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ANTI-POLITICS AS A QUASI-REGULATIVE IDEA¹

ABSTRACT: The notion of anti-politics resists a straight-forward definition due to the complexity and heterogeneity of the phenomena it encompasses. Discussions of anti-politics rarely aim to identify its essence directly; rather, they describe individual phenomena that constitute it, hoping that its meaning will emerge through such descriptions. Another possible methodological stance – drawing on Wittgenstein’s concept of family resemblance – would be to assume that anti-politics lacks a fixed nature and that the phenomena associated with it are only loosely connected. I propose a different solution: to treat anti-politics as a *quasi-regulative idea* in the Kantian sense. In this view, anti-politics does not possess a substantial character (it is not a phenomenon or institutional fact) but a regulative one. It would thus be a construct of reason aimed at imposing unity on our cognition. This allows for phenomena such as the crisis (or reevaluation) of democracy; the crisis of (neo)liberal ideology; processes of de-democratization or autocratization; depoliticization; the emergence of ‘uncivil’ society; contestation and political rebellion; indifference or apathy; and political disaffection or de-ideologization² to be linked under a single idea that provides regulative coherence – without forcing them into a reductive, uniform framework that erases their internal differences. I suggest a change in the way of thinking about anti-politics, namely, instead of thinking about it as a certain socio-political phenomenon, I propose to think about it as an idea that unites these phenomena without being constituted by them. In the first part of this paper, I examine how selected

¹ The publication was funded by the Future Democracy Lab, a flagship project of the POB Society of the Future, under the program “Excellence Initiative – Research University” at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

² J. Ziółkowski, „Partycypacyjny wymiar antypolityki – od modelu do badań empirycznych,” *Politeja*, vol. 21, no. 3 (90) (2024).

authors conceptualize anti-politics; in the second, I outline Kant's concept of regulative ideas; and in the third, I propose how this framework can be applied to the analysis of contemporary political phenomena.

Keywords: anti-politics, Kant, regulative ideas, quasi-regulative ideas

INTRODUCTION

In the case of social phenomena, unlike in the case of physical phenomena, it is more difficult to capture and therefore define their essence. One of these, it seems, is the term 'anti-politics', which is more of a cloud of meaning than a single precisely defined concept and an a fortiori phenomenon. As some authors say: *Anti-politics is like a shifting target, hard to pin down in any coherent, precise definition, (...) its conceptual ambiguity comes from its being a kind of shadow of modern politics: it springs up with and from the latter, mirroring its many forms.*³ Jacek Ziółkowski claims that the term anti-politics eludes any precise definitions, because on the one hand its scope of meaning is very broad, and on the other hand, very narrow. Anti-politics is often treated as a convenient term that can be used wherever democracy is in trouble, civic activity is decreasing, alternative forms of political activity are emerging or populists are gaining applause.⁴

These definitional difficulties raise several methodological questions. First, are we not committing the fallacy of *unum nomen, unum nominatum* – assuming that because we have a name, there must exist a corresponding object? Second, and following from this, might it be more accurate to treat anti-politics as a 'quasi-regulative idea' in the Kantian sense: not as a substantive process, attitude, or feature, but as a construct of reason intended – like Kantian ideas – to organize our cognition? In this shift, anti-politics would move from being something substantial to being a conceptual framework that allows us to relate diverse political phenomena without forcing them to be called anti-politics.

I describe it as quasi-regulative to emphasize the significant difference between Kant's original notion of regulative ideas and its application here. Whereas Kant's ideas encompassed the totality of inner (soul), outer (world), and ultimate (God) experience, anti-politics, in this framework, pertains only to a fragment of reality: the socio-political sphere.

³ M. Truffelli, L. Zambnardi, "Taking Modernity to Extremes. On the Roots of Anti-Politics," *Political Studies Review*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2019), , p. 2.

⁴ J. Ziółkowski, "Partycypacyjny wymiar antypolityki...", pp. 174-175.

