



The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution

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Within the English revolution of the mid-17th century which resulted in the triumph of the protestant ethic--the ideology of the propertied class--there threatened another, quite different, revolution. Its success "might have established communal property, a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic."

In *The World Turned Upside Down*, Christopher Hill studies the beliefs of such radical groups as the Diggers, the Ranters, the Levellers and others, and the social and emotional impulses that gave rise to them.

The relations between rich and poor classes, the part played by wandering 'masterless men,' the outbursts of sexual freedom and deliberate blasphemy, the great imaginative creations of Milton and Bunyan - these and many other elements build up into a marvellously detailed and coherent portrait of this strange, sudden effusion of revolutionary beliefs. It is a portrait not of the bourgeois revolution that actually took place, but of the impulse towards a far more fundamental overturning of society.

"Incorporates some of Dr. Hill's most profound statements yet about the 17th-century revolution as a whole."
-- The Economist

The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution Details

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sean says

Best history book I've read in a while. I love the fact that the radical protestants were so radical that, in fact, many of them were more or less not even theists but actually atheists. Best discovery of this book: Gerrard Winstanley, who is my new favorite writer from this period.

My only complaint; Hill seemed a little too sympathetic to the more wild-eyed sects. I bought it when he said that some of the crazier things attributed to them by their enemies were just propaganda against them, because it makes sense and he also gave some proof. I found it much hinkier that he said that we should disregard some of the crazier things they said about themselves as simply not to be taken literally, or as having been said for shock value. It might be true, but he simply said it as a hand-wave and never made any attempt to prove it. Minor point, though, in an otherwise extremely interesting book.

Charlie says

Christopher Hill has written a stunning intellectual history of radical thinkers during the unruly decades of the English Civil Wars (roughly 1640-1660). Censorship of printed material was strict for most of British history until the 19th century, but from 1641-1660, censorship was lifted. When the restraining dam burst, a flood of eccentric, radical, blasphemous, and sometimes brilliant literature washed over Britain. Christopher Hill has mastered this literature and brought it into some order for the appreciation, entertainment, and even awe of the reader.

This book focuses on the left wing of the left wing, those revolutionaries whom the more mainstream revolutionaries marginalized and even suppressed. Religious ideas from heterodoxy to pantheism to atheism are found. Economic ideas approaching national communism or local communitarianism were broached. Entirely new critiques of existing government and proposals of novel governmental systems were advanced. The material is a glorious mess. However, running through almost all the radical critiques are a thorough-going democratic impulse and a reliance on individual conscience, which therefore required individual liberty of conscience.

This book is a window onto many fascinating characters. One is Gerrard Winstanley, a proponent of the Diggers, a short-lived association of people who confiscated common lands for agricultural purposes in protest against the agricultural policies of the government. Winstanley leveled (a pun) criticisms of the economic order of landed gentry, but his positive proposal is even more interesting. He is one of the first to have grasped that a long-term solution to England's economic crises was to increase the area of arable land. Much like Marx, Winstanley believed that in an egalitarian society, most of the law and government would wither away. After all, isn't law just the landed class's way of perpetuating their privilege? He was a pantheist and materialist; his anti-clericalism was fueled by his (mostly correct) belief that the clergy were a professional class in a symbiotic relationship with an oppressive government. The professional classes most go: scientific, theological, and legal instruction should be available to all in a system of universal education, so that specialists will not be needed. Winstanley was a monopoly buster. And a failure.

Other fascinating characters pepper the pages. Thomas Nayler was a revolutionary Quaker who entered

London riding on a donkey; his rejection and brutal flogging pushed the Quakers to try pacifism instead of revolution. Alchemists and prophets lurk behind every corner and sometimes sit openly in the parlor. John Warr proposed an almost Hegelian dialectic between Equity and Form that explained the historical development and justified the aims of the radical revolutionaries.

Hill's scholarship is thorough; a truly impressive congregation of primary source material takes center stage. He is also generous in giving praise to contemporary scholars whose work he finds useful. Hill is a daring writer with a penchant for synthesis. He makes many interpretive claims that have garnered criticism and likely will continue to do so. But he advances them with courage and with evidence. If he has sometimes been tackled short of the goal line, he has never failed to move the ball downfield.

I found this book absolutely electrifying. I even made several notes of aspects I would like to imitate in my own scholarly work. I recommend it to anyone interested in modern intellectual history.

