the idea of an original state of promiscuity in 1861 in his book *Das Mutterrecht* ("Mother Right"). Working primarily with Greek and Roman sources, Bachofen also argued that the family had evolved through matriarchy and matrilineal descent to patriarchy and patrilineal descent. However, McIlvaine and Morgan were unaware of Bachofen's work at the time (Service 1985: 45). So the idea was not new, what was new was the manner in which McIlvaine and Morgan would use kinship term systems, construed as survivals in Tylor's sense of the term, to reconstruct past stages of evolutionary development.

For the Reverend McIlvaine the implication of all this was satisfyingly clear: a concrete demonstration of the superiority over all others of the Aryan and Semitic systems based on the monogamous family and the moral code behind it (Resek 1960: 96).

Needless to say, McIlvaine's hypothesis was based on several erroneous assumptions. These errors were incorporated into Morgan's work. First, he assumed incorrectly that kinship terms denoted actual or true biological ("consanguinal") relationships rather than serving as signifiers of social statuses (cf., Service 1985:

30-31). Second, it was erroneous to assume that people referred to by the same label are indistinguishable. In other words, just because the word for "father" extends to many others, does not mean that those others have the same sexual rights over "mother" as the actual father. This aspect of Morgan's work, as Bloch (1983: 69) has pointed out, is based on an "illusion." Third, there is no evidence that there is a lag of the magnitude required by Morgan's scheme between kinship terminological systems and marriage systems or that terminology systems correspond with systems of marriage with the precision that Morgan attributed to them. Modern anthropologists have found that marriage and kinship terminology systems are both highly variable (Bloch 1983: 97).

Morgan wrestled with McIlvaine's suggestion for three years before adopting it. He then recast his materials in evolutionary terms. This is an astonishing case of tailoring the data to suite the one's needs. This marked Morgan's conversion to the evolutionary perspective. He described the shift in his thinking as follows:

When Darwin's great work on the origin of species first appeared I resisted his theory and was inclined to adopt Agassiz' view of the permanence of species. For some years I stood in this position. After working up the results from consanguinity I was compelled to change them and to adopt the conclusion that man commenced at the bottom of the scale from which he worked himself up to his present status (in Resek 1960: 99).²

Morgan's acceptance of cultural evolution did not mean that he also embraced the Darwinian position on the biological evolution of human beings from "animals" (Service 1985: 47). Nor did Morgan embrace the materialist/naturalistic point of view. Indeed, Morgan ends his *Ancient Society* (1877), in which he expounded his ideas of the evolution of culture, by thanking God for granting the Aryans civilization:

It may well serve to remind us that we owe our present condition, with its multiplied means of safety and happiness, to the struggles, the suffer-

ings, the heroic exertions and the patient toil of our barbarous, and more remotely, of our savage ancestors. Their labors, their trials and their successes were a part of the plan of the Supreme Intelligence to develop a barbarian out of a savage, and a civilized man out of this barbarian (Morgan 1877: 554).

Thus, it would seem that although Morgan may have been among the embattled men fighting to lift the curse of Adam from his primitive ancestors (cf. Murphree 1961: 267), he was not quite willing to lift "the hand of God" from his ancestor's affairs.

Having adopted the evolutionary perspective and McLivaine's hypothesis, Morgan reached the following conclusion:

Upon one side are the Aryan, Semitic, and Uralian, and upon the other the Ganowanian, the Turanian, and Malayan, which gives nearly the line of demarcation between civilized and uncivilized nations (Morgan 1871: 469).

In other words, kinship terminology systems were the basis for evaluating cultural evolution, in which societies that possessed classificatory kinship systems were lower on an evolutionary scale than those with descriptive kinship terminology systems.

From the kinship terminology systems, Morgan inferred corresponding marriage and family types, or domestic structures. He then attempted to classify these arrangements along an evolutionary scale, a theme he would develop more fully in his book *Ancient Society* (1877), which we shall examine later.

Morgan first traced out the evolutionary development of the family from sexual promiscuity to the nuclear type based on monogamous marriage in a paper entitled "A Conjectural Solution to the Origin of the Classificatory System of Relationships." He presented the paper before the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston in 1867 (Morgan 1868). Morgan, like McLivaine, argued that the monogamous family was the most advanced evolutionary form and the principle he thought he had discovered was that the

number of licit sexual partners decreases chronologically from the stage of savagery to civilization, moving from promiscuity to monogamy. The paper received positive reception.

This success led to the publication of Morgan's *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871). Despite its shortcomings, this work was important in the development of anthropological thought because it represented the first attempt at the systematic analysis of kinship systems that explored the implications of kin classification and highlighted their sociological correlates. As such, the work opened up an entirely new direction in anthropological research, as subsequent anthropologists have acknowledged (W. Adams 1998: 56; Fortes 1969: 19; Magli 2001: 70; Rivers 1914: 5-6).

MORGAN AS EVOLUTIONIST

In his *Ancient Society* (1877) Morgan elaborated upon the ideas presented in *Systems of Consanguinity* and turned his attention to the reconstruction of the evolutionary history of humankind as a whole. The scheme Morgan proposed entails a construal of Evolution as progress and evolutionary change as immanent, necessary, directional, and teleological, involving the unfolding of latent potentialities present from the start of existence (cf. Sanderson 1990: 17). In other words, all of the major elements for which nineteenth-century evolutionism has been criticized appear in Morgan's formulations. He begins his study as follows:

The latest investigations respecting the early condition of the human race, are tending to the conclusion that mankind commenced their career at the bottom of the scale and worked their way up from savagery to civilization through the slow accumulation of experimental knowledge. . . . As it is undeniable that portions of the human family have existed in a state of savagery, other portions in a state of barbarism, and still other portions in the state of civilization, it seems equally so that these three distinct conditions are connected to each other in a natural as well as necessary

progress. Moreover, that this sequence has been historically true of the entire human family, up to the status attained by each branch respectively, is rendered probable by the conditions under which all progress occurs, and by the known advancement of several branches of the family through two or more of these conditions (Morgan 1877: 61).

The scheme Morgan proposed was similar to that of Tylor (1871 [1929]: I: 32–33) involving three successive stages: Savagery, Barbarism, and Civilization. “The principle institutions of mankind,” according to Morgan (1877: vi), “originated in savagery, were developed in barbarism, and are maturing in civilization.” The stages are construed to be sequential, not temporal, because various existing cultures around the world were to be found at various stages of evolutionary development (Salzman 2001: 92).

