

## The individual facing reality: The sociogenesis of the political vocation.

### El individuo ante la realidad: La sociogénesis de la vocación política.



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#### Abstract.

The aim of this article is to understand political vocation as a sociogenetic phenomenon that emerges from the process of social construction of reality experienced by individuals during their biographical trajectory. It is assumed that as a consequence of the factors that intervene in the unavoidable interaction between the individual and the social order that is imposed on him, he assumes a position in front of the reality that carries implicitly the political vocation itself. Taking as a background the approaches made by Max Weber regarding vocation and political vocation, the approach to the object of study is made from the sociological perspective of social constructionism which is part of the sociology of knowledge and which was contributed by the Austrian social theorists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. Finally, the possibility is raised that an approach such as the one intended here may contribute to a better understanding and analysis of political identity and ideology today, as well as lay the theoretical foundations for the construction of a typology of political vocation.

**Keywords:** Political vocation. Social construction of reality. Individual. Social order.

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**Resumen:**

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo comprender la vocación política como un fenómeno sociogenético que emerge del proceso de construcción social de la realidad experimentado por los individuos durante su trayectoria biográfica. Se parte del supuesto de que a consecuencia de los factores que intervienen en la ineludible interacción entre el individuo y el orden social que se le impone, éste asume una postura frente la realidad que lleva implícita la propia vocación política. Tomando como antecedente los planteamientos hechos por Max Weber al respecto de la vocación y la vocación política, la aproximación al objeto de estudio se hace desde la perspectiva sociológica del construccionismo social que forma parte de la sociología del conocimiento y que fue aportada por los teóricos sociales austriacos Peter L. Berger y Thomas Luckmann. Finalmente se plantea la posibilidad de que un acercamiento como el que aquí se pretende pueda contribuir a una mayor comprensión y análisis de la identidad e ideología política en la actualidad, así como sentar las bases teóricas para la construcción de una tipología de la vocación política.

**Keywords:** Vocación política. Construcción social de la realidad. Individuo. Orden social.

**Introduction**

One of the most complex decisions that individuals have to make concerns the choice of a professional career. Since childhood, the question is often asked about our professional predilection: "What do you want to be when you grow up? At that moment, when one has to decide on the profession or trade that will define one's career path and for which one will have to prepare oneself technically and/or scientifically, the individual experiences one of the most decisive situations in one's personal life.

It is a question that places us in front of a set of alternatives of action that urges us to make a fictitious choice but that projects our first interests, tastes, inclinations, curiosities and/or desires for some specific activity or activities. It is a recurrent question that is presented colloquially since childhood and whose deep and decisive implications are obviously ignored at that stage of life. But that "being" that is posed in the question generally has a practical, i.e., productive and competitive background that begins to be thought or defined in relation to what to "do". The question really is then "what do you want to do when you grow up?"

The same question comes up again already in a more objective and responsible way just when the individual is close to having to become part of the economically active population. The question "what am I going to study?" must be answered in order to obtain the knowledge and tools necessary for the proper development of the activity that the individual aspires to perform. Deciding what to study is not generally something simple, since the individual receives directly and indirectly different influences and even pressures from his or her own family environment, circle of friends, school life, religious groups, as well as from the media, with the purpose that he or she chooses one or another professional option considered as the most convenient for various reasons.

Of course, these influences can be decisive in the inclinations of the person, but so are the various experiences he or she has with the social environment that surrounds him or her, which can be highly significant in terms of the recognition or discovery of his or her vocation. All the social institutions in which people's lives develop can have an impact in one way or another on the individual's deepest interests in some activity. In other words, the social influences and experiences that the individual receives and lives in the course of his or her life can derive in the most determinant motives or incentives for the definition of his or her vocational orientation.

Nevertheless, vocational orientation will inevitably have to consider the political-economic factors prevailing at a given time and place and thus know the real possibilities that the individual has to fulfill his vocation. These factors mainly involve the economic resources available to be able to access the necessary academic preparation that accredits him/her as qualified to exercise a certain trade or profession in the workplace. Or, if the State, through its educational policy, contributes to the satisfaction of people's professional vocation by guaranteeing diverse opportunities for technical and scientific training through higher education institutions or technical schools.

The market, as the scenario where professional and labor development opportunities are presented, defines the structure and curricular offerings of educational institutions. Thus, the State and the market, as well as the political-economic link they establish, will mainly

determine the margin of choice of individuals with respect to the academic and professional career they seek to undertake according to the vocation they have developed.

We observe then that the vocational orientation of individuals depends to a great extent on the objective reality that happens to each one of them in the course of their daily lives, that is, on the institutions that make up the social environment where they develop, as well as on the prevailing political-economic regime. Although reality presents objective elements in its constitution, it is always interpreted by each individual on the basis of his own circumstances and conditions, that is to say, reality also presents a strong subjective character. It is the reality that the individual conceives as such in the course of his biographical trajectory within a specific context, within the framework of a social facticity, recognizing and endowing with meaning previous social facts by way of tradition.

The interpretation that the individual makes of objective reality in the course of his daily life represented the object of analysis and theoretical understanding of the Austrian sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in a now classic work of this discipline entitled *The Social Construction of Reality*, which was originally published in 1967. With this work the social theorists sought to rethink the object of study of the sociology of knowledge by arguing, precisely, that it focuses on how reality is socially constructed from individual experience.

