

E. P. Thompson, Judith Shklar and the Implications of 'Antipolitics'

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The Paper

In her 1957 book *After Utopia*, the young political theorist Judith Shklar described the twin impulses of the romantic faced with a 'social universe' turned 'totalitarian' - to retreat from politics on the one hand or to turn politics into aesthetics on the other - as 'antipolitical'. In essays in 1959 and 1960, E. P. Thompson addressed himself to an incipient 'politics of anti-politics' conceived in strikingly similar terms, combining 'retreat' from politics with occasional recourse to 'individualist or sensationalist protest', 'divisive' in conception and 'ineffectual' in practice.

This paper examines the ways in which this early encounter with what both briefly called 'antipolitics' shaped Thompson's and Shklar's later work. It asks, albeit more by implication than explicitly in the paper's present form, how bringing this fleeting 'antipolitical' moment into focus might deepen our appreciation of the variety of responses to the 'ideological vacuum' in postwar Britain and the United States.