Jan-Maat says

[or interregnum, or Great Rebellion, as you may call it if you believe that Charles Stuart - that man of blood - is a holy blissful martyr of the Anglican (view spoiler)

Warwick says

A question on the r/askhistorians subreddit the other day expressed confusion over Milton's *Paradise Lost*: how was it that such an established canonical writer was able to compose such a subversive work, which expresses so much sympathy with the Devil? How was this allowed in the seventeenth century – didn't he get in trouble?

Underlying the query is the assumption that in the Old Days, the tenets of religion were monolithic and universally accepted. In fact, as this book shows, the disruption of the English civil war(s) and the chaotic interregnum saw the biggest flare-up of religious experimentation and batshit unorthodoxy that side of the Enlightenment (for which, in some ways, it may have laid the groundwork). A whole baffling array of fantastically radical politico-religious sects sprang up: Levellers, Familists, Diggers, Ranters, Quakers, Seekers, Fifth Monarchists, Muggletonians, Grindletonians...all of them merging into each other, all of them with extraordinary and subversive ideas.

Many thought the Bible was merely allegorical; some did not believe in life after death, or the historical Christ, or the concept of a soul. Gerrard Winstanley, one of the Diggers, equated 'God' with 'Reason', or spoke ambiguously about 'the God Devil'; one of the Ranters, Laurence Clarkson, wrote that to the truly pure, 'Devil is God, hell is heaven, sin holiness, damnation salvation'. (Here you might sense Milton taking notes directly.) A lot of these pamphleteers and itinerant preachers were, in modern terminology, essentially atheists, though in the religious atmosphere of the seventeenth century even this unbelief was expressed in theological terms: they called themselves 'pantheists' or 'deists'. 'God has become a synonym for the natural world,' as Christopher Hill puts it. Many of them were profoundly impressed by the emerging rational science – so much so that, Hill says, 'chemistry became almost equated with radical theology'. This new materialism could make people's objections to religion awesomely practical – I loved hearing the record of one John Boggins of Great Yarmouth, who demanded:

‘Where is your God, in heaven or in earth, aloft or below, or doth he sit in the clouds, or where doth he sit with his arse?’

As in religion, so in politics. All these radical sects were, in a general sense, speaking for the masses as against the ruling classes; they had supported the Parliamentarian side in the civil war, they opposed the union of church and state (‘The function of a state church was not merely to guide men to heaven,’ Hill reminds us: ‘it was also to keep them in subordination here on earth’); they believed in a widespread redistribution of wealth and land, and thought traditional moral censure should give way to an enjoyment of life’s brief pleasures. This included sex: opposition to marriage as a state-sanctioned (and expensive) piece of admin was pretty universal among these groups, but some took it much further and advocated a kind of free love. ‘There’s no heaven but women, no hell save marriage,’ according to one rector. Hill is professorial about all this, and shows himself well aware of the fact that

[s]exual freedom, in fact, tended to be freedom for men only, so long as there was no effective birth control.

Women’s voices are rarely heard directly in this book, though; hopefully that’s something that later historians have been able to improve upon.

Overall, it’s hard not to feel on the side of the radical underdogs, but you can see why they had such a tough time because their vision was genuinely revolutionary. When an opponent of Winstanley’s objected that his ideas, if realised, would destroy all government, ministry and religion, ‘Winstanley replied coolly: “It is very true.”’

And ranged against them was a land-owning aristocracy and a hierarchy of bishops, whose conservatism and staunch antidisestablishmentarianism aimed to keep property in the hands of the few and to regulate the behaviour of the great unwashed – though, on the plus side, it did mean I was able to use the word ‘antidisestablishmentarianism’, so swings and roundabouts.

A Marxist historian, Hill perhaps sees things in more overtly class-warlike terms than other writers would – he never talks about the ‘civil war’, for instance, but always refers to it as the English Revolution. This is justified, but it does reflect a certain perspective. Personally I find it a very productive way to approach the period, but your yardage may vary.

Certainly one thing you don’t get much of in this book is the wider historical context. Hill assumes you know the outline of all the major players and events going in, takes it for granted that you appreciate the difference between the Long Parliament, the Rump Parliament, the Barebones Parliament and the Restoration Parliament, and can identify Cornet Joyce or Thomas Fairfax at fifty paces. ‘The events following Nayler’s symbolic entry into Bristol in 1656...are well known,’ he says, rather optimistically. The last time I did any serious reading in this period was twenty years ago during a ‘17th century literature and culture’ module at university, so I found it all a bit of a shock to the system at first – even half a page on what the Civil War was all about would have helped. But once I’d waded a few chapters into it, I was won over by the sheer heady excitement of the time and place – the sudden rush of ideas, the intellectual melting-pot, is very powerfully evoked.