Thinking about the phenomenon of vocation from this theoretical approach, that is, from the way in which the individual positions himself before reality, allows us to understand, in addition to the emergence and consolidation of professional interests and aspirations, the other vocational orientation that manifests itself in the person: the political vocation. This is the central theme of the present reflection, where we intend to explain the political vocation as a sociogenetic phenomenon that is gestated in the process of social construction of reality experienced by the individual in the course of his biographical trajectory.

In addressing the phenomenon of political vocation we seek to rescue or simply bring back to the discussion table of the social sciences and political science one of the most important approaches of Max Weber's work, made almost at the end of his life. We believe

that this reflection of the German sociologist is of great relevance for the current political situation of our societies, considering the individual once again as a protagonist of the social and political processes of the time and not only as a mere component of these, as an abstract entity that responds automatically to the dynamics and functioning of the political system.

The political discussion currently revolves around specific characters, men and women whose names and surnames are even more recognized than the institution or political body to which they belong. They are the representatives and symbols of the political projects they lead, defend and try to implement in the framework of naturally unstable democratic societies that do not rest in their will to transform and, therefore, in the struggle for power not only locally and nationally but also globally. Who are these characters then? Where do they come from? from what reality have they emerged? and why do they aspire to political power? fundamental questions that lead us to inquire about the sociogenesis of the political vocation of these men and women who have decided to belong to public life out of conviction.

This paper develops a fundamentally theoretical reflection on the phenomenon of political vocation. It begins by returning to some of the main ideas that Max Weber established on "politics as a vocation" (or profession), to then explain the sociogenetic character of this phenomenon, which corresponds to the core of this essay. Finally, we conclude by alluding to the possible theoretical and practical implications of understanding political vocation as the result of a sociogenesis experienced by the individual in the process of social construction of reality, particularly in three substantive aspects: 1) political vocation as an antecedent of political ideology, 2) the possible constitution of a typology of political vocation, and 3) the relevance of this phenomenon for political parties and democracy. Three themes that open the door to further reflections.

### **Politics as a vocation in Max Weber**

It is probable that before Weber (1864-1920) there is no other social theorist and researcher who has thought and approached the subject of political vocation as such, being until then

the classical works developed by distinguished figures of Western thought such as Plato (*Dialogues*, ) and Aristotle (*Politics*,), Cicero (*De Officiis*, 44 B.C.), Seneca (*De Officiis*, 44 B.C.), and the philosophers of the political parties and democracy (*De Officiis*, 44 B.C.), and the philosophers of the political parties.C), Seneca (*De la Clemencia*, 55 A.D.), Plutarch (*Parallel Lives*, 96-147 A.D.), Machiavelli (*The Prince*, 1513), Erasmus of Rotterdam (*Education of the Christian Prince*, 1516), Thomas More (*Utopia*, 1516) and Francesco Guicciardini (*History of Italy*, 1540), who came closest to the subject in question by reflecting on the qualities of political leadership.

Nor is it easy to find theoretical or research work on the phenomenon of political vocation after Weber. In sociology and political science, as well as in political philosophy and even in political psychology, interest predominated in topics such as the profession, ethics and motivations of politicians. It is only recently, since the end of the twentieth century and the current one, that some research on the phenomenon of political vocation has begun to appear as an object of study.

However, in order to have a broader understanding of the theoretical treatment of vocation by this distinguished German intellectual, it is necessary to go back to another of his most representative works, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2007 [1904]), where he studies in depth the changes that this phenomenon presented after the historical event of the Lutheran Reformation (1517) and the axiological and deontological implications it had for the dynamics of the capitalist economic system.

### **Vocation as a profession: a conception of modern origin**

The phenomenon of vocation has generally been linked to the religious sphere, due to the strong spiritual charge assigned to it in the cultural and political context of the Middle Ages. There, vocation was conceived as "God's call" to the priestly or consecrated life. The term comes from the Latin *vocatio*, that is, "called," and its religious meaning derives from the biblical content, particularly from the New Testament. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:20 (Biblia Latinoamericana, 2005), when the apostle Paul (or Saul) exhorts the community he is

addressing that "each one should remain in the situation in which he was when he was called" by God.

With the advent of the Renaissance era, which also marked the entry into Modernity and its characteristic process of secularization, the concept of vocation was redefined by breaking its then semantic limits that circumscribed that "calling" within the margins of the religious-spiritual, rethinking it from an eminently practical and less contemplative perspective, as the "trade" or "work" that each one carries out.

With the Reformation movement (1517) initiated by the German friar Martin Luther (1483-1546), the concept of vocation gradually acquired a more secular meaning. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber addressed the way in which the Lutheran and, above all, Calvinist Protestant interpretation of Protestantism conceived of the vocational question as a "profession". This term did not refer strictly to what is commonly understood today as a "job or specialized work activity", but mainly to a "state" assigned by God to individuals in the form of a "predestination". Weber (2007) points out that: "[...] in the German word for 'profession' (*Beruf*) there is at least one religious reminiscence: the idea of a mission imposed by God" (p. 85). But this mission, of course spiritual, did not have to be of a strictly religious character, that is, through exclusive dedication to the priesthood or monastic life, but was mainly interpreted in allusion to the particularity of the situation or state in which each individual found himself in terms of his conditions, his work or office. In fact, the German word *Beruf* comes from the Lutheran translation of the Bible where:

[...] it seems to have been used for the first time, in our present sense, in a passage in Jesus Sirach (11, 20 and 21). It did not take long for the profane language of all Protestant peoples to adopt its present meaning, whereas previously no traces of it are to be found in the sacred or profane literature of those same peoples. But not only the literal sense, but also the idea is new: it is a product of the Reformation (Weber, 2007, pp. 88-91).

