

## CLASSICAL EVOLUTIONISM

Cultural evolutionism explains the **genesis & growth of cultural phenomena**. It tried to establish a **Unilinear Pattern of human cultural evolution**. By studying & analyzing cultural evolution, anthropologist during 19<sup>th</sup> century hoped to develop a science of culture that could incorporate universal law of human nature.

Evolution – may be defined as a process in which different forms are produced or developed orderly in a system. It is concerned with the continuous process in a system that brings **complexity in simplicity, heterogeneity in homogeneity & certainty in uncertainty**.

Cultural evolution may be defined as process by which different successive forms in socio-cultural institution or culture of mankind as a whole are developed & accumulated to constitute the growth of culture over different periods of time, but in a continuity.

### BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

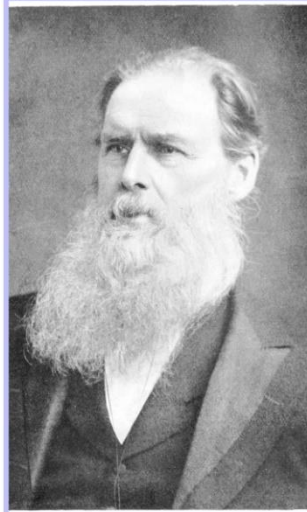
- Unilinear culture Evolution in this evolutionary scheme it is postulated that culture or cultures of world pass through **different successive development stages in unilinear fashion**.
- The direction of evolution is always from **simple to complex, similarity to dissimilarity and indefinite to definite**.
- It postulates that genuine cultural parallels a **cultural similarity developed independently in all culture in historical sequences**.
- For culture parallels it has been assumed that it is due to man's ability to invent new things & ideas as well as **'Psychic Unity of mankind'**. Psyche unity of mankind refers to similar mental state of human beings that read similarly in a like environmental situation at particular period. of times. According to Evolutionist it was due to psychic Unity of Mankind that human beings of different parts of world passed though similar stages of savagery, barbarism and civilization.

### SALIENT FEATURES OF CLASSICAL EVOLUTIONISM

- Human culture as a whole or socio-cultural institution evolves in **a unilinear manner stage after stage**.
- The direction of cultural evolution is from **simple to complex, homogeneity to heterogeneity and from indefinite to definite**.
- Different stages of cultural development were **based on historical explanation (museumology & Comparative method)**.
- Similarities in cultural traits or complexes were due **to parallel inventions & psychic unity of mankind**.
- **Survivals**, in both material & non-material aspect of culture simian proof of earlier condition. Survival are processes, customs & opinions that persist by force of habit, even when they lose their utility.

### E B TYLOR:

Tylor maintained that culture evolved from the simple to the complex and that all societies passed stages



**Edward B. Tylor**, a Quaker scholar, wrote **Primitive Culture** (1871). "Tylor set out a program for a "reformer's science," based on the conceptual divorce of a people's biological or racial features from their learned or behavioral features. He called these latter aspects "culture, or civilization" and the science he called 'anthropology'."-- Jonathan Marks, anthropologist, author

of development from savagery through barbarism to civilization. Progress was therefore possible for all. To account for variation Tylor & other evolutionists postulated that different contemporary societies were at different stages of evolution. According to this view, the "simpler" peoples of the day had not yet reached "higher" stages. Thus, simpler contemporary societies were thought to resemble ancient societies. The more advanced societies on the other hand, testified to cultural evolution by exhibiting what Tylor called **Survivals – traces of customs that survive in present day cultures due to force of habit despite losing their utility.**

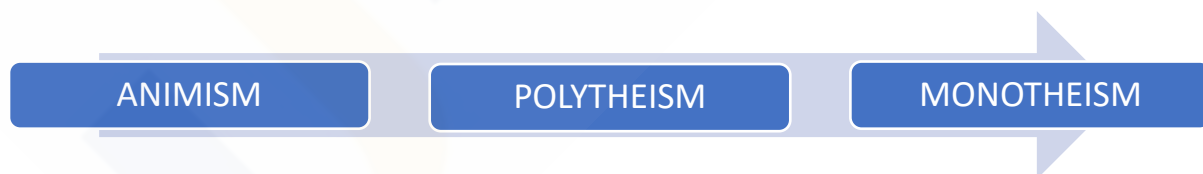
Tylor believed there was a kind of psychic unity among all peoples that explained parallel evolutionary sequences in

different cultural traditions. In other words, because of the **basic similarities common to all peoples, different societies often find same solution to same problem independently.**