And for a narrative historian (which Hill isn't quite), the whole thing does have the appealing shape of a classical tragedy. The monarchy *was* restored, a state Church *was* re-established, and social equity, for the most part, remained an unrealised fantasy. Of the spectrum of weird and wonderful sects, the only survivors are the Quakers, and they survived only by submitting to the worldly authority they had originally opposed – an evolution that, for Hill, epitomises 'the fading of the [countercultural] dream into the half-light of common day'.

It is sad, in a way – but it's also hugely inspiring to get such a comprehensive overview of this rich, anti-authority tradition in English intellectual history. It was a tradition that was picked up by Milton, and later by Blake and the Romantics, and that by rights should be drawn on today, by people looking for inspiration in turning today's inequalities upside-down, too.

Jim says

This book opened my eyes, not only insofar as its strict subject matter, but also in its applicability to our own times. Christopher Hill was without a doubt one of the most knowledgeable commenters on the seventeenth century in England, especially of that period between 1640 and 1660 which he refers to as the English Revolution.

I recommend *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* to anyone who is interested not only in English history, but our own. I find in Hill's Antinomians and Ranters a fore-runner of the Tea Party and many of the more radical evangelical preachers in the American South and Midwest. As Hill summarizes:

Since the external world is the manifestation of [Gerrard] Winstanley's God, our senses are to be valued because by them we know this world. Man must live in himself, not out of himself; in his five senses, not in empty imaginations, books or hearsay documents. Then God walks and delights himself in his garden, mankind. We know God by the senses, 'in the clear-sighted experience of one single creature, man, by seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling.' When the five senses act in their own light, this is 'the state of simple plainheartedness or innocency.'

What is missing are the priesthood, the Bible, the theologians ... for these radicals, every man was his or her own prophet, and dogma be damned.

Hill's ***The World Turned Upside Down*** was a revelation to me. We tend no to read much about the seventeenth century, but it was a yeasty period which is still affecting us today.

Lorri Lynn says

An astonishing account of the underlying catalysts that contributed to England's greatest religious, political and social upheaval. While so much is written about the Tudors, life during that period pales in the face of what James I did (or didn't) do after Elizabeth I's demise. The explores not only the events leading up to the 'republicanism' of England, but also the religious and social impacts, and the permanent and shocking change to life before the revolution.

Matthew Retoske says

Kind of surprised by the number of low ratings. This is a terrific introduction to Hill, readable as a novel, and pretty much a landmark book Marxist and 17th Century studies. It's an accessible introduction to Hill's writings on the period which have been so influential in reconsidering an intriguing period of not just English but human history. By giving serious consideration to groups casually dismissed as madmen and criminals (when they were mentioned at all), and tracking their influence and the congruity of thought with more mainstream movements in 17th century England as well as modern social movements, the book contextualizes forgotten pioneers of modern nonconformity.

Carl Williams says

As a Friend myself and a bit of a history geek, I've read plenty about early Quakerism but mostly by other Quakers. I've been looking forward to reading this book to read about the birth of Quakerism by a non-Friend for sometime. Quakers were a part of a wide and varied radical landscape in Britain, and were influenced by many of these groups.

Not a history of the English Civil War, but a study of the radical groups that, finding themselves suddenly free of censorship and the iron authority of the king, propagate their ideas in print with an astonishing voracity. Hill's research and footnotes are extensive (if occasionally a bit stuffy for the casual reader). Anyone on this side of the pond will do well to have a map of 17th century Britain and an index of English biographical sketches atlas of English movers and shakers. I certainly found both useful.

The radical religious groups able to explore religion for themselves for the first time found themselves challenging authority, time-honored English traditions like land ownership and primogeniture, and the power structure. Diggers, Muggletonians, Levellers, and Ranters were all vocal and many of their ideas and practices were subsumed into the early Quaker movement. Numerous peculiarities that made Friends a "peculiar people" like hat honor, plain language, as well as theological anomalies began within these other groups and were adopted by Friends.

And, while George Fox is most often listed as the founder of the sect, several others stand in that spot with him. "Fox's achievement was to form a disciplined sect, with a preaching ministry, out of a rabble of ex-Ranters and others new to the idea of thinking for themselves about religion." (p 373)

Natalie says

Blaaaaah.