It is precisely from that disruptive historical event that the meaning given today to the concept of vocation, generally linked to a profession or trade, begins to take shape. Luther

pays solemn attention to the aforementioned Pauline approach, since the meaning of his translation not only refers to the question of "calling" (*vocatio*), but also considers the entire exhortation of the apostle of Tarsus to the Corinthians, when he asks them to "remain" or "stay in the situation" in which they were when they went or felt that "call of God". The *Beruf* or "profession" implied then for the Augustinian monk, the unconditional respect and a quasi-mystical valuation to the situation and, therefore, to the conditions in which one was when the phenomenon of vocation was produced in the individuals, understood as a divine call. It was thus a matter of assimilating the profession as an ineluctable "duty", of the distinction of the task in the world for the individual who found or was found by God through vocation.

From the Lutheran perspective and interpretation, the "fulfillment of duty" was the individual manifestation of the affirmative response to the "mission imposed by God", an expression, for Luther, of the profession that a certain individual had to assume once and for all (predestination). In this conception of profession, the observance of the second divine commandment concerning "love for one's neighbor" was indissolubly linked. To fulfill the duty implied by the situation and conditions in which the individuals found themselves, and to do so practically in terms of a devotion to work, also included the fulfillment of the second commandment. For the precursor of the Reformation, this idea of "profession" marked a substantive difference with the way in which from the Catholic perspective devotion to God was experienced, since according to Weber (2007),

[...] what engendered the ethico-religious concept of profession [was that] as the only way of life pleasing to God, it recognizes not the overcoming of earthly morality by means of monastic asceticism, but precisely in the fulfillment in the world of the duties imposed on each one by the position he occupies in life, and which therefore becomes for him a 'profession' [...] thus arises the idea at once profane and religious of professional work as a palpable manifestation of love for one's fellow man (pp. 94-104)

The recognition of work or profession as a sacred activity has since then formed one of the religious principles of Protestant ethics, and it acquired this sacred character because it was assumed as the entrustment of a divine mission that was assigned to each individual through the "call" of God. "Profession is that which man has to accept because providence sends it to him, something before which he has to accept; and this idea determines the consideration of professional work as the mission imposed by God on man" (Weber, 2007, p. 105).

Since then, devotion to work or profession was understood as the clearest manifestation of a true vocation in individuals. This is a modern (or Renaissance) conception of vocation as a divine calling, to which Luther gave a more robust meaning by assigning it an applicability and a *praxis* that, through the strict fulfillment of duty, marked a significant distinction with respect to the contemplative and ascetic devotion whose monastic character was representative of the Catholic tradition. Thus, "vocation" and "profession" were two concepts that merged as a result of the Lutheran exegesis of the Bible, highly influenced by the Germanic linguistic context of its translator and interpreter.

The purpose of these first brief paragraphs has been none other than to present a phenomenon traditionally understood from a religious and spiritual approach, based on a broader (historical and sociological) perspective provided by Max Weber in one of his classic works. It is therefore the modern understanding of "professional duty" as intrinsic to the Protestant conception of "vocation" (Giner *et.al*, 1998).

Ideally, every profession should be based on a vocation that shows that the professional has chosen to carry out a certain trade or activity because he has discovered in it the meaning of his own existence, his mission in life, a reason for being and being in the world. But this call does not emerge only as a result of a merely spiritual life or one consecrated to contemplation or asceticism, but the vocation also derives from secular, profane factors, alien to a certain type of spirituality.

It has been through "vocational guidance" that support has been provided institutionally to young students about to decide which technical or scientific career to study, a process through which the possible discovery of the professional vocation that is being built

in a latent way in the individual experience under circumstances and social conditions of the reality that happens to each person is intended. Individuals are not always attracted by any of the alternatives of professional development presented by the university curriculum and the labor market, but they discover their vocation in more traditional or classic areas of human endeavor, which are not necessarily inserted in the forefront of industrial activity. We are referring to music, literature or some of the "fine arts", sports or what is of interest in the present reflection: politics.

When politics is recognized as the vocation of the individual then that "call", that is, that aspiration, that desire or that need that seeks to be satisfied comes from power, but not from a sacred or divine power, but from another fully profane and mundane one, that is, political power. It was Max Weber himself who, after having studied the professional vocation as a substantive element of capitalist ethics, was then credited as the most appropriate to analyze the specific theme of politics as a vocation, .

### **Political vocation in the Weberian perspective**

In 1919, a year before his death, Max Weber gave a lecture at the request of a group of students at the University of Munich entitled "Politics as a Vocation". The interest of the students and of Weber himself in addressing this topic was rooted in the socio-structural conditions then prevailing in Germany as a result of the First World War (1914-1918). At that time, Europe was beginning to undergo a complex political process involving the transition to a democratic order for all sectors of the population. The German nation faced and assumed this challenge in really adverse socio-political and economic circumstances, due to its bankrupt situation, the difficult position in which it was left after the Treaty of Versailles and the impact and influence that the recent Russian Revolution of 1917 had on many European intellectual sectors. Thus, Weber, who shortly before had failed in his only attempt to assume public office, considered it pertinent and necessary to reflect on politics as a vocation or "political vocation" in order to try to shed some light on the ideal character that,

according to his criteria, the politician should manifest in the context of a chaotic situation for German society.