### EVOLUTION OF RELIGION BY E B TYLOR

In his **book "Primitive culture"**, Tylor defined religious belief in spiritual beings. He stated that religion was a cultural universal, because no known cultures were without such beliefs. **According to him, religion originated as belief in soul, which is known as animism.**

As **souls were numerous**, who were worshipped on different occasions in the form of ancestral worship, this created belief in **polytheism**, which following the process of cultural evolution, reached at a stage of **monotheism**, the great belief of civilized people. Thus, the evolution of religion has passed through the **development processes of animism, polytheism & monotheism.**



In Tylor's view, religion originated in people's speculation about dreams, trances & death. Tylor thought that the life like appearances of imagined persons & animals suggests a dual existence for all things- a physical visible body & a psychic, invisible soul. Because the dead appear in dreams people come to believe that the souls of the dead are still around.

### Psychic Unity of Mankind:

The psychic unity of humankind (or mankind) enters the anthropological lexicon in the work of **Adolf Bastian** (1826–1905). Popularized by Edward Burnett Tylor (1832– 1917), this latter argument firmly linked the psychic unity of humankind to progressivist and evolutionary theories in anthropology. It claims that human being think similarly and will come up with same solution for same problem.

Tylor and Morgan by using this concept claimed that since every human thinks similarly, every human culture will have same stages of development i.e. Savagery Barbarism and Civilization.

### LEWIS HENRY MORGAN

Tylor & Morgan postulated that mankind as a whole has passed through the stages of savagery, barbarism & civilization. But Morgan sub-divided the stages of savagery, & barbarism each into three groups, namely lower, middle & upper.



For Morgan the terms “savagery,” “barbarism,” and “civilization” represented well-defined stages of progress measured by four sets of cultural achievements: **(1) inventions and discoveries, (2) the idea of government, (3) the organization of the family, and (4) the concept of property**. The lines of progress were clearest in the field of inventions and discoveries because certain inventions necessarily preceded others (fire before pottery, hunting before pastoralism). Therefore, Morgan chose technological developments as the primary but not sole “test of progress” marking the different stages of

cultural evolution.

He was of opinion that **lower savagery** began with gathering of fruits & nuts as subsistence. This stage ended with development of fishing subsistence & use of fire.

In the **middle savagery**, fishing subsistence & use of fire continued, but ended with invention of low & arrow. During this period, mankind expanded to cover the greater part of earth’s surface. He placed Australians & Polynesians the time of first contact with European.

**Upper status of savagery**, invention of low & arrow continued, but ended with the invention of pottery.

**Lower status of barbarism** witnessed continuation of pottery inventions, either by original or by adoption & ended with invention of animal domestication in eastern hemisphere.

**Middle status of barbarism** witnessed animal domestic in old world & use of plant cultivation, adobe brick & stone in New world and invention of iron ore smelting in both worlds.

**In upper status of barbarism**, something of iron continued & end with the invention of phonetic alphabet & use of written literature.

The **stage of civilization** began with phonetic alphabet & literary writing. Morgan's classification of stages of development of human kind in terms of ethnic period such as savagery, barbarism & civilization are what anthropologists generally call hunting & food gathering societies, horticultural tribal & pre or proto state societies.

Morgan argued that the "successive arts of subsistence" were the foundation on which "human supremacy on the earth depended," suggesting that "the great epochs of human progress have been identified, more or less directly, with the enlargement of the sources of subsistence".

Lewis Henry Morgan's Scheme for Evolution in Ancient Society					
<i>ETHNICAL PERIODS</i>	<i>ARTS OF SUBSISTENCE</i>	<i>THE FAMILY</i>	<i>SYSTEMS OF CONSANGUINITY &amp; AFFINITY</i>	<i>GOVERNMENT</i>	
LOWER SAVAGERY	FRUITS AND NUTS, LIVING IN GROVES, CAVES	CONSANGUINE FAMILY	CLASSIFICATORY MALYAN	CONSANGUINE HORDE	
MIDDLE SAVAGERY	FISH SUBSISTENCE, USE OF FIRE	PUNALUAN FAMILY	CLASSIFICATORY TURANIAN AND GANOWANIAN	GENTE OR GENS	
UPPER SAVAGERY	INVENTION OF BOW AND ARROW			CLAN	
LOWER BARBARISM	POTTERY	SYNDASMIAN FAMILY			TRIBE
MIDDLE BARBARISM	DOMESTICATION OF ANIMALS				
UPPER BARBARISM	SMELTING OF IRON ORE				
CIVILIZATION	INVENTION OF PHONETIC ALPHABET, PRODUCTION OF WRITTEN RECORDS	PATRIARCHAL FAMILY  MONOGAMOUS FAMILY	DESCRIPTIVE (ARYAN, SEMITIC, URALIAN)	NATION/STATE	