Each stage, as Morgan saw it, contains the “germ” of thought that would emerge and blossom in the succeeding stage. For Morgan, germs of thought produced kinship terminology systems and other cultural arrangements. The question Morgan did not ask is why should such thoughts occur in the first place (Harris 2001: 231). The reason, as Sanderson (1990: 20, 22) has pointed out, is that Morgan, like many of his contemporaries, had no clear model of causation and because he saw evolution as the unfolding of inherent potentialities, which to his mind made evolution self-explanatory.

This is what separates Morgan’s work from modern materialist evolutionary research strategies. The materialist would ask, If cultural elements such as kinship terminologies are the product of someone’s spontaneous flights of fancy, what compels others to adopt and incorporate them in their culture? People do not simply think up things like kinship systems and postmarital residence rules at will and then whimsically adopt them as they wish (Harris 2001: 231). And if people capriciously adopt any new idea that strikes their fancy, then why are there not as many kinship terminology systems as there are cultures? Why have people culturally

and technologically as far apart as the Euro-Americans and the Inuit use essentially the same kinship terminology system? Morgan does not take into account that germs of thought are actualized under particular socioeconomic, political, demographic and ecological circumstances (Harris 2001: 231). He does not consider these questions because he attributes cultural development to self-propelling mental processes.

There are, therefore, central theoretical differences between Morgan’s mentalist perspective and the materialist evolutionary models used by modern anthropologists. It requires more than “nimble terminological adjustments,” motivated by political correctness to substitute categories such as “savages” with “hunter-gatherers,” contra Barrett (1996: 51), to make Morgan’s scheme compatible with modern evolutionism.

Morgan’s evolutionism is based on a thorough commitment to an ideational or mentalist perspective and his model is directional and teleological, which entails the idea of evolution as the unfolding of latent potentialities present from the start of existence, as noted previously. As Morgan (1877: 61) observes,

Out of a few germs of thought, conceived in the early age have been evolved all the principle institutions of mankind. Beginning their growth in the period of savagery, fermenting through the period of barbarism, they have continued their advancement through the period of civilization. The evolution of these germs of thought have been guided by a natural logic which formed an essential attribute of the brain itself. So unerringly has this principle performed its functions in all conditions of experience, and in all periods of time, that its results are uniform, coherent and traceable in their courses. These results alone will in time yield convincing proofs of the unity of origin of mankind. The mental history of the human race, which is revealed in institutions, inventions, and discoveries, is presumptively the history of a single species, perpetuated through individuals, and developed through experience (Morgan 1877: 61, emphasis added).

Morgan’s idealism also extends to his construal of the mechanism of evolutionary devel-

opment in terms of the inherent self-expansion of ideas that give rise to new sociocultural transformations (Sanderson 1999: 11, 35). Again, this makes his scheme incompatible with modern evolutionary thought with its materialist mechanisms for sociocultural transformation.

The reason why there is confusion over Morgan's precise theoretical stance stems from numerous interspersed statements throughout *Ancient Society* that can be interpreted to mean that he was committed to a materialist theory of causation, stressing the primacy of technological or economic variables (Harris 2001: 213–214). For instance, Morgan (1877: 39–40) writes that

the most advanced portion of the human race were halted . . . at certain stages of progress, until some great invention or discovery, such as the domestication of animals or the smelting of iron ore, gave a new and powerful impulse forward.

Or with respect to the evolution of cultures in the Americas, Morgan (1877: 460) states that

improvement in subsistence, which followed the cultivation of maize and plants among the American aborigines, must have favored the general advancement of the family. It led to localization, to the use of additional arts, to an improved house architecture, and to a more intelligent life.

Despite such statements, Morgan's (1877: 37) deep commitment to a mentalist view is unquestionable. However, biology plays a major role in his thinking. For example, he writes that "with the production of inventions and discoveries, and with the growth of institutions, the human brain necessarily grew and expanded; and we are led to recognize a gradual enlargement of the brain itself, particularly of the cerebral portion."

Other factors that "gave a remarkable impulse to society" were changes in marriage practices that decreased inbreeding because they "brought unrelated persons into marriage relations," creating "a more vigorous stock physically and mentally" (Morgan 1877: 459). When two advanced tribes were brought together and blended "the

new skull and brain would widen and lengthen to the sum of the capabilities of both." This would then give the new "stock" superiority asserted in an increase of intelligence and numbers (Morgan 1877: 459). Morgan thus sees strong links between social and biological evolution, which not only sets him apart from Tylor, but also accounts for his racism, discussed later (Kahn 1995: 11).

MORGAN, PSYCHIC UNITY, AND RACISM

Many of Morgan's passages give the impression that he shares the central assumptions of the evolutionists of his time regarding human cultural diversity, the uniformitarian perspective, and humankind's biopsychological unity:

It may be remarked finally that the experience of mankind has run in nearly uniform channels; the human necessities in similar conditions have been substantially the same; and that the operations of the mental principle have been uniform in virtue of the specific identity of the brain of all the races of mankind (Morgan 1877: 8).

This would put Morgan squarely on the side of those arguing for the racial unity of humankind. However, these statements are made in reference to the polygenesis theory (see Chapter 3), not necessarily as an advocacy of the unity of the human race.

It is true that Morgan had great admiration for the American Indians, especially the Seneca; it is also true that he was a blatant racist and white supremacist. Racism did not conflict with Morgan's acknowledgement of the idea of the unity of mankind. This is because an argument could be made that while it is true that there are no biopsychological differences between people of different races; however, this does not hold true for those races occupying different stages on the ladder of evolutionary progress. Primitive people who are at the lower stages are inferior to Euro-Americans because their mental powers, brain size, and so on have as yet not reached

their fullest potential. Thus unity meant there was unity for those in the same evolutionary stage, but not for others. The idea of the unity of mankind was therefore fully compatible with racist explanations of cultural similarities and difference.

It is not surprising then to find that Morgan had a special hatred of people of African ancestry. As his biographer Resek (1960: 63, n. 1) has pointed out,

During the debate in the Congress over the Compromise of 1850, Morgan expressed the not uncommon sentiment of Negrophobia, based partially on the belief that the Negro was a separate species. He urged Seward to limit the expansion of slavery because "it is time to fix some limits to the reproduction of this black race among us. It is limited in the north by the traits of the whites. The black population has no independent vitality among us. In the south while the blacks are property, there can be no assignable limit to their reproduction. It is too thin a race intellectually to be fit to propagate and I am perfectly satisfied from reflection that the feeling towards this race is one of hostility throughout the north. We have no respect for them whatsoever."³

Moreover, while Morgan may have affirmed that all the races of mankind were making their way upward "from savagery to civilization through the slow accumulation of experimental knowledge," "in nearly uniform channels," for Morgan God, or the "Supreme Intelligence," favored one particular group above all others:

The Aryan family represents the central stream of human progress, because it produced the highest type of mankind, and because it has proved its intrinsic superiority by gradually assuming the control of the earth (Morgan 1877: 553).