It is interesting that those students concerned about the complicated situation of their country asked Weber - who two years earlier had given them the lecture "Science as a Vocation" - to reflect on the subject of the vocation of those who would assume the reins of the nation in a deeply critical situation such as that of the interwar period. It seemed as if they considered vocation as a more transcendental element even above other issues such as the ideology of political leaders to face an adverse reality. One thing seemed clear to the Germans at the time: democracy was the way forward. Subsequently, Weber noted (2000 [1919]): "We have only to choose between 'caudillista democracy' with a 'machine' or democracy without caudillos, that is, the domination of 'professional politicians' without vocation, without those intimate and charismatic qualities that make the caudillo" (p. 57). Indeed, for the German sociologist, political vocation was rooted and manifested exclusively in the charismatic leader, whom he represented from a historical perspective in the figure of the "caudillo," whose charisma endowed him with peculiarities through which he was able to generate a predominantly emotional bond with those who followed him and legitimized his leadership both inside and outside the political apparatus ("the machine").

Those Germans were then sure of their inclination towards the configuration and consolidation of a democratic framework for their nation. All that remained was to think about a question that had not been taken up since the philosophical approaches of the Renaissance: the qualities or attributes of those who sought to assume the exercise of power. Weber understood these qualities or attributes of the political as a constitutive part of the vocation of individuals who aspire to political power. In his classic taxonomy of types of leadership, he observes that it is in the charismatic individual where the political vocation lies, since in this leader there are conditions that free him or her from certain constraints - mainly of an economic nature- that coerce the performance of political activity. Because of this, in the first statements made at that conference, he pointed out that:

[...] there are two ways of making politics a profession. Either one lives 'for' politics, or one lives 'from' politics. Generally, one does both, at least ideally and also

materially. He who lives 'for' politics 'makes it his life' in an intimate sense; or he simply enjoys the exercise of the power he possesses, or he nourishes his equilibrium and tranquility with the awareness of having given meaning to his life, putting it at the service of something. He lives 'from' politics as a profession who tries to make of it a lasting source of income. (Weber, 2000, p. 17).

The "caudillo" represents, for Weber, the charismatic leader, whom he considers the only one truly capable of "living for politics". This leader perceives and experiences himself as "internally called to be the leader of men, who obey him because they believe in him, and he himself 'lives for his work'" (p. 10). From these approaches, Weber delineates the notion of political vocation, first by situating it in a specific type of leadership, and later by introducing the two perspectives derived from the classical and Renaissance traditions on the qualities and duty of the politician.

On the one hand, we find in Weber the approach underpinned by the approaches of the Renaissance philosophers Niccolo Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini, when he states that the leader, finding in politics his meaning of life, can understand it in terms of assuming power only for the mere satisfaction it produces as an instrument of domination and vindication of his authority, that is, "power for power's sake", which implies an egoistic or individualistic assimilation of politics and, therefore, a modern one. While the classical perspective represented in the figures of Cicero and Plutarch, and which was followed by the pens of Erasmus of Rotterdam and Thomas More in the historical period of the Renaissance, is observed in Weber when he points out that the leader can also opt for politics in terms of his dedication to a cause by assuming political power as an instrument at its service, i.e., exposing an "altruistic" character of politics. In this regard, he notes:

[...] in the politician the 'power instinct', as it is usually called, is, in fact, among his normal qualities. The sin against the Holy Spirit of his profession begins at the moment when this lust for power ceases to be positive, ceases to be exclusively at the service of the 'cause' and becomes pure personal intoxication (Weber, 2000, p. 60).

It is likely that both the students and Weber himself thought of vocation as a key element in the political leader who aspired to power with the purpose of making the decisions he considered most appropriate, necessary or optimal to lead his people towards a better state of affairs (the cause), especially if a structurally critical situation was being experienced. Therefore, delving into the political vocation over other aspects that come into play within the political field implies then seeking to answer a fundamental question: : who are the individuals who, upon reaching power, may be the most capable of not bowing down to it, thus avoiding betraying the expectations founded in all or a large part of a nation or people? Weber himself (2000) formulated this question when he pointed out the following:

[...] the question that then arises is that of what are the qualities that will enable him [that political leader] to live up to that power and to the responsibilities it casts upon him. We now enter the realm of ethics, which is to determine what kind of man one must be in order to have the right to put his hand on the wheel of history (p. 59).

The dissertation on "politics as a vocation" finds an ethical background, which cannot be ignored given the strong implications it entails both for those who have decided to undertake a political career seeking to reach or participate in power and for those who will be affected in one way or another by the decisions made by those who exercise that power. Ethics as a constitutive component of political activity is where the question emerges as to who has "the right to put his or her hand on the wheel of history", or who is more capable of not bending to the temptation of power.