ANTI-POLITICS AND ANTI-POLICY

Matteo Truffelli and Lorenzo Zambenardi argue that the very meaning of the prefix ‘anti’ preceding ‘politics’ can be interpreted in at least two distinct ways. First, it may denote the rejection of politics as such and of all its manifestations; second, it may refer to opposition directed at particular forms of politics perceived as socially dysfunctional.⁵ The authors emphasize that anti-politics should not be understood merely as distrust or disengagement from politics, but rather as an absolute delegitimation of politics and existing political authority. They associate anti-politics with positions such as anti-parliamentarism, anti-partitism, anti-establishment sentiment, and hostility toward the necessarily slow decision-making processes of democracy – all of which frame politics as something to be discarded in order to build a ‘healthier’ society and economy.⁶

Nick Clarke, Will Jennings, Jonathan Moss, and Gerry Stoker define anti-politics, at its broadest, as encompassing *negative attitudes towards ‘traditional’ political institutions and processes, including parliamentary, executive and party politics.*⁷ They identify several core indicators of anti-politics: (i) a lack of public acceptance of government actions and/or dissatisfaction with them; (ii) a growing belief that the government prioritizes its own interests (or those of its party) over those of the citizens; (iii) negative emotions – such as hatred, anger, or contempt – directed toward politicians, parties, parliaments, governments, and democratic institutions (despite general support for democracy itself); and (iv) hostility toward politics exceeding healthy scepticism, often accompanied by social apathy.⁸

Mathew Wood proposes understanding anti-politics as a critique of representative democracy. He argues that anti-political approaches *propose alternative ways in which democratic representation can and should function, based on a lack of confidence that mediated ‘party’ democracy will achieve its core aims. They are hence anti-politics in the very specific sense of conceptualising mediated representation in a normatively ‘negative’ way, and proposing ‘unmediated’ alternatives.*⁹

Building on Mete’s typology, Wood distinguishes four forms of anti-politics characterized by three dimensions: (i) locus of representation; (ii) representative model; and (iii) the basis of distrust toward mediated representation.¹⁰

Wood mentions technocratic as a first type of antipolitics, which he depicts as (i) diffused in expert groups in society (‘expert rule’); (ii) self-organizing spheres of economy/society self-governed based on their expertise and (iii) politicians biased by electoral cycle, leading to a ‘slippery slope’ statism. The second one is populist, which

⁵ M. Truffelli, L., Zambenardi, L., “Taking Modernity to Extremes...,” p. 4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ N. Clarke, W. Jennings, J. Moss, G. Stoker, *The Good Politician. Folk Theories*, Cambridge 2018.

⁸ N. Clarke, W. Jennings, J. Moss, G. Stoker, *The Rise of Anti-Politics in Britain*, Southampton 2016.

⁹ M. Wood, “The Political Ideas Underpinning Political Distrust. Analysing Four Types of Anti-Politics,” *Representation. Journal of Representative Democracy*, vol. 58, no. 1 (2022), p. 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

prioritizes (i) direct democratic mechanisms ('will of the people'); (ii) direct representation of 'the will of the people' through referendums/single party and (iii) politicians a corrupt 'elite' that must be overthrown through a party representing 'the people'. The third one is elitist, which involves: (i) a charismatic leader appealing to a rational electorate ('enlightened rule'); (ii) the charismatic leader is judged by (otherwise) passive electorate; (iii) politicians have a privileged skillset and the public lack skills for engaging political issues. The fourth one is participatory, which emphasizes (i) participatory initiatives across society ('popular will'); (ii) individuals participate actively in a wide variety of workplace politics and (iii) political efficacy must come from the bottom up.¹¹

Technocratic anti-politics, described as 'government by experts', has been explored by Flinders, Wood, and Corbett.¹² Wood cites Hayek as an exemplar: opposed to state interventionism and centralism, Hayek argues that knowledge, including economic knowledge, is dispersed throughout society and cannot be monopolized by a single group. As he writes:

*Hayek promotes a specific version of technocratic anti-politics because he warns against state intervention and voices distrust in politicians and legislatures, on the basis that they do not and cannot fully represent the diversity of forms of technical knowledge within the economy.*¹³ This approach tends to foster depoliticized and privatized forms of governance, a process which, according to Flinders, Wood, and Corbett, can intersect cyclically with other forms of anti-politics, as they write: *Depoliticization and technocratic governance may hence be linked to each of the other forms of anti-politics, giving a somewhat cyclical character to the anti-politics problem.*¹⁴

The 'elitist' form is exemplified by Schumpeter, who – distrusting popular rule – conceives democracy as the rule of elites chosen by otherwise passive citizens and supports a strong bureaucratic state. While Hayek and Schumpeter differ in their emphasis (expert self-organization versus enlightened political leadership), both share distrust of mediated party representation.¹⁵