Where to start? How about with the aspect of the book that irritated me the most?

No women! How could you write a book about the English revolution and have no women? This was 100% a man's history. Yes, yes, I'm an angry feminist, but I couldn't believe, page after page, that a full 50% of the

population was completely left out of Hill's analysis.

The only time women's issues were specifically addressed was in the chapter about changing sexual mores, and then the discussion was so terrible that I wish he hadn't even attempted it. For pages, he carries on about the improving condition of women in England at this time and cites ALL MALE SOURCES to prove his point! Well, if male travelers from Italy, and male religious leaders, and male scientists all thought women's position was on the up and up, that must really have been so, right?

And the constant references to looser sexual mores among certain radical sects bugged me too. He mentioned again and again throughout the book that radicals (male radicals, because that is all he included in his analysis) thought that "enjoying women" and "taking pleasure in your neighbor's wife" should not be considered sins; and he never once even kind of addresses whether or not this expanded sexual liberty on the part of women was at all voluntary or compulsory. He spends all of one paragraph (quoting a male source) mentioning that looser sexual standards led to heavier child-caring duties for women abandoned by "sexually liberated" men. Just wonderful.

The sad thing is, if I hadn't read feminist histories of this era and others, I might come away from this book thinking that women must have been a mostly illiterate (and non-linguistic?) batch of dummies who did nothing at all. Boo.

Other than roiling feminist issues, however, I was just so let down that someone could take such an exciting topic (radical political theories during the English Revolution! Aah!) and make it so mind-numbingly BORING. I gave him an extra star just as a hat tip to the coolness of the subject matter.

I need to stop reading history books that are written like Ph.D. dissertations.

Nick Jones says

Of course, the British Marxist historians are old hat. 35 years ago they would have been argued against, but now they can be treated with condescension, ignored, while the stars of modern history extol the virtues of Empire. But for many of the younger historians the greatest crime of the Marxists is that they didn't tell stories: they deal with the dried up world of ideas. This is perhaps Christopher Hill's most respected work and is unashamedly a history of ideas: as its sub-title tells us, radical ideas during the English revolution. I will admit that the most annoying thing about Hill's studies of the Seventeenth Century is the way he presumes we know not only the broad narrative outlines of the English revolution and civil war, but also much of the detail... although now we can click onto the internet and fill in our ignorance with timelines and such internetty things. Personally I think the structure of *The World Turned Upside Down* is intriguing, narrative replaced by modernist flexibility, Hill moving from broad historical movements to closer detail. As a good Marxist, Hill begins by filling in a background to the revolutionary intellectual life, pointing to a range of influences from unemployment to astrology. Hill's detractors tend to attack him for reducing the upheavals of the early Seventeenth Century to a conflict of class, but, for anyone who bothers to read his books, this is obviously not the case: his is not a crude exposition of base and superstructure, rather Hill identifies a range of formative influences with a fluid ease...I imagine back in the 1970s he would have been attacked by some Marxists for his lack of rigorous theoretical method, but even Marx looked to the events of history before theory. The heroes of the book are undoubtedly Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers. These

communistic Christians, with their belief that none should employ others, are generally regarded as utopians, either heroic or misguided, but Hill views them as deeply practical: while, for instance, other radicals denounced the enclosure of common land, against the new economic efficiency they could do little more than suggest a return to an imaginary past, but the Diggers worked for an alternative form of cooperative land cultivation. They tried to build an egalitarian society based on a faith in God and manure. The pivotal chapter of *The World Turned Upside Down* is one about sin: for Hill the erosion of the idea that we were all tainted by Original Sin, that the Law was needed to hold back the corruption of Man, was a deeply liberating one, allowing a challenge to established ideas, religion and politics. Hill continues by considering two of the religious movements: the Ranters and the Quakers. The Ranters were not a cohesive movement, lacking any organization or even a united body of ideas: they tended to pantheistic, seeing God in everything, and, with the abolition of Sin, they thought behaviour was marked as neither good nor evil. When Hill published his book, parallels with hippies and 1960s counter-culture would have been obvious. With the Commonwealth and the control of revolutionary ideas, the Ranters were suppressed. It is Hill's contention that the Quakers came from a similar milieu, but under the Commonwealth their survival was dependent on a new discipline and centralization, and with the Restoration of the monarchy they had no alternative but to turn to quietism, dedicating themselves to hard work, the avoidance of sin (Sin had returned) and a belief in the hereafter, rather than building a New Jerusalem on earth. All history is a study in the time of its writers as much as a study of the past and Hill makes both intellectual and emotional sense to me: I first read Hill and his colleagues, and other Marxist writers, in the early 1980s, when I was in my early twenties, i.e., many of my ideas were formed at the tail end of the Marxist revival of the 1960s and 70s. I still share the emotional identification with radical trouble makers and still believe that Marxism gives us the most useful methods of understanding our society, even, and especially, in our market dominated times. To those who think I am an irresponsible utopian and an apologist for social chaos, I can only reply, 'I only wish.'