This is an ethical question that challenges both the historical processes and the contemporary political configurations of various societies. In many cases, access to political power leads to a progressive absorption of those who exercise it, to the point of making them lose sight of the social and political responsibility inherent in this exercise. This drift manifests itself with particular gravity when the causes that originally legitimized the struggle for power are betrayed, turning it into an end in itself, oriented exclusively to particular interests. Enrique Dussel (2006) referred to this as:

[...] the fetishism of power, which consists in the political actor believing he can affirm his own subjectivity or the institution in which he fulfills some function - be it president, deputy, judge, governor, military, police - as the seat or source of political power" (p. 13).

This misrepresentation of politics by those who exercise it has been a problem for Latin American nations, which have presented many alleged political leaderships that have risen as bearers of heartfelt social causes or as holders of the technical and strategic keys for the resolution of deep and historical problems of the society they intend to govern. But when they hold political power, they are unable to resist the temptation implicit in it, which leads, on the one hand, to the betrayal of the expectations generated in those who believed in and legitimized that leadership and, on the other, to the laceration of the still young representative democracies of our peoples.

At the beginning of the aforementioned conference, Max Weber set out the general aspects that established the framework of his dissertation. He began by presenting his conception of vocation as a phenomenon that is part of human behavior in general. He then warned that his speech would not offer a political position on how his country should conduct itself at that time and that he should start, for the purpose of the topic to be developed, from an understanding of politics as an activity. In this sense, the definition of "politics" that he would then provide presented as characteristic features qualities such as the capacity to "direct" and "influence" the State, conceived from the Weberian perspective on the basis of a social phenomenon historically present in human coexistence: physical violence. Weber (2000) said on that occasion:

Everything is founded on violence, said Trotsky. Objectively this is true. If the means of violence were ignored, the State would disappear and anarchy would be established. The State claims for itself the monopoly of legitimate physical violence. Politics would then mean the aspiration (*Streben*) to participate in power or to influence the distribution of power among the different States or, within the same State, among the different groups of men who compose it (pp. 8-9).

The aspiration to participate in and influence the power concentrated in the State could summarize the starting point of Weber's comprehensive approach to the phenomenon of political vocation. Thus, it could be thought that any individual who manifests this aspiration would presumably have a vocation for political activity. The equation then seems simple: if vocation is that "inner call" manifested in terms of an attraction, inclination, propensity, aspiration or yearning to carry out some activity, and that activity is the exercise of politics understood Weberianly as the capacity to "direct" and "influence" over and within the State, then the sum of the meaning of the two concepts accounts for the semantic result of their fusion, which would allow a concrete definition of "political vocation".

The truth is that Weber himself did not undertake the procedure to solve this equation, since he did not formulate a concrete and, above all, operationalizable definition of the phenomenon in question throughout his lecture or in any other work. He only provided a series of substantive elements to understand this phenomenon from a predominantly ethical perspective, from which he began by presenting the three fundamental qualities that for him should characterize anyone who wanted to be a protagonist of the history of his society and, perhaps, of the history of the world through the exercise of power: "passion", "sense of responsibility" and "moderation". From the reflection of these three qualities, Weber conceived two of the most decisive concepts for the understanding of the politician with vocation: the "ethics of conviction" and the "ethics of responsibility". He argued that both were part of the character and guided the behavior of the subject with a political vocation.

He also established an important distinction between what he called "living 'for' politics" and "living 'of' politics". These notions are usually the main references for analysts who have been interested in thinking about the phenomenon of vocation for the exercise of public power, even though in Weber's dissertation they only represent the two general forms -also ethical- of politics as a professional activity, but in no way comprise the central aspects of political vocation.

As we have already discussed, the "for" indicates that the individual understands politics as dedication to a cause, that is, as a life mission for which it is necessary to come to power. While living "from" politics refers to this activity as a mere means of subsistence, as one more job that allows the individual to make a living. Therefore, those who claimed to live "for" politics could do so, according to Weber, because they do not think of this activity with a lucrative purpose, since they have a solved economic situation. Thus, the politician could focus fully on his "political mission". Those who lived "for" politics were those who had a vocation for this activity.

The theoretical-conceptual contributions made by a historical intellectual and referent of the social sciences such as Max Weber are undoubtedly of great relevance and, of course, fundamental when attempting to address the issue of political vocation. However, the fact that he did not establish a precise definition of the concept has probably inhibited the development of subsequent research on the subject and, consequently, the possibility of increasing knowledge about this phenomenon. Furthermore, understanding political vocation as an aspiration to participate and influence power that presents elementary and unavoidable ethical nuances, although it allows us to begin to understand the phenomenon in its *a posteriori* manifestations, that is, as a social action, does not do so in its *a priori* character as a constitutive process that gives an account of how the subject came to discover his vocation, which also has important and perhaps more determining sociological implications. It is not only a question of knowing whether the politician has a vocation for the exercise of this activity and all that it implies, but mainly where this vocational orientation comes from, or rather, how the vocation of those who have reached political power to participate and influence in and from it was built.

When thinking about the phenomenon of political vocation as a social construction, it is understood as the result of a process that generates in the individual a strong attraction or propensity for the exercise of power. This derives from both subjective and objective aspects that prevail in the social relations and institutions that make up the context where the individual has developed in the course of his or her biographical trajectory . From the

social constructionism proposed here as a sociological perspective to understand this phenomenon from its origins, we then argue that each individual experiences a sociogenesis of political vocation.