It was, in the final analysis, the Aryan and Semitic families, which from the Middle Period of Barbarism assumed the central trends of evolutionary progress; they were the first to emerge from Barbarism and "were substantially the founders of civilization" (Morgan 1877: 39). Ultimately, it was the Aryan family alone that came

to embody progress (Morgan 1877: 40). Only one conclusion can follow from these statements: While there may be some confusion regarding Morgan's materialist leanings, there can be no doubts about his racism and devotion to the stance of white supremacy.

MORGAN'S EVOLUTIONARY SCHEME

As noted previously, Morgan saw the evolution of culture as the working out and realization of "a few primary germs of thought" (Morgan 1877: 4). Among the lines of development Morgan focused upon are technological innovations, changing forms of the family, the development of property rights, and the evolution of political complexity and the rise of the state.

Morgan set forth a three-stage evolutionary scale of progress that he called **ethnical periods**: Savagery, Barbarism, and Civilization. He subdivided the first two stages into subperiods: lower, middle, and upper. Each stage of evolutionary progress was defined in terms of particular technological developments (Morgan 1877: 10–12). Morgan's scheme is summarized as follows in Figure 4.4.

Morgan described the evolutionary stages set forth in Figure 4.4 as follows:

Each of these periods has a distinct culture and exhibits a mode of life more or less special and peculiar to itself. This specialization of ethnical periods renders it possible to treat a particular society according to its conditions of relative advancement, and to make it a subject of independent study and discussion. It does not affect the main result that different tribes and nations on the same continent, and even the same linguistic family, are in different conditions at the same time, since for our purpose the *condition* of each is the material fact, the *time* being immaterial (Morgan 1877: 13).

Morgan associated the stages of evolution with the evolution of social organization, going from a stage of promiscuous marriage to the development of the monogamous family, which

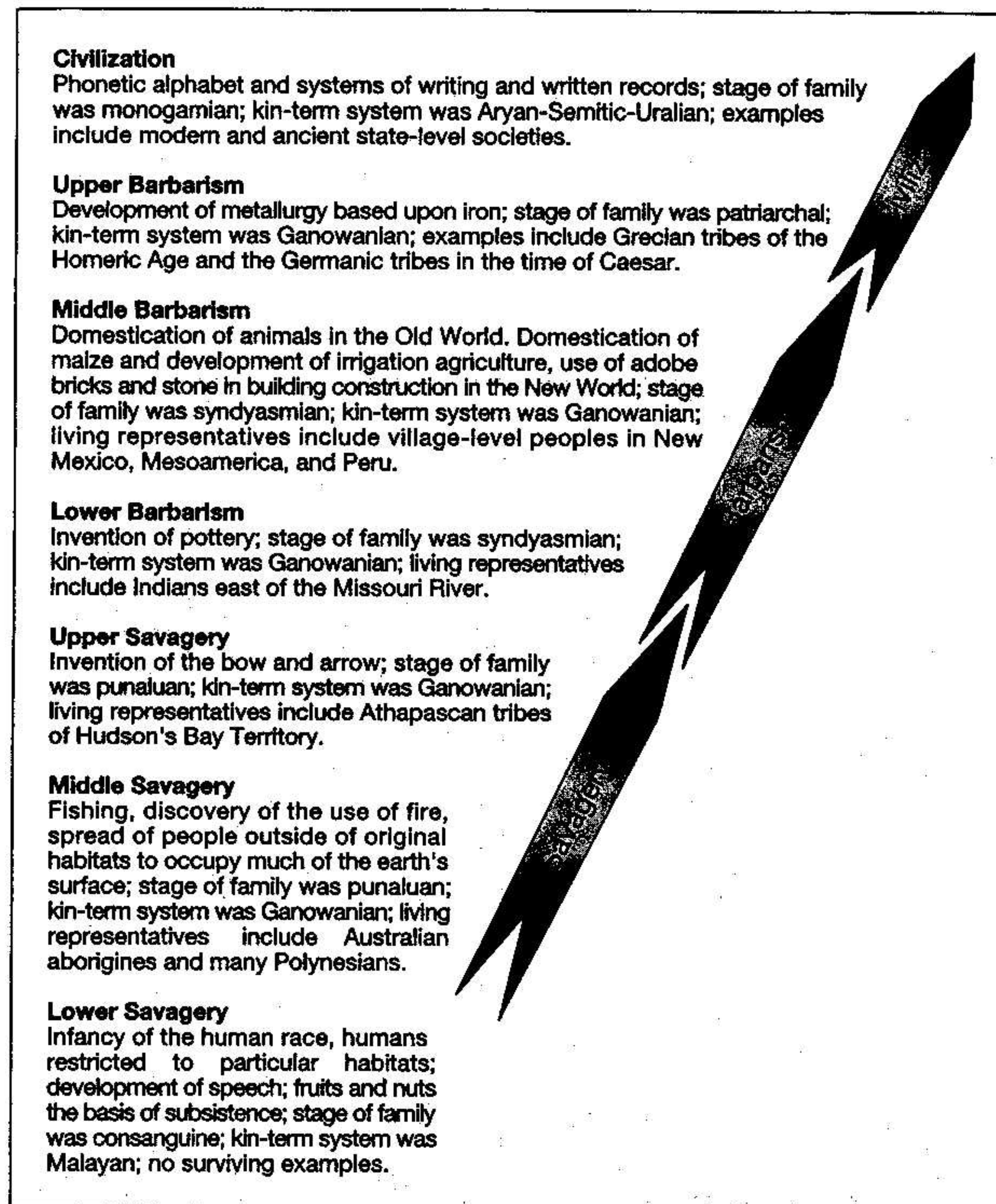


Figure 4.4 Morgan's sequential stages of cultural evolution.

we shall examine later. Morgan, however, did not recognize any sort of logical or causal articulation between the technological and economic innovations by means of which he differentiated evolutionary stages and substages and associated forms of family types of social organization.

Such obscurities in Morgan's work have led him to be classified as a materialist by some, as an idealist by others, and as an eclectic theoretician by still others (Sanderson 1990: 25). The lack of articulation between the technological traits Morgan used to demarcate evolutionary stages

and other features of culture have rendered his typology difficult to use (Rambo 1991: 30).

