

alism. There are many other instances, but each might be seen to represent different types of national identity/nationalism/nation-state building.

There is, however, a different level to this question. What Breuilly states is contentious to a certain degree. There were national movements before nation-states; there was national identity before the modern (usually seen as post-1789) era. The question thus tries to elicit a measured approach to the topic, whereby you atomise it and reconstruct it again with the particular question in mind. However, this time it is asking you to discuss an historian's perspective which inevitably leads you to alternative perspectives (including your own). This question asks you to be an arbiter much more than the other, although all questions require some degree of judiciousness. The second question also demands that you evaluate differing historiographical emphases on nationalism. On top of that, as with the first question on migration, you also need to show some knowledge of the theories of nationalism, of which there are many. Fortunately, any good course teaching an element on nationalism will cover these theoretical issues.

The secret with essays is to answer the question and to show understanding (analysis) as well as knowledge (facts). You also need to show good construction – introduction, main points and conclusion.

⇒ 7.4 STATEMENT AND EVIDENCE

You now have an idea about how to tackle the essay question. The best way to improve your skills is to look at old essay questions and try your hand at planning them. Remember, you do not need to know anything about a topic to begin with the mechanical task of breaking the question down into key words/phrases. What you now need, as you prepare to write, is confidence that your essay will be balanced and well written. You also need to be able to balance statement and evidence: to show you appreciate the importance of each and their necessarily linked relationship.

You have to make sure that the essay marker feels that you have (i) made the right case; (ii) made a strong case; or, preferably, (iii) both. For this purpose, one of the key features of a good essay is the balance between statement and evidence. Let us consider what is meant by these two terms. Here is a simple historical statement:

Hitler's childhood was marked by impoverishment.

This statement is weak, both because it has no supporting evidence and because it is wrong! Hitler himself chose to portray his early life as hard and unyielding because it suited his self-justificatory purpose. It is not unreasonable, however, that a student reading Hitler's autobiographical *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*) would believe Hitler's own claim to poverty and privation. Not only does this incorrect statement challenge our historical judgement, it also asks 'have you read enough sources?' If we have only Hitler's view, then the answer is no. However, if we add Alan Bullock's *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (1952) to our reading, contrary evidence becomes apparent. Thus a rewritten statement, supported by evidence, might look like this:

Hitler stated in *Mein Kampf* that his childhood was one of poverty and hardship. (statement) However, as Bullock argues, his father had a comfortable pension and Hitler benefited from a good education, at both primary and secondary level. (evidence) His schooling included a period at a commercial and technical school in Linz. (further evidence) Even after his father died, Hitler's mother had a pension to keep the family in a measure of comfort. Thus, Hitler's education was to continue until he was sixteen. (further evidence)

In history, the presentation of other writers' work is part of the procedural norm, for it is impossible for you always to quote primary material. For English, however, the primary texts – for example, the plays and poems of Shakespeare – are readily available. Unless we go to Linz in Austria to check the school records of Hitler, we cannot do other than rely on historians. The answer, then, is to use a number of historians to see if they differ in interpretation of evidence. These historians, moreover, must be ones who have made a notable contribution to the particular field you are scrutinising: in other words, steer clear of using only very general texts.

For the above passage on Hitler's early life, we know that, because Bullock's line flies in the face of Hitler's own myth-making, that Bullock is likely to be right. In addition, our knowledge of history tells us that anyone still in education at the age of sixteen in 1906 was significantly removed from the lower orders of society. Yet, because different criteria apply to history at different times, education to the age of sixteen is wholly unremarkable today.

Essays, of course, tend to be constructed of more complex material than a few sentences on an historical character's life. As your studies progress, you will see that questions are more contentious in that there

is no right or wrong answer and that historians have debated the topics you must address. In these instances, your writing will need to balance counter-arguments; to plot a course through often turbulent waters. The key point, however, is that you need evidence to support your statements. Consider this statement:

In the eighteenth century, social theorists were concerned about population growth.

This phrase is true enough, but, without evidence, it is meaningless. Of course they *were* concerned about population; but in what ways? This statement needs further discussion and also evidence to show what is meant. Thus:

In the eighteenth century, social theorists were concerned about population growth. (statement) However, while earlier writers were concerned that population was not growing quickly enough, later observers expressed the opposite opinion. (qualifying statement) In 1748 Montesquieu wrote, in his *Esprit des Lois*, that 'Europe is still today in need of laws which favour the propagation of the human race', (evidence) whereas in 1798, Thomas Malthus published his *Essay on the Principle of Population* which made bleak forecasts of the impact upon precious natural resources of a growing population, much of which, he claimed, was redundant. (evidence)

Here is another, more complex paragraph. Again, notice the balance of statements and evidence; notice also the fact that a paragraph can contain more than one statement:

Irish immigration, in the generation around the Famine years, has to be seen as part of the wider social problems which Carlyle dubbed the 'Condition of England' question. (statement) A host of contemporary literature addressed this question; while many textbooks on the period habitually dwell on passages from Disraeli's *Sybil*, for its portrayal of unionisation and Chartism, or Dickens's *Hard Times*, for its witty yet disturbing portrayals of political economy and the bleak industrial landscape of Coketown. (evidence) In the context of these social problems, and in the literature about them, perhaps no place features as visibly as does Manchester, the cotton metropolis which contemporaries saw as the very symbol of their changing world. Many social reformers took the horrors of Manchester life as their theme. (statements) These included Dr J. P. Kay-Shuttleworth, whose *Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (1832) is a classic of the social-comment

genre. (evidence) Kay-Shuttleworth was followed by a host of like-minded investigators, not least Friedrich Engels, whose *Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1845) contains one of the most biting assessments of Irish migration. (further evidence) Although Kay and Engels are known to all those with an interest in Irish settlement, their works must be seen as part of a growing body of Victorians – government officials, professionals, journalists and local amateurs – who exercised similarly troubled consciences. (statement which leads to next paragraph)

See the way that an idea develops in this paragraph? It starts with a statement about the 'Irish problem' of the 1830s and 1840s being part of a set of wider issues; it goes on to look at those issues; singles out a classic example (Manchester); and ties the Irish in again, near the end. Finally, a hint as to the content of the next paragraph is given by the final statement. The next paragraph must now be about some other aspect of the growing tradition of Victorian social commentary.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS

The essence of writing a history essay is in organisation, analysis and argument. The essay demands that you understand the question, that you answer it (and not some other question you would prefer), and that your statements are supported by evidence. The essay also requires you to prepare meticulously; to know what you will write and in which order. You must present your plan in the introduction; you must work methodically through the evidence; and you must conclude crisply and with an answer. Try to see yourself as a lawyer arguing a case. It is no coincidence that history graduates often go on to study law! In many ways law and history require the same approach. You have conflicting evidence to marshal, and you have to balance the claims for historical truth of different historians. You are an arbitrator between competing views of the past. As a result, your first aim has to be an understanding of what those views might be. Essays thus demand reading. At undergraduate level, a bibliography of five or six books/articles is the minimum requirement. Your bibliography must comprise only those items you have actually used to write the essay. Do not pad out the references.

Practise the things we have outlined here, for they are relevant to every piece of written work you will submit. Basic writing skills also have a utility beyond history, for prospective employers will