### **Vocation as a sociogenetic phenomenon**

Ideally, it is expected that every individual who chooses to exercise some profession or trade does so "by" and "with" vocation. "By vocation", in the sense that the individual choice of a particular professional activity is motivated by a personal desire or by a need experienced by the person in terms of a task considered as highly significant; and "with vocation", due to the expectation that what is exercised as a trade or profession must be done at all times, as if it were a life mission that has been imposed on the individual, giving the best of himself in its exercise.

However, the vocational question is not resolved simply at the moment in which each individual recognizes the desires to be fulfilled, the needs to be satisfied or the mission to be addressed and consummated. Vocation is something deeper and more complex that is at the origin or origins of those impulses or motivations that the individual experiences when realizing what he or she wants to exercise professionally. This raises a first question that stimulates the present reflection: what is the origin of vocation, or where does the vocation that the individual discovers at some point in his or her life come from?

Due to the apparently subjective nature of this phenomenon, the most common theoretical and empirical approaches that have been presented on the subject tend to come mainly from the field of psychology and pedagogy, and the answer generally refers us to the motivations, impulses or drives that lead a person to decide on what he or she intends to devote himself or herself to, that is, the profession to which he or she will devote a large part of his or her life and where personal satisfaction will be obtained to a large extent.

Likewise, as already mentioned, the concept of "vocation" has traditionally had a religious imprint due to the strong spiritual and moral charge that was assigned to it in the cultural and political context of the Middle Ages, . With the advent of the Renaissance era,

which also marked the beginning of European Modernity and its characteristic process of secularization, vocation was rethought from a more rational and practical perspective and, therefore, less contemplative, that is, from the trade or work activity that each person carried out, or to which he or she intended or believed he or she should dedicate himself or herself. This redefinition was evident in the words of the Florentine philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), when in his famous *Discourse on the Dignity of Man* (2010 [1496]) he wrote: "O supreme freedom of God the Father, O supreme and admirable fortune of man to whom it has been granted to obtain what he desires, to be what he desires" (p. 5).

Freedom has been one of the main banners of Modernity and undoubtedly one of its main attractions. It positions the individual before the world in terms of a will fully endowed with autonomy through which one assumes the belief of being able to "get what one wants" and "be what one wants to be". Vocation, therefore, would correspond to the clearest manifestation of this feeling of freedom where the individual recognizes what he/she wants or wishes to become. This is why, from a philosophical point of view, "the dignity of man consists in 'being called' (*gerufen*) by being in the safeguarding of the truth of being. This call ad-comes as pro-yjection, in which the being-aroused of Being-there originates" (Dussel, 2017, p. 64). Thus, vocation appears as the personal project, the expectation that poses to it the path by which it is presumably possible to reach the goal, the fulfillment of desire, the satisfaction of need or even the development and culmination of a mission. In concrete words, the meaning of life.

However, the projection is made from a concrete place, a specific social space-time that significantly influences the individual, who: "at any moment of his daily life is in a biographically determined situation, in a moral and ideological position, that is, he has his history" (Schutz, 2008, p. 40). Therefore, the biographical context of each person, that is, the social, political, economic and cultural determinants of each one, in addition to the biological and physiological determinants, will always be decisive in recognizing the professional vocation.

Although the discourse of that distinguished Renaissance philosopher, written several centuries ago, is still valid today, the vocation of the individual as an expression of his or her freedom and autonomy, as that "being what one wants to be", ceased to be attributed to divine will, and came to be understood as a consequence of the historical struggles that men and women have undertaken to achieve emancipation from any ballast that hinders the individual will. The democracy that we experience and defend today in most of the world's societies, with all its inconveniences and weaknesses, has been one of the most significant achievements of those struggles. A democratic political system that is underpinned precisely by freedom and its diverse and fundamental manifestations such as thinking, expressing oneself, moving, associating and choosing.

Experiencing democracy brings the conviction that freedom has indeed been achieved by allowing a great diversity of possibilities for the individual to be, to do and to be. Within this socio-political framework of thought and action, the theme of vocation seems to find ample opportunity for its realization. The individual would have before him different alternatives of professional development for which he could opt following his vocation, as long as he has indeed discovered it. However, the issue of vocation in liberal democracies, such as ours, has an implicit determining condition, and that is that such vocational orientation be consistent with the supply or the pressing needs of the labor market.

If in the democratic experience we pretend to assume the longed-for individual autonomy, the market - as an unsuspected Leviathan - constrains this liberal precept to a matter of choice among predetermined alternatives. Thus, professional vocation is an issue that is subject to the economic character of the political regime, given that it is the labor market that determines the real possibilities of each individual's vocation, that is, whether its realization and fulfillment is possible. Therefore, the vocational question is not an issue that is circumscribed only to individual freedom. Thus, we argue that the phenomenon of vocation is intrinsically mediated by *the status quo* that characterizes each epoch or historical period. Vocation is politically and economically conditioned.