Again, contra Barrett (1996: 51), more than "nimble terminological adjustments" have been necessary to make what has not been discarded in Morgan's work compatible with modern evolutionary thought, as evident in Service's (1971) band-tribe-chieftdom-state typology. Morgan's use of subsistence strategies and techno-economic factors to distinguish different types of cultures is still a viable idea, and as Leacock (1963: xi) points out, "his general sequence of stages has been written into our understanding of prehistory and interpretation of archaeological remains." This is true, but only because of substantial modifications to Morgan's original typology (Rambo 1991: 30-32).

It is only in the context of Morgan's discussion of the transition from descent-based to territorially and politically based polities or **state-level societies** that an articulation between the technological traits and other cultural features becomes evident, and even this is problematic. This aspect of Morgan's work was emphasized in Marx and Engels' reworking of his scheme (see Bloch 1983: 47-48; Harris 2001: 248-249; Magli 2001: 70-76).

Morgan's evolutionary scheme as a whole is fraught with errors (Harris 2001: 184-185). For example, Morgan's association of Lower Savagery with a fruit and nut subsistence is contrary to archaeological evidence, which has shown that Paleolithic people were hunters and gatherers. Similarly, there is an overlap if not synchronization between the domestication of plants and animals (Bar-Yosef and Valla 1990; Harris 1997: 143-144; Zohary and Hopf 1988), which Morgan places into two separate stages, with **pastoralism** preceding agriculture. Also, Morgan's assumption that the manufacture of pottery, which "presupposes village life," came before domestication of animals and cereal cultivation is false.

Morgan's other errors include placing the agricultural and highly stratified aboriginal

Hawaiians, who possessed a complex government (see Kirch 1984, 1988), in the level of Middle Savagery because they lacked the bow and arrow. Similarly he failed to recognize the tremendous complexity achieved by the Aztecs, who possessed a highly developed state-level society, simply because they did not use iron tools. Finally, using writing as a criterion for "civilization" has led Morgan to underestimate the nature of the Inca society, which had become a super-state, or empire, without a system of writing (on the Aztec and Inca states, see Fiedel 1987). Another error is assigning the bronze-age people of the Homeric age to the stage of iron tools.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE FAMILY AND THE INCEST TABOO

Morgan's analysis, as noted previously, is based upon the assumption that kinship terminology systems are static and tend to endure for long periods of time after the social arrangements that gave rise to them have vanished. Morgan's acceptance of this idea and the logic underlying it is clear in his *Ancient Society* (1877):

Systems of consanguinity are neither adopted, modified, nor laid aside at pleasure. They are identified in their origin with organic movement of society which produced a great change of condition. When a particular form had come into general use, with its nomenclature invented and its methods settled, it would, from the nature of the case, be very slow to change. Every human being is the center of a group of kindred, and therefore every person is compelled to use and to understand the prevailing system. A change in any one of these relationships would be extremely difficult. This tendency to permanence is increased by the fact that these systems exist by custom rather than legal enactment, as growth rather than artificial creations, and therefore a motive to change must be as universal as the usage. While every person is a party to the system, the channel of its transmission is blood. Powerful influences thus existed to per-

petuate the system long after the conditions under which each originated had been modified or had altogether disappeared. *This element of permanence gives certainty to conclusions drawn from the facts, and preserved and brought forward a record of ancient society which otherwise would have been entirely lost to human knowledge* (1877: 398, emphasis added).

Morgan's reconstruction of the evolution of the family is as follows: In the beginning there was the promiscuous horde. This is "the bottom of the scale—the lowest conceivable stage of savagery" a time when people "possessed feeble intellect and feebler moral sense" (Morgan 1877: 500). The next stage is the development of the consanguine family. This was characterized by a rule restricting sexual intercourse within the group consisting of males who cooperate in food acquisition and defense and who share a group of women. For this reason the membership of the group consists of brothers and sisters. Morgan (1877: 388, 401) notes that the consanguine family disappeared altogether with no present-day groups conforming to this pattern.

like Tyler There is, however, no tangible evidence for the existence of this presumed stage of evolutionary development, other than what Morgan supplies from his imagination. We must remember that there is a lot more of imaginative speculations and retrodiction than of ethnography in the works of nineteenth-century writers such as Morgan, as Adams (1998: 57) has correctly pointed out. Morgan maintained, however, that the evidence in question has been preserved in the Malayan system (now known as the Hawaiian kinship terminology system), in which the same terms used to refer to parents apply to their siblings and the same terms used to refer to siblings also apply to cousins. Thus, from a set of kin terms presumed to be survivals from a period long gone, Morgan inferred a set of social relationships and domestic arrangements that, he argued, gave rise to those terms. The inferences as to the possible family types associated with particular terminology systems were based entirely on Morgan's own imaginative reconstruction.

In the next phase of Morgan's scheme, the consanguine family evolves into a form called the punaluan family. This is the conjectural type that Morgan inferred from the Ganowanian kinship terminology, as exemplified by the Iroquois system. According to the Iroquois kinship terminology, ego refers to mother and mother's sister by the same term, and father and father's brother are denoted by the same term. Mother's sister's children and father's brother's children are referred to by the same terms ego uses to refer to brother and sister. However, mother's brother's children and father's sister's children are referred to as cousin. The system (Figure 4.5) distinguishes between cross cousins (children of mother's brother and father's sister) and parallel cousins (children of mother's sister and father's brother). Again, Morgan takes this to indicate social relations that held true in the past, rather than sets of social relationships observable among the Iroquois during the nineteenth century.

Morgan saw in the Iroquois system evidence of a previous evolutionary stage in which marriage rules became more restricted, producing a system in which a group of brothers shared each others' wives and sisters shared each others' husbands. The significant development here, as Morgan sees it, was the prohibition on brother-sister marriages. At this stage, according to Morgan, the kinship terminology system underwent a significant transformation. If brothers and sisters were no longer mates, then their children could no longer be referred to as brothers and sisters by ego. Because brothers belonged to the same marriage group, children of brothers would still address one another as brother/sister. Similarly, since sisters belonged to the same marriage group, their children continued to address one another as brother/sister. ***

Morgan considered the prohibition of brother-sister marriages to have had important evolutionary consequences. Such marriages, he argued, eliminated the deleterious genetic effects of inbreeding. This led to increased intelligence