Populist anti-politics involves the rejection of professionalized politicians and parties, fostering 'anti-political entrepreneurs' ('alternative parties').¹⁶ In Laclau's framework, populism critiques elites who 'betray the will of the people', advocating a restoration of 'true' democracy via referenda or charismatic leadership, which *is perceived as the only legitimization of power.*¹⁷ Aslanidis describes populist anti-politics as framing

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² M.V. Flinders, M. Wood, M. J. Corbett, "Anti-Politics and Democratic Innovation," in S. Elstub, O. Escobar (eds), *Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance*, Cheltenham–Northampton 2020, p. 149.

¹³ M. Wood, "The Political Ideas...", p. 35, 37.

¹⁴ M.V. Flinders, M. Wood, M.J. Corbett, "Anti-Politics and Democratic Innovation..." p. 156.

¹⁵ M. Wood, "The Political Ideas...", p. 35.

¹⁶ M.V. Flinders, M. Wood, M.J. Corbett, "Anti-Politics and Democratic Innovation..." p. 149.

¹⁷ M. Wood, "The Political Ideas...", pp. 40-41.

reality in terms of ‘corrupt elites’ usurping the sovereign authority of the ‘noble People’, with redemption promised through mobilization of the latter: *the solution to the problem resides in the righteous political mobilization of the latter in order to regain power*.¹⁸ Populists hold a negatively defined ‘elite’ responsible for the problems of society. Their anti-politics links mainly to the ‘top-down’ phenomenon in which nontraditional political parties led by charismatic leaders attempt to gain power. They do so through naive appeals to ‘the people’ that draw on anti-establishment sentiments.¹⁹ This top-down phenomenon often manifests in the rise of nontraditional parties capitalizing on anti-establishment sentiment.

Participatory anti-politics refers to *disappointed voters and militants seeking a ‘voice leading to adhesion’ to protest*.²⁰ It reflects the aspirations of disillusioned citizens seeking expanded participation (Patman) in civic institutions and direct pressure on authorities to implement grassroots demands.²¹ This form valorizes marginality and outsider status, emphasizing reflexivity and alternative models of political organization.²² Wood points out that participatory and technocratic anti-politics support reflexivity, while elitist and populist anti-politics reject it.²³

Flinders, Wood, and Corbett additionally introduce the notion of *passive anti-politics* – negative attitudes toward politics expressed through disinterest, dissatisfaction or boredom rather than active opposition. Although anti-politics often carries negative connotations, these authors note potential positive outcomes, such as revitalizing democracy via popular sovereignty (populism and anti-establishment) and control or improving policymaking through technocratic expertise. They claim that anti-politics is a complex phenomenon which refers not only to political attitudes, *but to a wider set of legitimacy challenges for representative democracy that undermine foundational democratic goods*.²⁴

Spasojević offers a complementary perspective, identifying anti-political trends as: (i) the depoliticization process, aimed at reducing political influence on decision-making in favor of experts or independent bodies; (ii) the ‘populist Zeitgeist’ a surprisingly constant wave of populist parties that emerged throughout Europe, fueled by distrust in political institutions and anti-elitist stances; (iii) demands for greater citizens’ participation in politics as professional politicians are not perceived as true representatives. Anti-politics seeks to (i) reduce the power of political elites, (ii) reshape

¹⁸ P. Aslanidis, “Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective,” *Political Studies*, vol. 64, no. 1 (suppl) (2016), p. 99, cited in: M.V. Flinders, M. Wood, M. J. Corbett, *Anti-politics and democratic innovation*, p. 153.

¹⁹ M.V. Flinders, M. Wood, M.J. Corbett, “Anti-Politics and Democratic Innovation...,” p.154.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

²¹ M. Wood, “The Political Ideas...,” pp. 41-43.

²² M.V. Flinders, M. Wood, M.J. Corbett, “Anti-Politics and Democratic Innovation...,” p. 152.

²³ M. Wood, “The Political Ideas...,” p. 45.