In one of his *Essays on Politics and Culture* (1986), entitled *The Individual in the Great Society*, Herbert Marcuse, in observing the conditioning of individual autonomy by the functioning of the productive system, gave an account of an implicit contradiction in the liberal conception of the individual. The "Great Society" outlined in the American political discourse and conceived from the *American way of life*, was defined as a "free society" composed of free individuals whose freedom was expressed in the autonomous creative possibility. However, while adopting Enlightenment premises such as individual freedom, self-determination and the will of the individual, the theses of liberalism conceived the subject mainly as a productive and competitive actor in the economic system, immersed in the logic of the market and responding to its interests. For Marcuse it is a question of

[...] two conflicting tendencies: on the one hand, there is the unfolding of the free moral and intellectual subject; on the other, the unfolding of the free enterprise individual in free competition. We can also say that the individual in the struggle for himself, for moral and intellectual autonomy, and the individual in the struggle for existence, are separated (1986, p. 27).

The phenomenon of vocation expresses this conflict when the individual attests that there are neither the alternatives nor the economic conditions within his environment to satisfy his vocational orientation. This is the case of those who desire and aspire to the development of activities considered as unproductive in the strict sense of the economic production process or within the so-called primary, secondary and tertiary economic activities. Individuals who generally aspire to develop or fulfill themselves in the arts or even in some sporting activity. That is to say, trades or professions that do not guarantee them a sufficient subsistence capacity for an exclusive dedication, with the exception of belonging to a certain elite or social class that assures in a permanent way the individual subsistence.

We also find in the same conflictive situation individuals who recognize their vocation in trades or professions -technical or scientific- that for diverse circumstances (economic, cultural, geographical, physical, etc.) are not within their reach. They are forced to decline in

their aspiration and have to opt for other types of activities whose esteem is lower or even null.

Of course, the idea is that these people whose vocational orientation is outside the productive and labor logic of the market are as few as possible. The same *status quo* as a social and institutional order has historically sought, through education, the formation of individuals oriented towards some of the areas of the current productive system, seeking to convert - or reduce - dissident and/or apparently dysfunctional vocations into "interests" or *hobbies* that can be "taken up" only in the so-called and increasingly limited "leisure time". As a classic of sociology, the Frenchman Emile Durkheim (2016 [1922]) noted,

[...] society cannot live if among its members there is not sufficient homogeneity: education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity, fixing beforehand in the soul of the child the essential similarities required by collective life. But, on the other hand, all cooperation without a certain diversity would be impossible: education ensures the persistence of this necessary diversity by diversifying and specializing itself (p. 47).

The relationship of vocation with the economy or more precisely with the market can be found in Durkheim himself, when he disserted on the "division of social labor". This fundamental question has to do mainly with the development of culture and the increase and differentiation of needs experienced both by societies in general and individuals in particular. With the passage of time, societies have seen their populations grow in size, which automatically expands the needs to be satisfied. But this is not only a quantitative expansion, but also a qualitative one due to the highly subjective nature of the issue of need, due to the cultural diversity that characterizes contemporary democratic societies today more than ever before.

This has led to the emergence of new and varied tasks in the industrial and commercial spheres, by means of which the accumulation of manifest needs is sought to be satisfied. Such a wide range of tasks or labor or professional activities segmented by areas of specialization is what gives rise to the increasingly complex division of social labor.

Rethinking the phenomenon of vocation in this way allows us to discover its complexity, which is usually concealed under the cloak of freedom and individual autonomy, as if vocation were one of its expressions and realizations. However, it is proposed here that although this phenomenon takes place in the sphere of the individual's subjectivity, it is mainly the result of his experience in the socio-structural and therefore objective circumstances and conditions in which he develops during a good part of his biographical trajectory and that, basically, it responds to the needs or interests of the established social order, that is to say, the *status quo*.

Up to this point we have tried to argue about the objective conditioning of a subjective phenomenon such as professional vocation with the purpose of highlighting its complexity, not only psychological or pedagogical, but also sociological. We are aware that we have most probably overlooked several aspects that are also determinant when trying to explain professional vocation as a socially conditioned phenomenon; however, we consider that, in view of the central interest of the present reflection, this may be sufficient.

By thinking and evidencing the phenomenon of vocation as a result of the interweaving of subjective and objective elements experienced by the individual in the course of his biographical trajectory, we intend to show that the vocational orientation of the person is then, from the sociological perspective, a sociogenetic phenomenon, which is born of the socio-structural conditions and circumstances in which the individual experience develops.

Now then, the biographical trajectory of each individual unfolds within the framework of his or her own daily life, which is recognized for each person as the

[...] supreme reality that imposes itself on the consciousness in a massive, urgent and intense way to the highest degree and that is organized around the "here" of my body and the "now" of my present. This "here" and "now" is the focus of attention that I pay to the reality of everyday life, it is the *realissimum* of my consciousness (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 37).

The experience of reality by individuals through their everyday life, that is, in the "world of everyday life" in the words of the Austrian sociologist Alfred Schutz (2008), is a key aspect for the understanding of the political character of any vocation, regardless of the profession that expresses it. As the reality of daily life imposes itself on each individual in an objective manner, that is, through the set of primary and secondary social institutions that exhort him to act in accordance with certain historically established norms or rules, the individual interprets this institutional normativity as a manifest expression of the social order, resolving to legitimize it and thus reproduce it or, on the contrary, delegitimize it, seeking its possible transformation. It is precisely when perceiving the predisposition for one of both possibilities in the face of reality that the individual recognizes the origin of his political vocation.