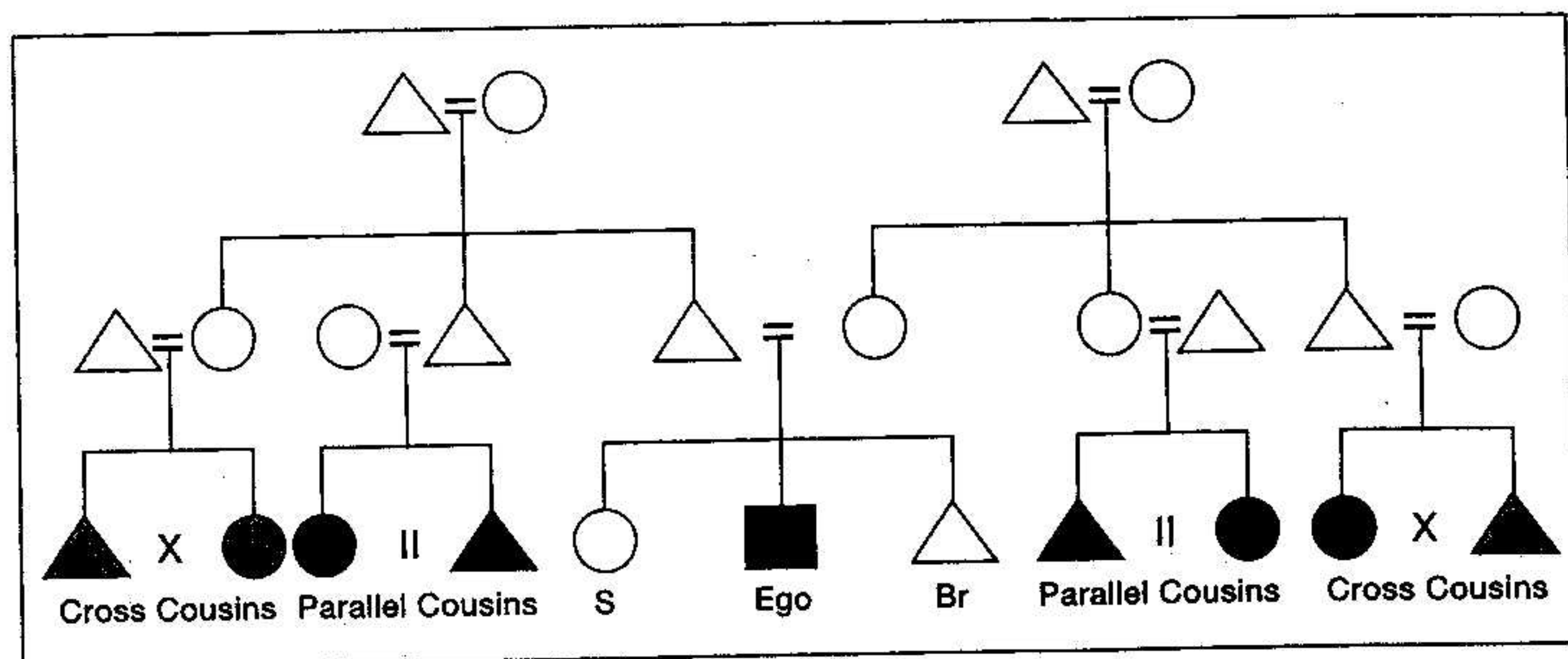


Figure 4.5 Parallel and cross cousins.

that, in turn, led to technological progress. Morgan viewed such progress as evidence of "natural selection" at work (Morgan 1877: 421).

This evolutionary stage led to the development of what Morgan refers to as the **gens** (singular, plural = **gentes**), a group of consanguinally related individuals descended from a common ancestor. The gens had a particular name and its members observed the rule of exogamy; they were forbidden to marry anyone descended from the same common ancestor. Thus recognizing the "evils of consanguine marriages," according to Morgan, people sought marriage partners from other clans. At first descent was traced through the female line because prevailing mating practices made it impossible to identify the biological father of any child (Morgan 1877: 67–68). The rule of **exogamy** led to the production of "a stock of savages superior to any then existing on earth," who then spread because of their superior powers (Morgan 1877: 378).

Morgan thus offers an explanation for the **incest taboo**, a topic that not only attracted the attention of nineteenth-century ethnologists

such as McLennan, Lubbock, Tylor, Spencer, and Durkheim, among others, but also of twentieth-century anthropologists. Morgan's inbreeding explanation holds that the incest taboo arose because of the biological advantages it conferred upon those who adopted this practice. This idea stands in contrast to Tylor's (1889) position, which stresses that the explanation for the incest taboo lies in the survival advantages it confers in terms of the establishment and maintenance of alliances with other groups. Both perspectives have advocates among present-day anthropologists (see Kang 1979; Leavitt 1989, 1990, 1992; Ottenheimer 1996; Thornhill 1993; see also the discussion in Chapter 11).

What is most problematic about Morgan's assumption that the offspring of outbreeding were biologically superior to others is that exogamy excludes only certain categories of relatives as mates and is associated with "inbreeding" with other types of relatives (Murphy 1989: 221; see the discussion in Chapter 11). Finally, Morgan's idea of biologically superior offspring is based on Lamarckian conceptions of heredity, rather than a Mendelian one, as one is first led to believe. This makes his ideas in-

Method = stories

compatible with Darwinian explanations for the incest taboo.

Overall, the problems in Morgan's work on kinship and family forms are legion. As noted previously, there is no evidence that kinship terminological systems persist unchanged through time. Moreover, there is no evidence for the assumption that the kinship terminology in use in the present reflects a past stage and that people in the present are employing marriage rules belonging to the next stage of evolutionary development. However, there is evidence that shows other kinds of kinship systems changing into the Hawaiian kind over time, which is the reverse of Morgan's developmental sequence (Murphy 1989: 131).

Morgan's reconstruction of the evolution of the family is for the most part an artifact of his imagination. Validation against empirical evidence necessary in order to determine the accuracy of such representations is absent in his work.

Morgan's errors illustrates some of the dangers of relying upon free reigning imagination without empirical verification of propositions. To call Morgan's work scientific, despite the fact that he uses that honorific to describe his own studies, is therefore entirely unjustified.

EVOLUTION OF THE STATE

Morgan stressed the importance of the gentes, and their larger groupings, **phratries** and **tribes**, in the evolution of society (Morgan 1877: 62). He contrasted "gentile" societies (*societas*) based upon gentes with the type of polities we call the state (*civitas*) and attempted to explain the transition of the one to the other, beginning a line of inquiry that eventually led to his conception of the rise of the state. Morgan felt that the manner in which the changeover took place from a kinship-based society to a territorially based "civil society" was crucial to the understanding of social evolution. On this sub-

ject we find Morgan's legal mind at work in top form as he teases out issues of marriage rights, property rights, inheritance rules, and their social and legal implications.