²⁴ M.V. Flinders, M. Wood, M.J. Corbett, “Anti-Politics and Democratic Innovation...,” p. 149, 158, 157.

political processes and (iii) expand civic involvement and make more space for citizens' participation.²⁵

Anti-politics seems to presume negative attitudes and sentiments toward formal politics, politicians and its institutions. One can understand anti-politics as a set of political attitudes and ideas containing preferences for unmediated mechanisms of democratic representation, as well as for changing the main model of political practices. The goal of anti-politics is reduction of the political element in decision-making and changes in the way politics is made itself. Referring to Robinson, Spasojević distinguishes between the apolitical, which 'presumes passivity', and the unpolitical *which does not want to overturn existing political order but to find other means of conflict resolution like war or conspiracy theories* and contrast them with anti-politics which is *almost a revolutionary quest, a radical intent to conquer and change politics at its core*.²⁶ Then Spasojević compares anti-politics with populism, and states that *the difference between the two is based in the intensity and the scope of rejection – antipolitics goes above being against contemporary parties and beyond the core populist themes*. He admits also that anti-politics can be linked to different ideologies, and is not limited to the populist one.²⁷

Dick Howard interprets anti-politics both as a critique of democracy and as a form of politics in its own right;²⁸ he cites Somerville who says that anti-politics is *a threat to...democratic legitimacy*²⁹ and Hay and Stoker who argue that *a fairly profound and deep-seated malaise in...democratic political culture*.³⁰ Howard warns, however, that anti-politics is inherently self-contradictory – aiming to abolish politics yet inevitably reproducing it – and that, despite its failure, it can inflict profound harm.³¹

As examples which pose analogous challenges to democratic legitimacy in the twentieth century, Howard mentions fascism, communism, *and* unrestrained free-market capitalism. Fascism, communism and pure capitalism all denounced newly democratic societies on the basis of anti-politics. These forms of anti-politics repudiated democracy, while their supporters hypocritically assured that they would restore true democracy. At the same time, they assured that their actions would lead to an end of wars and to peace between society and the state.³²

Unfortunately, the proposed methods made political action impossible *since a homogeneous nation, or a completely planned proletarian society, or a thoroughly market-regulated economy would have no need to seek popular legitimation for its decisions, no reason*

²⁵ D. Spasojević, "Antipolitics as a Challenge to Political Parties," *Teoria Polityki*, no. 10 (2024), p. 42. He refers here to Flinders, Mudde and Fiket.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ D. Howard, *Between Politics and Antipolitics*, New York 2016.

²⁹ P. Somerville, "Democracy and Participation," *Policy & Politics*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2011), p. 422.

³⁰ C. Hay, G. Stoker, "Revitalising Politics. Have We Lost the Plot?," *Representation. Journal of Representative Democracy*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2009), p. 234.

³¹ D. Howard, *Between Politics and Antipolitics*, p. 166, 167.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 167.

to deliberate before pronouncing judgment, and no means by which its rules and regulations could be contested or modified. In this sense, each was an antipolitical politics.³³

In the twenty-first century there appeared new forms of anti-politics such as: fundamentalism, terrorism and anti-globalization, which are a critique and remedy for failings of democracy. They are challenges to Western democracies that are unable to cope with the consequences of their own political assumptions. For example, modern democracies are unable to accept the fact that *religious fundamentalism might reflect a legitimate attempt to reassert human dignity in the face of the moral relativism produced by a privatized individualism that can find no grounds to condemn sexual license and consumerist hedonism.*³⁴

Howard notes that in the past, Western political thought was more self-critical than today's, which is why anti-politics seems to pose a greater threat to democracy today than it did a hundred years ago.³⁵

Summarizing his reflections on anti-politics, Howard states: *The antipolitical temptation that privileges the values of unity over diversity, rationality over opinion, universality over particularity, community over competition, the sacred over the secular, stability over innovation, and tradition over novelty, has to be understood as an internal challenge rather than an external threat*³⁶ and argues that *if antipolitics is itself a form of politics*, as the above examples suggest, 'politics' cannot be understood simply as the action of governments or of those seeking to control them.³⁷

Finally, William Walters introduces the concept of *anti-policy*, describing it as *a set of considerations that enable a common analysis of policies as diverse as anti-terrorism, anti-racism, anti-trafficking, anti-corruption, anti-poverty, and the war on crime.*³⁸ Walters approaches anti-policy not as a substantive policy type but as an 'analytic sensitizing device', drawing on Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance to capture shared features across heterogeneous phenomena.³⁹ Anti-policy, in this sense, operates at a meta-level, offering a heuristic framework for comparing diverse movements – anticommunism, anti-apartheid, anti-globalism, and others – without imputing unwarranted unity.⁴⁰