Ryan says

Very enlightening read on a moment of the Enlightenment that doesn't always get the attention it deserves -- radical movements during the English revolution. It's not the best introduction to the period (unless you don't mind wiki-ing every other name) but it's vital material for anyone interested in social movements. And who isn't these days?

The basic idea is, amidst the more well-known events of the period: the Parliamentarians vs. the Royalist supporters of King Charles I, the latter's execution, Cromwell's interregnum, the collapse of the revolution and the restoration of kingly power, up to the Glorious revolution of 1688 -- there were a number of 'Dissenting' Christian sects, with unorthodox, anti-clerical, and sometimes radical social theories, all opposing state control of religion.

These groups functioned the way activist groups do today, and even pioneered some of their tactics, such as petitioning, pamphleteering, the formation of intentional communities, etc. The book pays the most attention to the Levellers -- sort of like social democrats, supporting equality before the law, Diggers -- 'Christian communists' who opposed private property (equality of land ownership), and the Ranters -- hippies, more or less. Gerrard Winstanley is evidently Christopher Hill's favorite person (with good reason, evidently) and there are several wonderful quotes from him:

"The poorest man hath as true a title and just right to the land as the richest man...True freedom lies in the free enjoyment of the earth...If the common people have no more freedom in England but only to live among their elder brothers and work for them for hire, what freedom then have they in England more than we can

have in Turkey or France?" (133)

Just as these sects are made to feel surprisingly contemporary in Hill's hands, many of the challenges they had to deal with -- how free is too free, how much discipline is necessary, how to balance radical conviction with pragmatism, how to maintain hope in spite of defeat -- are the same faced by any small group of determined individuals dedicated to opposing the Evil Empire of today.

As one can guess, 'moderate' middle-class protestantism won out in the end, the most radical dissenters made their peace with the status quo or disappeared into history -- and "Milton's nation of prophets became a nation of shopkeepers" (379). But just as obviously, their ideas have continued long after their actual efforts became impractical.

Ed says

Much of "The World Turned Upside Down" is not for the general reader. It is aimed at professional historians of 17th century England and advanced students so it is full of references to historians active 45 to 50 years ago when Hill was writing his book, because he disagreed with both the top down view of history then prevalent and schools of thought that dismissed the ideas of religious radicals during the period as unhinged harangues of dissidents to the established church. That said there is a lot of profound content for unlearned and unlettered (like myself). While it would increase one's understanding of this work, it isn't necessary to know, for example, the various conflicts within English Protestantism or the politics of the gentry vs. the nobility.

1620 to 1660 and especially the last decade of that period were among the worst in England's economic history with failing harvests and scarcity of goods throughout the island. This prompted more enclosures of formerly common land, driving peasants off the land onto the roads and into forests to live rough; some became highwaymen, footpads or robbers while others survived by collecting firewood, hunting or fishing, braving the law's wrath (and the hangman's noose) as poachers. Many of the recruits into both the radical religious sects like the Levelers or the Ranters, as well as those who joined the Parliamentary army came from these dispossessed tillers of the soil.

The collapse in censorship meant that anyone could preach the gospel and many of the chaplains of the New Model Army also preached to civilians. These sermons included calls for turning landowners into peasants by confiscating their estates, reversing the movement among some of the great landlords to enclose forests and pastures formerly held for the common use and even early forms of socialized land tenure. Some of the more radical campaigned for toleration of Jews since all men were born equal in the sight of God.

Trends of thought which caused people to question traditional dogmas about original sin, hell and damnation led to discussion among the lower classes about the social functions of sin and how wicked politicians had invented sin or that it was the result of a competitive society. Accepted social categories and hierarchies were upset in the next world—heaven, hell, saints and angels—and also in this one. But, according to Hill, with no real political and social revolution possible what developed was a materialism that was subject only to cyclical change, a philosophy of despair and turning inward.