Before we proceed with a discussion of Morgan's theory for the rise of the state, it might be useful to define what anthropologists mean by "state-level societies" and examine some of the theories presented to explain the rise of states. In the context of my own study of state formation in the former kingdom of Hunza, in what is now northern Pakistan, I have defined the state as follows:

[The state is] an autonomous political body, controlling a defined territory incorporating many communities, possessing a centralized government and administrative bureaucracy, with powers to issue and enforce legislation, extract taxes, conscript labor, and draft men for military service. State level polities are also characterized by a degree of social stratification and differential access on the part of higher and lower social strata to necessary resources and means of production (Sidky 1996: 27).⁴

I have also noted the criterion of scale, which sets states apart from other political entities. To this definition one might add the following criteria suggested by Sanderson (1999: 56): "a state [may be defined as] a form of sociopolitical organization that has achieved a monopoly over the means of violence within a specified territory." Also, another feature that sets states apart from other political entities, such as for example, chiefdoms, is the separation of their specialized institutions from systems of kinship (Sanderson 1999: 57), a characteristic central to Morgan's scheme.

The state evolved in six and up to eight places independently of one another about 5,000 years ago in the Old World, and somewhat later in the Americas (for an overview, see Sanderson 1999: 68-86). Thereafter the state as a form of sociopolitical organization has dominated the face of the earth. For this reason, many

anthropologists see the rise of the state as perhaps one of the most significant events in human history (Gross 1992: 430). The evolutionary process contributing to the rise of the state, which is now seen as a case of worldwide parallelism, has been the focus of a number of studies by cultural and archaeological anthropologists (Figure 4.6). These represent a line of research the initiation of which has been credited to Morgan (R. Adams 1966; Blanton et al. 1981; Carniero 1970, 1987; Fried 1967; Johnson and Earle 1987; Krader 1968: 2; Service 1975; Sidky 1996; Spencer 1990; see Steward 1955).

Morgan's distinction between societies based upon kinship organization and those based upon state organization is central to his conceptualization of how the state emerged. According to his scheme, in "gentile" societies (*societas*), social and political relationships were based upon kinship

and operated through personal relations in the gens and its larger groupings, phratries, and tribes (Morgan 1877: 62, 66). Under the state (*civitas*), a political society developed in which the government dealt with people through territorial organization, such as township, county, and the state. This is an important distinction that modern anthropologists have accepted as one of the defining features of state level societies, as noted previously.

According to Morgan (1877: 67), gentile societies, which were founded upon the principles of gens, phratry, and tribe, were communal and democratic in nature. Such societies continued to be the dominant form through the stage of Barbarism. However, "the germs of thought" for the evolutionary developments to follow were contained in the gens. Thus, although Morgan talks about associated technological innovations,

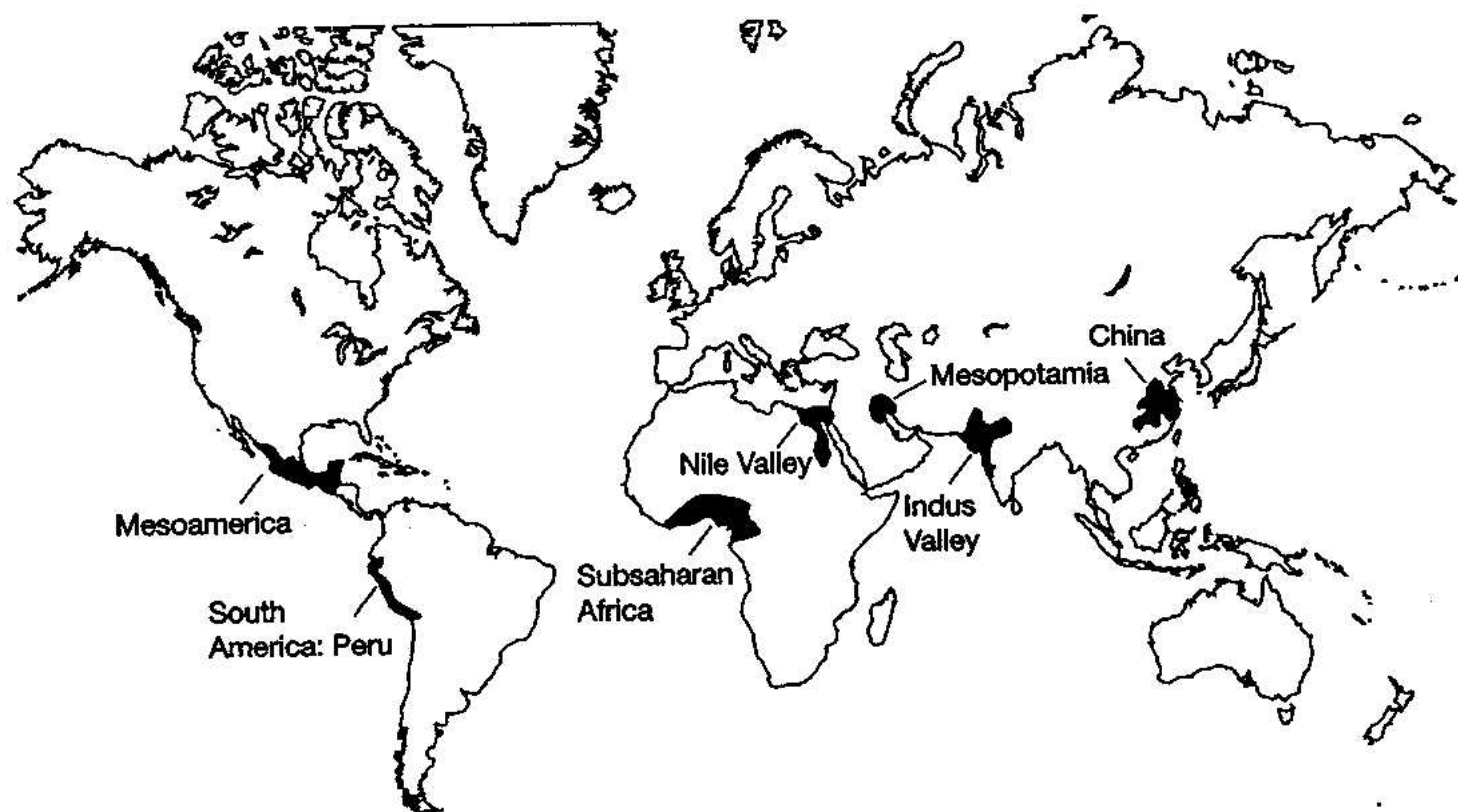


Figure 4.6 Early state-level societies thought to have evolved independently of one another about 5000 years ago in the Old World, and somewhat later in the Americas. The evolutionary processes contributing to the rise of the state are now seen as a case of worldwide parallelism.

ultimately the engines of evolutionary development in his scheme are "the germs of thought." As Morgan (1877: 64) put it,

The gens has passed through successive stages of development in its transition from its archaic to its final form with the progress of mankind. These changes were limited, in the main, to two: firstly, changing descent from the female line, which was the archaic rule, as among the Iroquois, to the males, which was the final rule, as among the Grecian and Roman gentes; and, secondly, changing the inheritance of the property of a deceased member of the gens from his gentiles who took it in the archaic period, first to his agnatic kindred, and finally to his children. These changes, slight as they may seem, indicate very great changes of condition as well as a large degree of progressive development.