Walters claims, that *the notion of anti-politics has been taken up in a number of different ways in political analysis. Sometimes it is used to describe a family of political ideologies which evacuate a space of politics, or limit political activity to particular times and places.*⁴¹

³³ Ibid., p. 168.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 169.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

³⁸ W. Walters, "Editor's Introduction. Anti-Policy and Anti-Politics. Critical Reflections on Certain Schemes to Govern Bad Things," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2008), p. 269.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 269-270.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 270-282.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 269.

Walters bases his concept of anti-policy on epistemological nominalism. In his view, anti-policy is not a particular kind of policy.⁴² Walters argues that anti-policy should be understood not only as a reaction to something that exists, but also as a provocation leading to a new politics; as he writes: *It is mistaken to treat anti-policy only as a reaction to asset of prior transgressions and it could not be regarded as a merely a discourse and politics of repression.*⁴³

Walters claims that it is a concept thanks to which we can understand what is common to various political phenomena that do not have an essence understood as a common definitional feature. Anti-policy is to be a tool that provides insight into variability and diversity. Walters mentions antiterrorism as examples of such diversity taking place under the banner of anti-policy, where the basis of conceptualization is the distinction between us and them (good-bad); and the fight against human trafficking, which is based on the notion of victim.⁴⁴ Walters emphasizes that we should *regard anti-policy as discursive, institutional and social domain in its own right to see it as an irreducible space that is more than just a reaction to prior transgressions and (...) explore a possibility that anti-policy can operate as a space of politics in its own rights a politics which will take specific forms determined in part by a peculiar nature of this terrain.*⁴⁵

Jacek Ziółkowski differentiates anti-politics from anti-policy by observing that the former involves deep distrust toward institutional politics, professional politicians, and parties, while the latter concerns dissatisfaction with specific political decisions or outcomes. He writes: *In the case of anti-politics, the negative attitude concerns politics understood as struggles, wars for power, influence of politicians, resources. Here, anti-politics is characterized by very low trust indicators in institutional politics, professional politicians, political parties or even the political system in a broader sense. In the case of anti-policy, social reluctance is directed at the current nature of politics, political decisions, real effects or their lack. Citizens negatively assess the impact of politics on their lives.*⁴⁶ He situates anti-politics within broader trends such as depoliticization, de-ideologization, political contestation and rebellion and civic apathy, all symptomatic of the ongoing crisis of democratic legitimacy. Ziółkowski points out that anti-politics is also associated with the crisis of democracy, the ongoing crisis of state and political institutions (their assessments, trust), the decline in citizens' political activity, as well as the broader phenomenon of civic apathy.⁴⁷

Bernard Crick, who defines politics as the capacity to reconcile competing interests within pluralistic societies, considers anti-politics a threat to this function – understanding it as any action aimed at disrupting or negating such possibilities.⁴⁸ Marcin

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 274.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 277-279.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 282.

⁴⁶ J. Ziółkowski, "Partycypacyjny wymiar antypolityki..." p. 180.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 174.

⁴⁸ M. Tobiasz, "Citizens in the 'Realm of Anti-Politics,'" *Studia Politologiczne*, vol. 70 (2023), p. 108.

Tobiasz, by contrast, views anti-politics not as opposition to politics but as its complement: *part of a complex process aimed at transforming existing power relations*.⁴⁹

All these positions, except one, Walters's, in describing antipolitics as a social movement or process possessing some or other characteristic (typology) assume a substantive understanding of anti-politics. Walters is an exception here, as he defines anti-politics as an 'analytic sensitizing device'. My proposal goes in a similar direction, although referring to different sources.

KANT'S REGULATIVE IDEAS

The notion of regulative ideas originates in Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason". *Reason does not itself provide us with concepts of objects but only orders the concepts that we have. In providing concepts of objects with order reason gives them unity in terms of totality*.⁵⁰ As Kant observes: *Reason produces transcendental ideas, which, although they cannot be used to increase our scientific knowledge of objects, nevertheless have a positive 'regulatory' function to perform*.⁵¹ These ideas – namely the soul, the world, and God – arise from the inherent structure of reason and serve to unify knowledge. Kant emphasizes that: *(...) they are principles that aim at bringing the use of the understanding to complete agreement, completeness, and synthetic unity*⁵² and that everyone presupposes that this unity of reason accords with nature itself, and that reason – although indeed unable to determine the limits of this unity – does not here beg but command.