That the potentially upside down world was restored to its rightful balance in 1660 was shown by the Convention Parliament of that year. It was not summoned by the king—it summoned him; bishops and lords were returned and radicals were purged from the government. "Tumultuous petitioning" (one of the main

methods of organizing dissent before the restoration of the monarchy) was made illegal “for alteration of matters established by church or state” unless the petition was approved by the local power structure, once again run by the landowning gentry.

Hill was a Marxist historian and he made the point that England wasn’t ready for revolution no matter how unstable the property owning class seemed nor how many masterless men took over Crown lands. The Industrial Revolution, Darwin and Marx himself were far in the future but the radical basis for social transformation had occurred. Hill made sure that it would no longer be ignored by English historians.

Paul Bryant says

Nearly 400 years ago, from the midst of the English Revolution, I hear the same anger at the despoilation and hooliganism of their rich ravening rulers as I do today, in the incoherent but passionate Occupy movements, and, if I’m honest, in the outraged and outrageous screechings of the tea party - on all sides there is the sense of trying, pitifully, to raise up a single skinny fist and shake it and howl

This is not the way things were supposed to be!

So here are the words of an Englishman who thought the same in 1649. His name was Gerrard Winstanley and he wasn’t a Leveller, he was a True Leveller.

In the beginning of Time, the great Creator Reason, made the Earth to be a Common Treasury, to preserve Beasts, Birds, Fishes, and Man, the lord that was to govern this Creation; for Man had Domination given to him, over the Beasts, Birds, and Fishes; **but not one word was spoken in the beginning, That one branch of mankind should rule over another.**

And the Reason is this, **Every single man, Male and Female, is a perfect Creature of himself;**

The Earth (which was made to be a Common Treasury of relief for all, both Beasts and Men) was hedged in to In-closures by the teachers and rulers, and the others were made Servants and Slaves:

And that Earth that is within this Creation made a Common Store-house for all, is bought and sold, and kept in the hands of a few, whereby the great Creator is mighty dishonoured, as if he were a respecter of persons, delighting in the comfortable Livelihoods of some, and rejoicing in the miserable povertie and straits of others. From the beginning it was not so.

Money must not any longer....be the great god that hedges in some and hedges out others, for money is but part of the Earth; and after our work of the Earthly Community is advanced, we must make use of gold or silver as we do of other metals but not to buy or sell.

Break in pieces quickly the Band of particular Property, disown this oppressing Murder, Oppression and Thievery of Buying and Selling of Land, owning of landlords and paying of Rents and give thy Free Consent to make the Earth a Common Treasury without grumbling.....that all may enjoy the benefit of their Creation.

And hereby thou wilt honour thy Father and thy Mother : Thy Father, which is the spirit of community, that

made all and that dwells in all. Thy Mother, which is the Earth, that brought us all forth: That as a true Mother, loves all her children. Therefore do not hinder the Mother Earth from giving all her children suck, by thy Inclosing into particular hands, and holding up that cursed Bondage of Inclosure by thy Power.

Was the earth made to preserve a few covetous, proud men to live at ease, and for them to bag and barn up the treasures of the Earth from others, that these may beg or starve in a fruitful land; or was it made to preserve all her children?

Gerrard Winstanley & others

The True Levellers Standard Advanced - April, 1649

The New Law of Righteousness, 1649

A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England Directed to all that Call Themselves or are Called Lords of Manors, 1649

Tiarnán Ó says

One of the seminal works of the 'British Marxist Historians'. Does what it says on the tin: a history of radical religious thought and debates during the English Revolutionary (1640-60) period. Exemplary intellectual history/sociology of ideas, linking religious and ideological change to the tumult of the Civil War and ongoing deepening of capitalist social relations in 17th century England. Hill surveys the various Protestant sects, their social make-up and beliefs, parallel political movements (Levellers, Diggers, Fifth Monarchists), scientific debates, political theory, and literature of the period. Some aspects of Hill's macro historical narrative (e.g. bourgeois revolution thesis) have been challenged by later empirical scholarship, but the fundamental historical-materialist approach to the history of ideas and the debates of the Reformation remains insightful.

Bruce Grossman says

Continuing to explore "Early Modern England". A good time period for learning more about the idea and origins of America.

Really didn't like this book at all. The ideas were just presented as ideas. No indication of their respective popularity or relative importance. Very redundant. But it was published in 1972-- hence a fashionable reaction to an interest of similar radical ideas floating about in the "revolutionary 1960's", and hardly anything more. Not recommended.
