

The renowned Dutch historian Pieter Geyl describes history as 'an argument without end'. Evaluation of the interpretations of the causes of the Dutch Revolt can be seen to support his view! It is an area which is subject to many differing interpretations and your task is to evaluate them.

Tasks

1. Sort the extracts in order of validity in explaining the causes of the Dutch Revolt. You need to decide which interpretations make the strongest case by using **your own knowledge** of events to evaluate the evidential support for each view. You will need to justify your decisions to the rest of your class.
2. Next, use the extracts to complete a Venn diagram. Include short quotations from the extracts. There are three different categories - Political, Economic or Religious. An example from John Motley has been done for you:

From a letter sent by Philip II to Pope Pius V, August 1566. Philip explains his determination to maintain the Catholic faith of the Netherlands.

A I intend to settle the religious problem in these states without taking up arms, for I know clearly that to do so would result in their complete destruction. But should everything be impossible to settle as I desire without taking up arms, then I am determined to take them up and go there myself to carry it out. Neither personal danger nor the ruin of these my states, nor of all the other states which have been left to me, will stop me doing what a Christian prince ought to do in the service of God, the preservation of the Holy Catholic faith, and the honour of the Papacy.

From Geoffrey Woodward, *Philip II*, published in 1992. This historian places responsibility on Philip for causing the Revolt of the Netherlands.

B On leaving the Netherlands in 1559, Philip was aware of its unstable condition and he promised to treat it favourably and return as soon as possible. That he never came back and proceeded to implement unpopular policies goes a long way to explaining why, within ten years, he was facing the most serious rebellion of his reign. He knew all too well that the Netherlanders had experienced immense financial hardship in the 1550s and were in urgent need of peace. The end of the Habsburg-Valois hostilities in 1559, and the growing attacks by the Turks in North Africa, shifted Philip's priorities to the Mediterranean; for the next twenty years, no matter what happened in the Netherlands, he would always keep one eye firmly focussed on the Turks. If this emphasis was quite intelligible to all Spaniards, the Netherlanders saw it as a neglect of duty, and historians have subsequently argued that it was a serious political miscalculation. Certainly, the Dutch determination to resist Spanish rule and to preserve their religious and civil liberties, allied to their skilful deployment of naval and land tactics, frustrated successive Spanish generals. Yet the responsibility for causing the revolt and for failing to suppress it lay with the King.

From Andrew Pettegree, 'Religion and the Revolt', an essay published in 2001. This historian refers to foreign influences and suggests that the Dutch nobility tried to turn religious divisions to their own political advantage, unleashing popular revolt in 1566.

C

Ironically, Netherlandish Calvinism in the 1560s was largely a creation of the ruthless repression of Charles V's later years, but it was no more than a shadow of its French counterpart. The French Religious Wars had a profound impact in the Netherlands, giving the Dutch nobility an example of how political crisis could be turned to their own advantage. Consumed with their own exclusion from power, and anxious to show the absent Philip II their indispensability, they began to associate themselves with calls for a relaxation of the laws against heresy. Emboldened by open revolt in France, Dutch Calvinist communities were increasingly willing to resort to attacks on Catholic images. To the nobility, iconoclasm was a powerful signal that the forces they had unleashed posed a real threat to the established political order.

From Geoffrey Parker 'What if Philip II had gone to the Netherlands?', an article published in *History Today* in 2004. This historian blames Philip's absence and Alva's misguided policies for the outbreak of a second revolt in the Netherlands in 1572.

D

Philip wrote to Alva instructing him to delay his plan to round up all those identified for punishment before the King's arrival. He told him that a delay might lead William of Orange to feel secure and want to return to the Netherlands, and then Alva would be able to deal with him as he deserved. But Philip said 'If you punish the others first it will make it impossible to deal with William forever'. Orange and other rebels who had fled as Alva approached were unlikely to have dared resist a direct summons from Philip in person to return to the Netherlands. Arresting or discrediting Orange would have removed the only opposition leader facing Philip II. Without the costs of defeating the 1568 invasion, Alva would not have needed to raise new taxes and King's presence would have compelled the States-General to grant financial support. It was rare for a revolt to break out again after the personal intervention of a monarch. The second Netherlands revolt of 1572 was largely provoked by the misguided policies followed by the Duke of Alva. Philip's decision, in August 1567, not to travel to the Netherlands, forfeited his best chance of restoring order there and thus preserving Spain's status as a Great Power.