Crucially, such ideas are regulative rather than constitutive:⁵³ they do not correspond to empirical objects but instead function as ordering principles – *a consequence of the logic of thought*.⁵⁴ As Kant explains, an idea is *a necessary concept of reason, to which an exactly corresponding object cannot be given in the senses, (...) They are not arbitrarily invented, but are a task imposed by the nature of reason itself, and therefore they necessarily refer to the entire use of the understanding. Finally, they are transcendent and exceed the limits of all experience, in which therefore an object equal to a transcendent idea can never be found*.⁵⁵

Each of the three classical ideas corresponds to a domain of speculative metaphysics: psychology (soul), cosmology (world), and theology (God). In the case of the soul,

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

⁵⁰ G. Banham, "Regulative Principles and Regulative Ideas," in S. Bacin, A. Ferrarin, C. La Rocca, M. Ruffing (eds), *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht. Akten des XI. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*. Boston 2013, pp. 15-24.

⁵¹ F. Copleston, *Historia filozofii*, t. 6, trans. J. Łoziński, Warszawa 2005, p. 249.

⁵² I. Kant, *Prolegomena*, trans. B. Bornstein, Warszawa 1993, p. 151.

⁵³ Constitutive principles show how "mere perception or empirical intuition in general" comes about. See, G. Banham, "Regulative Principles and Regulative Ideas...".

⁵⁴ O. Höffe, *Immanuel Kant*, trans. A.M. Kaniowski, Warszawa 1994, p. 162.

⁵⁵ I. Kant, *Krytyka czystego rozumu*, vol. 2, trans. R. Ingarden, Warszawa 1986, pp. 36-37.

the possibility of experience requires that all representations can be related to the unity of apperception. For this to be possible, reason postulates the existence of an unconditioned *I* as a thinking subject. In the case of the world, reason postulates the totality of causal sequences of events. God, in turn, becomes the resultant idea as a result of reason's search for unconditioned unity in the form of the highest condition of the possibility of everything that can be thought.⁵⁶ They are neither innate nor do they come from experience, but *arise as an effect of the natural striving of pure reason to complete the synthesis to which the intellect arrives.*⁵⁷ Their function is to satisfy reason's drive for systematic unity, ensuring that knowledge forms an integrated whole rather than a collection of disconnected fragments. *This ordering – Höffe claims – has two opposing directions: the greatest unity of the coherent whole according to necessary laws and the widest range in relation to the diversity of objects.*⁵⁸ Ideas understood in this way are to ensure the completeness of knowledge – although they themselves cannot be objects of knowledge – because they are only maxims of reason. The desire to subordinate knowledge to a single idea can be seen in the history of science, starting with Newton and ending with contemporary attempts to find a theory unifying gravity and quantum theory. As Höffe notes: *Just as in the case of a painting, the vanishing point lies outside the picture, and yet it determines its perspective, so too scientific research is dependent on the idea of reason, being unable to achieve absolute completeness of knowledge at any moment.*⁵⁹ Kant himself underscores this point: while the totality of experience cannot be grasped, *the idea of the whole of knowledge according to the first principles in general is the only thing that can give knowledge a certain special kind of unity, namely the unity of the system, without which our knowledge consists only of fragments and cannot be suitable for the highest goal (which is always only a system of all goals).*⁶⁰

ANTI-POLITICS AS A QUASI-REGULATIVE IDEA

The concept of anti-politics remains notoriously polysemous. It encompasses negative attitudes of the rejection of politics as such and of all its manifestations, towards

⁵⁶ F. Copleston, *Historia filozofii...*, p. 249.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁵⁸ O. Höffe, *Immanuel Kant...*, p. 163.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, s. 166.

⁶⁰ I. Kant, *Prolegomena...*, p. 151. Professor Iván Llamazares Valduvicio drew attention to the similarity between Kant's conception of regulative ideas and Weber's theory of ideal types, which he wrote is *a mental image that is neither a historical reality, nor, even less, a 'proper' reality, and which in no way exists to serve us as a schema to which reality is compared as an exemplar. An ideal type has the meaning of a pure, ideal, limiting concept to which reality is compared in order to highlight certain essential components of its empirical content. Such concepts are creations by means of which (and using the category of objective possibility) we construct relationships that our imagination, determined and shaped by reality, will judge as adequate.* See M. Weber, *Racjonalność, władza, odczarowanie*, trans. M. Holona, Poznań 2004, p. 175.

