

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

by Christopher Hill
(Penguin Group 1984)

Study Guide

As its subtitle says, *The World Turned Upside Down* is a study of radical ideas that appeared in England during the English Revolution or Civil War of the 1640s and 1650s. When reading this book, keep in mind that Christopher Hill applies a Marxist interpretation to history, so he is looking for signs of class struggle and attempts by the lower classes to end the control or oppression exercised by the social elite. He sees the rise of early capitalism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a cause of social change that made the English Civil War possible while prompting lower class opposition to both Royalist and conservative Parliamentary governments.

Hill does a good job of depicting the diversity of radical opinions during a time when central government control weakened or broke down completely all around England. The book is based on extensive research and reading among the books printed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many quotes are presented in the narrative — at times, perhaps, too many.

Your study guide includes 18 questions to guide your reading and to help you prepare for the quiz. I will select three or four of the study questions for the quiz. You will be asked to write answers for two of them. Each question will be worth 25 points. You should plan on writing 10 to 15 minutes on each question for a total of 30 minutes. Bring your bluebook from the first quiz.

You will also find a glossary of terms and a list of the sects.

QUESTIONS

1. Introduction:

Hill talks about “the revolt within the Revolution” being the subject of his book. What does he mean by that phrase?

2. The Parchment and the Fire:

What was the condition of English society in the decades before 1640? Was it a stable society, or were there large numbers of discontented people? Who was discontented and why were they discontented?

3. Masterless Men:

How does Hill define a masterless man? What are the various categories of masterless men that he describes?

4. Agitators and Officers:

What was the role of the New Model Army in the rise of radicalism? Why did it only go so far in seeking reforms?

5. North and West:

The North and the West of England had supported the royalist cause but after the defeat of Charles I, they became hotbeds of sectarianism and radicalism. How does Hill explain this situation?

6. A Nation of Prophets:

How does Hill explain the rise of popular preaching and how did it impact English society during the 1640s and 1650s?

7. Levellers and True Levellers:

This chapter discusses the appearance of communistic ideas among English radicals. How did the constitutional Levellers differ from True Levellers and Diggers?

8. Sin and Hell:

What does Hill think is the social function of the concepts of sin and hell in traditional English society? How did radicals regard the concepts of sin and hell?

9. Seekers and Ranters:

How does Hill define the terms Seeker and Ranter? What were the social origins of the Seekers and the Ranters? How did the authorities and the other Sects regard the Ranters?

10. Ranters and Quakers:

What were the origins of early Quakerism and which people were attracted to it? How did early Quakerism differ from later Quakerism and how did the movement evolve?

11. Samuel Fisher and the Bible:

How did Radicals use the Bible as a guide and how did that compare to the traditional use of the Bible?

12. John Ware and the Law:

How did Radicals think the law oppressed the poor and how did they seek to reform the law? What was John Ware's contribution to legal reform?

13. The Island of Great Bedlam:

What was the function of fools or jesters in pre-Revolutionary England? How did the Radicals use madness to spread their ideas?

14. Mechanic Preachers and Mechanical Philosophy:

How were alchemy, astrology, and natural magic regarded by early seventeenth-century scientists and

also by the Radicals? What were mechanic preachers and mechanical philosophy? How did the Radicals want to reform medicine, law, divinity, and the universities?

15. Base Impudent Kisses:

What constituted the Puritan sexual revolution and how did the Radicals go beyond it?

16. Life Against Death:

What was the Protestant Ethic? What was the counter-culture that the Radicals attempted to establish?

17. The World Restored:

Describe the fate of Radical ideas from 1649-1660 and during the years after 1660?

18. Conclusion:

What does Hill see as the fate of and historical contribution of the Radicals in England?

T E R M S

Anabaptists: meaning re-baptizers. Followers of Anabaptist doctrine believed that only adults should be baptized because only adults could make an informed decision. They considered infant baptism, the common practice of mainline Christianity, to be wrong, so they would re-baptize adults. Other Christians considered this to be a terrible heresy.

Antinomians: name for people who believe that because they are saved, they are no longer bound by moral laws and values. Antinomians believed it was acceptable for them to commit sinful acts. Because they were already saved, they believed they could not sin.

Calvinism: branch of Christianity following the theology of the Protestant Reformer John Calvin. Calvin put a strong emphasis on the idea of predestination. English Puritans were Calvinists as were Presbyterians and Independents.

Free Will: The idea that Christians make clear choices that determine whether they will be saved or damned. This concept is the opposite of predestination.

Independents: Branch of English Puritanism who placed the government of the churches into individual congregations. Independents formed a more radical branch within the Parliamentary party. Oliver Cromwell and most generals in the New Model Army were Independents.

Original Sin: Theological concept that all humans were sinful by nature and from birth due to Adam's sin and fall in the Garden of Eden. Believers in original sin assume that humans will do the wrong thing if done on their own. Groups that believe in Free Will de-emphasize or even reject the idea of original sin.

Pantheism: Belief that equates God with nature and the universe. Christianity views God as separate from his creation of the natural world.

Parliamentarians: The side in the English Civil War that supported Parliament and opposed King Charles I as a tyrant.

Predestination: Theological concept that God as all knowing and all powerful knew from Creation which people would be saved and which people would be damned. Individuals had no power over their ultimate salvation or damnation. The saved were the Elect, i.e., they were elected or selected by God from the beginning of time for salvation through no merit or worthiness on their part. The elect were a small minority of the human population. Predestination was an important pillar of Calvinistic Protestantism and a central belief of the Puritans.

Presbyterianism: Branch of English Puritanism that advocated government of the Church through synods or gatherings of the Protestant clergy, which corporately controlled the individual congregations. Presbyterians tended to come from the more conservative segment of the Parliamentary movement. Its leaders were civilian politicians in the Long Parliament.

Royalism: Movement that supported King Charles I during the English Civil War.

R A D I C A L S E C T S

Baptists

Muggletonians

Family of Love

Quakers

Fifth Monarchy Men

Ranters

Grindletonians

Seekers