## SCHEME OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION

### EVOLUTION OF FAMILY AND SOCIETIES BY MORGAN

According to Morgan the institution of family has passed through fifteen stages of development. Among them **five main stages** are as follows:

- **CONSANGUINE FAMILY:** This was the early stage of family when there was sexual promiscuity and marriage between blood relation was not forbidden.
- **PUNALUAN FAMILY:** This was the second stage of family when group marriage was prevalent and all brothers of a group marry all sisters of another group.
- **SYNDASMIAN FAMILY:** In this stage one man married one woman, but he was also free to establish sex relations with other woman married in the family.
- **PATRIARCHAL FAMILY:** In this stage man's ascendancy and dominance in the family had fully achieved. He could marry many women and had sex relations with them.
- **MONOGAMOUS FAMILY:** This is the present stage of family in which one man can marry one woman and vice versa.

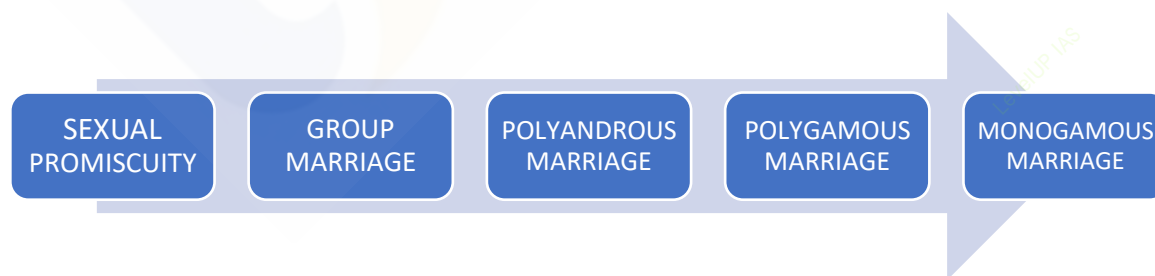
### EVOLUTION OF DESCENT GROUP BY MORGAN

Just as different types of families occur in different societies so do different kinds of descent systems. **Descent groups, for example, do not appear at all in simple hunting & gathering societies** where marriage acts as the social mechanism for integrating individuals within the society.

Morgan and other evolutionist believed that descent group progressed in an evolutionary manner from **promiscuity to matrilineal to patrilineal**. In so called promiscuous societies, paternity was never certain & descent could be traced only through mother, hence emergence of matrilineal group. The accumulation of wealth in the form of land & other valuable material possessions was responsible for the rise of the patrilineal system, for wealth resided with males. A means of passing wealth from male to male down the generations was required. Finally, civilization with its complex patterns of individuality, specialization of labor & greater mobility brought with the consideration of both paternal & maternal descent rules. This combination resulted in the bilineal or bilateral kinship system of modern western civilization.

### EVOLUTION OF MARRIAGE BY MORGAN

Institution of marriage has passed through sexual promiscuity, group marriage, polyandrous marriage, polygamous marriage and monogamous marriage.





### KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

Morgan argued that all kinship systems could be divided into two large groups—descriptive systems and classificatory systems.

Morgan was of opinion that kinship terminology in early stage was **classificatory from which present descriptive form** came into existence. In classificatory kinship terminology the same term is used to designate more than one individual. Thus, in it various kins are classified in one category and all are referred to by same term.

The difference between classificatory and descriptive kinship systems marks the distinction between uncivilized and civilized.

With the “rise of property, . . . the settlement of its rights, and above all, with the established certainty of its transmission to lineal descendants,” descriptive kin systems evolve, and the nuclear family eventually develops. The family “became organized and individualized by property rights and privileges” (Morgan 1871:492). Social structure and economy are thus linked.

### Evolution of Socio-Political Organization:

Morgan’s discussion of “Growth of the Idea of Government” comprises 60 percent of Ancient Society. By “government,” Morgan referred to what modern anthropologists call social organization and political organization. Morgan explicitly distinguished social order based on kin ties (**societas**) from social order based on political ties (**civitas**).