The evolutionarily significant changes described here are tied in Morgan's view to technological innovations associated with an economy based upon herding and agriculture, the latter being an expression of the growth of ideas. The new technology of production entailed the use of arable land, tools, livestock, and slaves and was operated by males and slowly became the private property of men. Thus, with an agrarian plow economy based upon the intensive use of land arose the notion of private property and with private property came socioeconomic and political differences. This resulted in an elevation of the economic status of men in the family, who emerged as the first group in human history to possess private property.

Although critics at the time argued that private land ownership was common among some hunting-gathering peoples in Canada, thereby refuting Morgan's scheme, modern anthropological research has proven that these patterns were a postcontact phenomenon (Murphy 1989: 159-160). Moreover, it is now clear that nowhere are hunting territories, fishing areas, or places for the collection of nuts owned by individuals in hunting-gathering societies (Murphy 1989: 159-160).

In Morgan's scheme it is the appearance of private property, and the associated disparities in wealth, that marked the beginnings of classes and class exploitation. This, along with Morgan's seeming materialism, as evidenced by his focus upon technology and economy (he in fact viewed these as expressions of the growth of ideas), attracted the attention of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Bloch 1983: 57). It has been said that Marx held Morgan in such admiration that he wanted to dedicate his book, *Capital*, to him. However, Morgan being "a highly conservative lawyer" was appalled by this and refused the honor (Barrett 1996: 50).

For Morgan the changes he describes had other ramifications. Associated with this shift in the economic powers of men and private ownership came a shift in clan descent rules from matrilineality to patrilineality. A new form of marriage and new inheritance rules favoring men accompanied this shift. To put it in a Marxist vein, as the new technology and relations of production developed they became incongruous with the prevailing pattern of social organization and form of inheritance. This resulted in a radical transformation from a system based upon matrilineal descent to one based on patrilineal descent and to inheritance along the male line.

To Marx and Engels this appeared to substantiate their own theory of social transformation in which change was seen as a result of incompatibilities between the relations of production and the forces of production (Bloch 1983: 10). Morgan's work was therefore seen as evidence that the same principles that created capitalism operated in the early history of humankind as well.

According to Morgan, the new form of marriage that emerged was monogamy. The monogamous family is linked in Morgan's scheme to the stage of Civilization. "It was founded upon marriage between single pairs, with exclusive cohabitation" (Morgan 1877: 384). This meant that men now had exclusive sexual monopoly over particular women. This ensured that men

could identify the children they sired and to whom they could pass on their property. Along with the new form of family a different system of kinship terms appeared as well, marking a shift from the classificatory system to the descriptive one.

Morgan's explanation for the shift from a classificatory system to a descriptive one centers upon "rights of property and succession to estates."

There is one powerful motive which might under certain circumstances tend to overthrow the classificatory form and the substitution of the descriptive, but it would arise after the attainment of civilization. This is the inheritance of estates. Hence the growth of property and settlement of its distribution might be expected to lead to a more precise discrimination of consanguinity (Morgan 1871: 14).

Here the lag time that Morgan posits to exist in kinship terminology systems and actual practices, something upon which he bases his entire method of evolutionary reconstruction, seems to disappear completely. At this point Morgan is also inconsistent and oscillates between mentalism and materialism. On the one hand, he says the idea of property resulted in changes in the way the family was defined and organized, and then he points out that the idea of property was a consequence of the development of a particular form of family. For example, he writes that

the growth of the idea of property in the human mind, through its creation and enjoyment, and especially through the settlement of legal rights with respect to its inheritance, are intimately connected with the establishment of this form [monogamous] of the family (Morgan 1877: 389).

Morgan (1871: 492) maintains that the development of private ownership of property and the issue of its transmission to lineal descendants radically transformed the structure of the family and the kinship terminology system. Morgan's formulations, it must be noted, were based upon the assumption that "noncivilized" people lacked

any conceptions of inheritance, which, of course, is simply not true. Morgan summed up his views on these evolutionary developments as follows:

Two forms of the family have now been explained in their origin by two parallel systems of consanguinity. The proofs seem conclusive. It gives the starting point of human society after mankind had emerged from a still lower condition and entered the organism of the consanguine family. From this first form to the second the transition was natural; a development from lower into a higher social condition through observation and experience. It was a result of the improvable mental and moral qualities which belong to the human species. The consanguine and the punaluan families represent the substance of human progress through the greater part of the period of savagery. Although the second was a great improvement upon the first, it was still very distant from the monogamian. An impression may be formed by a comparison of the several forms of the family, or the slow rate of progress in savagery, where the means of advancement were slight, and the obstacles were formidable. Age upon age of substantially stationary life, with advance and decline, undoubtedly marked the course of events but the general movement of society was from a lower to a higher condition, otherwise mankind would have remained in savagery. It is something to find an assured initial point from which mankind started on their great and marvelous career of progress, even though so near the bottom of the scale, and though limited to a form of the family so peculiar as the consanguine (Morgan 1877: 447).

Like his other formulations, this aspect of Morgan's work is fraught with numerous errors. First, there is no concrete ethnographic evidence showing that corporate descent is associated with matrilineal systems as opposed to patrilineal systems (Bloch 1983: 75-76). Second, the postulated correlation between kinship terminology and sociopolitical organization finds no ethnographic confirmation. For example, the Eskimo kinship terminology system is used not only by foraging peoples, but also by Euro-Americans, two groups that would fall on oppo-

site ends of Morgan's evolutionary scale (Bloch 1983: 71). Third, there is no evidence to suggest that matrilineality preceded patrilineality on the grounds that promiscuous marriages prevented the identification of a child's biological father. Fourth, as for the issue of promiscuous marriages, Morgan was working purely from his imagination, rather than on the basis of any kind of empirical evidence. His reasoning was simply that if monogamy represented the most advanced or "civilized" form, then the other end of the scale had to be characterized by promiscuity. Again, there is much imaginative speculation here and very little ethnography.