'traditional' political institutions and processes, including parliamentary, executive and party politics, and also an opposition to all possible kinds of politics distrust and disengagement with politics; and (i) negative attitudes towards traditional political institutions, processes, parties; (ii) antipathy, reluctance or social hatred towards politicians and political institutions.⁶¹ Anti-politics has also been described as a **process** aimed at transforming existing power relations or related to: (i) a change in long-term trends in electoral voting (decrease in activity); (ii) a decrease in citizens' involvement in traditional forms of political organization; (iii) changes in political attitudes, decrease in trust towards politicians; (iv) a decrease in participation in political parties; (v) a shift towards alternative forms of political activity; (vi) deep and deeply rooted negative changes in political culture, and others.⁶² In general, we can therefore say that anti-politics is a certain attitude or process.⁶³

Anti-politics can also be understood as: (i) **negative emotions**, such as hatred, anger, contempt; (ii) **action** aimed at disrupting or even negating reconciliation of different interests in pluralistic societies; (iii) **critique** of representative democracy; (iv) **kind of politics**; (v) **movements** such as anticommunism, anti-apartheid, abolitionism, anti-globalism, and anti-war movements; (vi) **relation**; (vii) **feature**.⁶⁴

Such breadth suggests that anti-politics is best understood, following Wittgenstein, through the lens of *family resemblances*: a network of overlapping similarities rather than a single essential definition. However, this very flexibility creates ontological confusion. The phenomena grouped under 'anti-politics' clearly do not belong to the same logical category. For example, a process (unfolding in time) cannot simultaneously be a feature (an attribute ascribed to an object or event). Emotions such as anger differ fundamentally from actions, critiques, or movements. This conceptual heterogeneity has led to frequent conflation of anti-politics with adjacent notions, such as depoliticization or democratic crisis, without clarifying whether these constitute elements of anti-politics or merely phenomena within the same semantic field.

Ziółkowski himself situates anti-politics within the broader crisis of contemporary liberal democracy (e.g., de-democratization, autocratization, backsliding) but does not fully resolve whether anti-politics is one symptom among others or a meta-category unifying them.⁶⁵ Likewise, anti-politics is frequently equated with depoliticization, yet

⁶¹ J. Ziółkowski, "Partycypacyjny wymiar antypolityki...".

⁶² Ibid., p. 178.

⁶³ V. Mete, argues that anti-politics consists of several elements: (i) the attitudes and actions of various members of the community directed against political actors and institutions and (ii) the accompanying discourse. V. Mete, "Four Types of Anti-Politics. Insights from the Italian Case," *Modern Italy*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2010), p. 38. Mete suggests three different meanings of the term: (i) anti-politics as a negation of politics itself; (ii) lack of involvement in politics, a withdrawal from participation in formal institutions; (iii) a certain strategy of behavior adopted by political actors that does not necessarily serve the interests of the community. (See M. Tobiasz, "Citizens in the 'Realm of Anti-Politics,'"..., p. 110).

⁶⁴ J. Ziółkowski, "Partycypacyjny wymiar antypolityki...".

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 176.

the two are conceptually distinct. Depoliticization may refer to declining civic interest and disengagement, but also to structural shifts in governance – such as the transfer of decision-making authority from elected officials to technocratic or supranational bodies. In this latter sense, depoliticization may itself fuel anti-political attitudes, as citizens perceive diminished agency within formal politics.

Ziółkowski himself situates anti-politics within the broader crisis of contemporary liberal democracy (e.g., de-democratization, autocratization, backsliding, depoliticization; non-civil society; contestation, political rebellion; indifference, political apathy; political de-ideologization; demystification, disenchantment of politics) but does not fully resolve whether anti-politics is one symptom among others or a meta-category unifying them. As he writes: *Although these phenomena fall within the same semantic nest with anti-politics, their scopes are not identical.*⁶⁶ It is also unclear whether these phenomena constitute anti-politics, and therefore it has a consecutive nature, or whether it is constitutive.