From J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716*, published in 1963. This historian argues that Philip saw the war in the Netherlands as a religious crusade.

E It was finally decided that the war in the Netherlands was best treated as a war against rebellious subjects; but, in practice, both Philip and his soldiers looked upon it as a religious crusade undertaken by a 'Catholic army' against a people whom Philip himself persistently described as 'rebels and heretics'. For Philip, heresy and rebellion were the same things, and not without reason. Everywhere he looked Calvinists were subverting the established order. Calvinist preachers were stirring up the populace; Calvinist literature was poisoning men's minds. In the Netherlands as in France, the forces of international Protestantism were on the march.

From Peter Limm, *The Dutch Revolt 1559-1648*, published in 1989. This historian sees 'Castilianisation' as a cause of the revolt of the Netherlands.

F Philip continued his father's policy of persecuting heresy and many Calvinists fled abroad to England, France or Germany. In his approach to government, however, Philip was far less inclined than his father to compromise with the traditional ruling groups in the Netherlands. He never made any attempt to speak Dutch or French and he maintained a Spanish haughtiness, which offended the local nobility. They were particularly annoyed by the way that he did not involve them in the business of the government of the States but instead relied on a small corps of trusted Spanish officials. He also tried to dominate the States-General with paying much heed to the privileges and interests of the institution and of the deputies in it. It was as if Philip wanted to make the Netherlands part of Spain.

From Patrick Williams, *Philip II*, published in 2001. This historian argues that Philip was forced to take determined action in 1567 as his previous concessions had endangered his inheritance in the Netherlands.

G Rebellion was an insult to the King's majesty. Philip had been forced to retreat on a number of key issues in the years since 1561, such as the recall of Spanish troops, the dismissal of Granvelle and the moderation of his religious policy. He had now been driven to the point where he would retreat no more. The Netherlands were part of the inheritance to which his father had committed him. He was immovably determined to preserve what remained of it. Philip's policy towards the Netherlands sprang from his obligations as King of Spain; but equally he had a duty to the Netherlands. Philip could not allow this key part of his inheritance to be at risk. To do so would be to betray his very heritage.

From John Motley, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, published in 1856. This historian argues that the Spanish Inquisition was the principal cause of the Dutch Revolt.

H The great cause of the revolt which, within a few years, was to break forth throughout the Netherlands, was the Inquisition. It is almost puerile to look further or deeper, when such a source of convulsion lies at the very outset of an investigation. During the war against France in 1556-9 there had been an occasional pause in the religious persecution. Philip had now returned to Spain, having arranged, with great precision, a comprehensive scheme for exterminating that religious belief which was already accepted by a very large portion of his Netherlands subjects. From afar there rose upon the provinces the prophetic vision of a coming evil still more terrible than any which had yet oppressed them... the shadow of the inquisition was cast from afar ... a spectre menacing fiercer flames and wider desolation than those of which mere physical agencies could ever achieve.

From Graham Darby, 'The Dutch Revolt', an article published in *History Today* in 2002. This historian suggests that both Philip and the Dutch rebels bore responsibility for the outbreak of revolt in the Netherlands.

I The revolt was a struggle for freedom and religion. But freedom did not necessarily mean freedom from Spanish oppression rather it meant that the King of Spain had to respect the local rights and privileges of the towns and provinces. As he was not prepared to do this he was overthrown. Religion too did not mean the replacement of Catholicism by Calvinism but rather a moderate settlement that allowed for freedom of conscience. Who was responsible for the outbreak of the revolt? Was it Philip who rode roughshod over local liberties and privileges, and insisted on Catholic conformity? Or was it the Netherlanders who placed their liberties and privileges and a compromise religious settlement above their allegiance to their ruler?