The first and most ancient was social organization, founded upon **gentes, clans and tribes**. The second and latest in time was a political organization founded upon territory and upon property. Under the first a gentile society was created, in which the government dealt with persons through their relation to a gens and tribe. These **relations were purely personal**.

Under the second a political society was created, in which the government dealt with persons through their relations to territory, e.g. the township, the county, and the state. These **relations were purely territorial**.

Thus, Morgan argued that government evolved from promiscuous horde to brother-sister group families, from group families to gens, and then progressively through stages of clans, tribe, and nation

## JAMES FRAZER

### VIEW ON TOTEM

According to Frazer, a totem is a class of material objects, which a savage regards superstition with respect, believing that there exists between him & every member of clan an intimate relation.



In his book **“Totemism & Exogamy”** – Frazer gave a theory of soul for the origin of totem. He opined that **totem originated as belief in soul**. Savages believed that souls of human being after death, resided in plant, tree, animals, birds etc. The plant, tree, animal or birds, which was possessed by the soul of dead persons, the savages began to pay respect towards them. Eating & killing of those objects were strictly tabooed. In this way Totemism came into being.

He cited example from **Arunta tribe of Australia**, in whose belief systems, totems were regarded as responsible for causing pregnancy among women. Thus, **Totemism came into being from female side rather than male side**. When in course of time, totems had become hereditary, exogamy developed as a means for preventing inbreeding.

### VIEW ON MAGIC, RELIGION AND SCIENCE

In his book **“Golden bough”**, Frazer explained that early men knew nothing of science. In this way, they possessed completely wrong idea of natural causes. **He lived primarily with belief in magic. Two erroneous principle of magic were**

- *law of similarity*
- *law of contact*

The first law presumes like produces like. In this magicians were, thus, convinced that they could control the nature by imitating it. Thus, if rain was needed, water was poured out.

The second principle presumes that once in contact always in contact. Thus, one could get hold of one's hair or nail, or clippings or clothes, he had worn, and burn or otherwise mutilate such items in the conviction that the same would happen to their former owner.



But when human mind progressed, people began to realize that they were fairly helpless, that their laws did not always work, & that they could not control nature by their own effort. The conviction then arose that higher, supernatural powers governed universe. **With these insights, religion was born**. Magicians became religious specialists and their supposed ability to contact and persuade supernatural spirits to act on their behalf gave them prestige and authority over people.

**Scientific stage was highest development of human mind**. Science was closely related to magic in as far as man once began to manipulate nature by his own skills, but now he was equipped with correct laws. Frazer calls **magic as 'bastard sister' of science or pseudo-science**

## CRITICISM OF CLASSICAL EVOLUTIONISM

The Evolutionists have accepted that origin of similar cultural traits was due to similar cause. This assumption of evolutionist is subject to criticism because human history is a witness that **different cultures have originated in same geographical environment.**



The evolutionists mostly tried to show independent evolution of culture stage after stage or period after period in a sequence. Thus their explanation was one sided ignoring other forces like diffusion that could have brought the change.

**All societies have not passed through all the 3 stages:** The claim that mankind of world has passed through different stages or period of cultural development in a sequence, doesn't stand true for all the

cultural groups.

### Empirically Flawed: Armchair Anthropology

A primary critique of Cultural Evolutionism is what contemporary anthropologists call **Armchair Anthropology**. Used largely by Edward Tylor, armchair anthropology was when an anthropologist worked with studies and data collected by others like missionaries, explorers, and colonial officials. In other words, these researchers did not collect their own information. The label essentially comes from the idea that these anthropologists did not have to leave their armchairs to do their research.

Accordingly, Harvard Professor of Anthropology James Ferguson calls the theory "**empirically flawed,**" meaning that there isn't enough evidence and experience to back it up. Armchair anthropologists based everything off of other peoples' (possibly biased) descriptions of the culture and did not observe first hand. This form of anthropology focused on theory over practice and therefore did not value the intimate details of societies, which is fallacious when trying to write about them. For Morgan the question of how societies developed from one evolutionary level to the next was nothing if not theoretical. His typology of developmental stages aimed at nothing less than the explanation of both human history and diversity. The distinction between "primitive" and "modern" societies was a theoretically argued one, rather than practical. Armchair anthropology leads to ethnocentrism, judging another's culture using one's own cultural standards.