Likewise, anti-politics is frequently equated with depoliticization, yet the two are conceptually distinct. Depoliticization may refer to declining civic interest and disengagement, but also to structural shifts in governance – such as the transfer of decision-making authority from elected officials to technocratic or supranational bodies. In this latter sense, depoliticization may itself fuel anti-political attitudes, as citizens perceive diminished agency within formal politics.

To this extent, depoliticization would be similar to anti-politics. However, studies on the relationship between anti-politics and depoliticization often view the latter from a different perspective. Depoliticization is the process of depoliticizing politics itself, including the diminishing role of professional politicians in favor of technocratic and expert power and the state itself, for example, in accordance with the principles of the 'free market' individual citizen responsibility for their lives (neoliberalism), and the displacement of the state by non-state organizations and institutions (interstate and intergovernmental organizations, transnational corporations, the banking system, etc.). The logic is as follows: citizens are turning away from politics, becoming indifferent to it because they see no agency or effectiveness in it.⁶⁷ Reducing the role of politicians in favor of technocrats and experts is precisely a manifestation of anti-politics (see, e.g., Wood, Mete). This means that the concepts of depoliticization and anti-politics can be treated interchangeably.

Most often, these reactions are either political passivity or active, innovative contestation, a search for alternative forms of political and civic activity, and an attempt to change politics itself.⁶⁸ Thus, anti-politics can manifest itself in both passivity and activity. William Walters points out that a negative attitude toward institutional politics (anti-politics) is a social reaction to the withdrawal of the state, politicians, or the loss

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 179.

of executive powers.⁶⁹ On the other hand, anti-politics is a reaction to the omnipresence of politics and politicians.

Ziółkowski also writes that *anti-politics can be perceived as a phenomenon linked to the culture of innovation, contestation, or political rebellion*.⁷⁰ And again, if it is linked, how?

This conceptual ambiguity – oscillating between attitude, process, critique, and movement – renders anti-politics difficult to study empirically without prior clarification of its status. I propose resolving this by reinterpreting anti-politics as a *quasi-regulative idea*. Unlike Kant's transcendental ideas, which encompass the totality of experience (soul, world, God), anti-politics would pertain to a circumscribed domain: the socio-political sphere. Yet, formally, it would serve the same function – providing a unifying horizon for phenomena that otherwise appear fragmented and heterogeneous.

Anti-politics as a quasi-regulative idea would connect these various phenomena without creating a metaphenomenon, which will never be given but always perceived, as a potential horizon. From this perspective, various socio-political phenomena could be studied using empirical methods without simultaneously examining anti-politics itself. Thanks to a regulative approach to anti-politics, knowledge about socio-political phenomena gains coherence, and the entire experience takes on a character of completeness. For example, by analyzing the decline in citizens' trust in the political class using quantitative and qualitative methods, we would not be *de facto* examining the phenomenon of anti-politics, that as such, according to our assumptions, does not substantially exist, but rather specific phenomena. In this case, the anti-politics would play the role of the Kantian soul or universe, whose aim is to harmonize the results of knowledge of psychological and natural phenomena. Such an understanding of anti-politics will also free us from attempts at constant, yet inconclusive, defining of anti-politics and will direct our attention to empirical research on phenomena related to the crisis of politics.

In light of these considerations, reconceptualizing anti-politics as a quasi-regulative idea offers a twofold benefit. First, it disentangles anti-politics from adjacent but distinct notions – such as depoliticization, democratic crisis, or populism, etc. – by shifting the analytical focus from ontological claims (what anti-politics *is*) to heuristic function (what anti-politics *does* in structuring our inquiry). Second, it enables a unified examination of heterogeneous phenomena – ranging from technocratic governance to populist mobilization – without collapsing their specificity into a single essentialist definition.

Ultimately, the proposal advanced here is not to dismiss empirical analyses of anti-political phenomena but to re-situate them within a conceptual architecture that mirrors Kant's regulative function: a horizon that unifies but never exhausts its referents. This, I argue, offers a promising path – heuristic tool – toward greater conceptual clarity in a field often characterized by semantic ambiguity and overlapping theoretical vocabularies.

⁶⁹ W. Walters, "Editor's Introduction...".

⁷⁰ J. Ziółkowski, "Partycypacyjny wymiar antypolityki..." p. 177.

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