MORGAN AND MARXISM

Leslie White (1948: 138) lauded Morgan as one of the greatest sociologists of the nineteenth century who devised "the most impressive system of institutional evolution in that century." Whether we are willing to accept White's appraisal or hold an opposite view, it is nevertheless true that Morgan's work and the topics he wrote about generated some of the lasting and significant controversies in sociocultural theory during the twentieth century (see Service 1985). One of these controversies is the relationship between the works of Morgan and Marx.

Morgan's writings, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, had a notable impact upon social theory as a result of the endorsement given to it by Marx and Engels (Service 1985: 4, 24). The latter found Morgan's work appealing because, unlike most of the other anthropologists of the period, Morgan not only provides an evolutionary scheme but also seems to describe the mechanisms for evolutionary transformations in which new forms emerged out of older ones, which they overthrow and replace. This, however, is an illusion because Morgan really has no coherent causal mechanism other than the idea that evolutionary change is immanent.

Morgan's construal of evolutionary change seems similar to Marx's analysis of the rise of capitalism and the internal contradictions that

bring about its demise (Bloch 1983: 8-9). Also, Marx saw in Morgan's idea of gens, which Morgan deems the most ancient form of social existence, proof for his own view on the forms of family and property rights. Morgan's work supported Marx's argument that the monogamous family and private property are features of particular historical stages and are not eternal phenomena inseparable from human nature, as evolutionists such as McLennan and Maine would have it (Bloch 1983: 74).

More important, Marx and Engels believed erroneously that Morgan had independently discovered the materialistic conception of history that Marx had formulated forty years earlier (Bloch 1983: 48). They accordingly modified their own ideas regarding the early history of humankind in view of Morgan's seemingly vast erudition regarding primitive cultures. Marx and Engels were willing to accommodate the most up-to-date scientific developments in relevant fields, anthropology, and Morgan's work were among them (Godelier 1977: 102).

Engels's book, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), is basically an exposition of Morgan's anthropology. It is for this reason that Hallpike (1988: 283) rejects Engel's work as "an entirely obsolete account of social evolution" and Marxist theory in general as irrelevant and "comprehensively refuted by events."

Marx and Engels were wrong in treating Morgan as a fellow materialist. The incorporation of Morgan's formulations into Marxism presented it with an irresolvable conceptual dilemma. If all class societies developed from original classless societies, and if the evolutionary dynamics of Marxist theory is contradiction or struggle between classes, then what propelled classless societies toward classes? What Morgan proposed as the mechanism of evolutionary development, the inherent self-expansion of ideas (Sanderson 1999: 11, 35), is not only unmaterialist, it is decidedly un-Marxist.

What our discussion has shown is that Morgan tied sociocultural evolution to "the germs of

thought" in the human mind, "guided by a natural logic which formed an essential attribute of the brain itself," rather than to environmental, demographic, technological, or economic factors. The development of the human mind, in turn, according to Morgan, was linked to the inheritance of acquired characteristics through "experience," which led to larger brains. Morgan's evolutionism was therefore not Darwinian (contra Opler 1964) but rather of the Lamarckian variety (Service 1985: 49).

Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's (1744–1892) theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics was based upon the assumption that species evolved and changed through time as a result of adjustments to the direct effects of the environment in which they lived and that the characteristics acquired in life by parents could be passed on to the next generation. Engels adopted the Lamarckian perspective as a result of the influence Morgan. It figured prominently in Engels's book, *The Dialectics of Nature* (1876), the source through which Lamarckian ideas and Morgan's evolutionary ideas made their way into the party-linked Marxist ideology and into Soviet agronomy under Trofim D. Lysenko (1898–1976). Lysenko devised a Marxist science of genetic based upon Lamarckian ideas that devastated Soviet agronomy (Futuyma 1982: 162).

In addition to this, until the second quarter of the twentieth century, Morgan's evolutionary scheme served as the standard source of ethnological wisdom for Marxists (Harris 2001: 246). When the anthropologist Leslie White visited the Soviet Union in 1929, he encountered Morgan's evolutionary ideas, which had been fully integrated into Marxist doctrine by Soviet theoreticians (Orlove 1980: 238). White's work, in turn, was instrumental in reincorporating a number of Morgan's ideas back into American cultural anthropology during the twentieth century (see Chapter 10).

The association of Morgan with Marxist doctrine had other ironic consequences with respect to American anthropology. The linkage

with Communist ideology was responsible for a massive assault upon Morgan's evolutionary model. American anthropologists denounced Morgan and his work was rejected. Along with them went the comparative method and all efforts to develop a science of culture based upon the search for generalizations (Harris 2001: 249).

ASSESSMENT

The problems of nineteenth-century evolutionary approaches had several sources. First, schemes such as Morgan's entail a construal of evolution as progress and evolutionary change as immanent, necessary, directional, and teleological, involving the "unfolding of latent potentialities" present from the start of existence (cf. Sanderson 1990: 17). As such, evolution was thought to be rooted entirely in mysterious metaphysical internal dynamics of sociocultural systems. It is evolutionism without material causation, and as such it is incompatible with scientific materialist evolutionary models.

Second, their construal of evolution in terms of "the unfolding of latent potentialities" led to other problems because rather than starting their research by looking for governing principles, they proposed principles as explanations without attempting to verify whether those principles did indeed hold true in the empirical world (Honigmann 1976: 116). In other words, instead of seeking to discover scientific laws governing evolutionary growth, cognitive principles underlying customs, or generalizations about the determining factors of kinship terminologies, writers such as Morgan took these laws as given (Honigmann 1976: 116). Despite lip service to science, much of what passed for evolutionary theory in the nineteenth century was basically an exercise in free reigning imagination, as I noted earlier.

Third, as noted in the previous chapter, nineteenth-century ethnologists were working with extremely low quality, secondhand ethnographic data. Their empirical errors were countless.

Finally, there was the abuse of the comparative method in which postulated stages were filled in by culling bits and pieces of data, a custom from here, an institution from there, an invention from yet somewhere else, which best illustrates the unscientific nature of anthropological theories of the period.

The accumulated errors of nineteenth-century evolutionism, in turn, cast a dark shadow upon scientific research in anthropology,

which became associated with the groundless formulations of evolutionists such as Morgan. The quest for a science of culture came to a halt in the twentieth century thanks to the endeavors of Franz Boas, who made the refutation of evolutionary anthropology and the formulation of any and all types of generalizations about culture one of his primary prerogatives and career objectives, as we shall see in Chapter 6.