Evolutionists are also criticized for **adopting weak method of study**. They were all arm-chair anthropologists, who never visited the field for actual observation of the phenomena. They relied on the data gathered by travelers and missionaries and never showed interest in testing the reliability of data before arriving at a conclusion.



## Ethnocentrism

Many anthropologists have argued that the cultural evolution theory is ethnocentric, stating that all cultures have a capacity to be on the same level as the Western civilization, Post-Enlightenment and Modernist era. Ethnocentrism says that other cultures are primitive, not yet at the level of western societies. Further, the theory holds Christianity as the ideal religion for humanity, although a science-based society is best. Morgan's line of evolution advances towards all civilized cultures practicing the christian belief system, and then unto the ideal scientific and secular state. To put this in a simpler context, Morgan might say that a Jew in today's world is uncivilized, and that Christians have not achieved their full cultural potential.

One critic, James Ferguson, asks from whose point of view can one society be seen as higher than another. This ties into the idea that **Cultural Evolution further allowed for cultural hegemony** of the West over the rest, in the forms of colonization and ongoing imperialism. It is still applicable today, in our globalized societies, where the West holds priority and influence over the rest of the world, particularly the third world. There continues to be turmoil across the globe between cultures arguing which religion and what societal trends are the best to follow. The West often sets these standards and further looks down upon those cultures who have yet to discover the trends that they are best run upon ie: democracy and morality.<sup>32</sup> We can't blame these ethnocentric theorists for the discourse they inherited from their forefathers, though it is important to recognize the elitist, western-superiority attitude. These concepts helped set up a system that continues to breed these attitudes for future Americans both scholarly and generally.

They are also **labelled as ethnocentric or racist** for using the terms Savage for the simpler societies. Moreover, they regarded the culture of Western Society as most evolved and progressive in nature.

## Broad Comparison

Another critique is that there are too many broad generalizations. Cultural Evolution does not compare enough specific traits of a culture and leaves too much out of the analysis that is used to classify cultures as either barbaric, savage, or civilized. A good analysis of a culture relies on using the minor details and particularities, what is unique to the specific culture, as well as the more generalized, universal and comparative ones. The comparisons that the basic ideas of Cultural Evolution deal with are very basic and broad, oversimplifying too many aspects of a particular culture.

Some of the criteria used by Morgan included material possessions and the creating of art such as pottery. A major flaw with this requirement lies in the example that it put the Polynesians in a progress trap in upper savagery because they never made pottery. However, in sociopolitical terms, Polynesia was a very advanced and complex society that included the ancient Hawaiian state.<sup>39</sup> Another broad basis of categorizing cultures was through their religion: if their culture doesn't change to include a new religion (or, best, the supremacy of science post the Enlightenment era), it doesn't matter what else they do or accomplish, they are still in the same evolutionary stage. For example, if they believe in ghost, which is incorporated in animism beliefs, they would still be in the savagery state.

Evolutionists also **ignored various other forces like diffusion or migration** that would have led to similarities in various cultural traits.

On one hand, Cultural Evolution was a vision of human unity. On the other, it was a device of differentiating and ranking contemporary societies according to their level of evolutionary development. Because of this, in spite of the best laid plans of the Supreme Intelligence, "other tribes and nations have been left behind in the race of progress." To Tylor, development was the active principle according to which, new and higher stages of human society might emerge out of order and simpler societies. He believed development was the driving motive force that unites all human history. By saying this, Tylor facilitates the persistent contrast between civilized and primitive that also plays a key role in the colonialism ideology

The evolutionism of Tylor, Morgan & Frazer is largely rejected today. For one thing their theories cannot satisfactorily account for cultural variation. The psychic unity of mankind that were postulated for parallel evolution cannot account for cultural differences. Another weakness in early evolutionist theories is that they cannot explain why some societies have regressed or become extinct. And finally, although other societies may have progressed to "civilization", some of them have not passed through all the stages. Thus, early evolutionist theory cannot explain the details of cultural evolution & variation as anthropology now knows them.

Nonwestern cultures were no longer to be understood as "living fossils" trapped in evolutionary stages through which the West itself had already passed. Different societies are really different, not just the same society at a different stage of development. Different primitive societies must not be placed on a ladder and ranked against each other; all are equally valid, forming whole culture patterns or functioning systems worth studying in their own right."