It is for this reason that our work is based on the assumption that the political vocation of every person is one of the most significant consequences of what has been theoretically called the "process of social construction of reality", which is inexorably assumed by every individual practically from birth and which develops throughout his or her life. This process was treated systematically by the social theorists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) in a work that has been transcendental not only for sociology and in particular for the sociology of knowledge, but also for the social sciences. We refer to *The Social Construction of Reality*. This representative work of the so-called sociological social constructionism is the one we have taken as the basis of our theoretical perspective for the understanding and explanation of political vocation as a sociogenetic phenomenon.

### **The sociogenesis of political vocation**

In the everyday life of individuals, the objective reality of society is experienced, comprising several elements to be considered. In the first place, Berger and Luckmann start from the thesis that the human being as a conscious biological organism, capable of developing a language, dominated by pragmatic motives within a space-time imposed on him both in his daily life and in his biography as a whole, is an individual who develops and develops within a particular social context in which he constantly interacts with his fellows. Through this

interaction or set of interactions that take place within the framework of pre-established guidelines, individuals carry out a series of activities that manifest the prevailing social order in the society to which they belong. The social order is the one that represents the objective character of the social reality that subjects experience in their daily lives. It is the expression of the objective reality of society. The question then arises, how is the social order composed? The answer to this question is the one that makes it possible to highlight the objective elements of the process of social construction of reality from this sociological perspective.

To answer this question, Berger and Luckmann (2008) developed a "theory of institutionalization", given that institutions are the founding elements of social order. This order manifests itself to the individual through mechanisms of institutionalization that are imposed on him when he begins his social life precisely within an institutional framework. Institutions are defined as "reciprocal typifications of habitualized actions that are always shared and accessible to all members of a given social group" (p. 74). In other words, routine practices that shape the intersubjective dynamics of people's daily lives. Of course, institutions correspond to the character of a given historical period and have been created to guide individual behavior for the maintenance and reproduction of the social order characteristic of an era. The historicity of institutions exposes their permanence in time and therefore their "objectivity", i.e., they have become permanent social facts that mold and control the behavior of the individual, thus propitiating the order also called institutional.

However, despite the fact that institutions appear to individuals as external and pre-established facts, "there is always in consciousness the possibility of changing or abolishing them" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 79). Therefore, although the institutional order is imposed on the subjects as an external factuality, they, as conscious beings, maintain at all times the possibility of undertaking a process of institutional change or transformation that responds to exhortations or needs different from the traditional ones.

Institutions" and "individual consciousness" are then the elements that express and characterize both the objective and the subjective reality of the society to which people

belong. The fact that such a possibility of change or transformation is always present means that individuals are the producers of their own social order. They are the ones who construct their own institutions while submitting their behavior to them. Consequently, social reality is made up of "three dialectical moments: 1) externalization (society is a human product); 2) objectification (society is an objective reality); 3) internalization (man is a social product)" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 82). In other words, for these social theorists

[...] the central argument [of their theory] is that the processes of objectification, carried out through language in everyday social interaction, construct society and turn it into an objective reality, through mechanisms of institutionalization and legitimization. Subjects internalize such objectification processes through processes of primary and secondary socialization (Rizo, 2015, p. 24).

The objective reality is understood by the mechanisms of institutionalization and legitimization, while the subjective reality by what corresponds to the processes of primary and secondary socialization. Knowledge of the institutions and their functioning is shared with the individual through the "roles" he/she must play in each of the institutions where he/she has to develop. Language has a relevant place here, which in the sociological approach of social constructionism acquires particular relevance in the subjective dimension of reality, due to its implication in the processes of dialogue. By assuming roles, individuals reproduce the mechanism of institutionalization and "participate in a social world [that] becomes subjectively real" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 96). Thus, through roles, individuals experience the objective and subjective facets of social reality.

Roles represent the way in which individuals acquire the knowledge transmitted by others who precede them in time about the functioning of primary and secondary institutions. This knowledge is not only of a practical or procedural nature, i.e. cognitive, but also normative, axiological and even emotional. The person may experience liking or disliking of the assigned roles, joy, sadness or another type of emotion when assuming certain behavior within the institutional framework. Because of this,

[...] the analysis of roles is of particular importance for the sociology of knowledge because it reveals the mediations between the macroscopic universes of meaning, objectified in a society, and the ways in which these universes become subjective realities for individuals. Thus it is possible to analyze the macroscopic social roots of a religious conception of the world in certain collectivities, and also the way in which this worldview manifests itself in the consciousness of the individual" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 101).

The "roles" in addition to serving as mechanisms of institutional reproduction represent the mechanisms of legitimization of the social order. This means that they also have the function of "explaining" and "justifying" both the "cognitive validity" ("things are done this way") and the "normative dignity" ("things must be done this way because...") of the pre-established institutional frameworks. The action of legitimizing involves the explanation of how things are done (knowledge) and the justification of why they should be done this way (values). For this theoretical perspective, the purpose of the action of legitimizing is to maintain the unity between the history of the group or society to which one belongs and the biography of the subjects. With the mechanism of legitimization, the aim is to "maintain" and "conserve" the institutional order transmitted to the new generations.

In Berger and Luckmann's (2008) theoretical approach, the legitimization mechanism has four levels: 1) pre-theoretical, 2) rudimentary theoretical propositions, 3) explicit theories and 4) symbolic universes. These correspond to the phases through which the individual passes from childhood to adulthood, so that each level comprises a different complexity that increases and varies with the passage of time. It should be noted that these stages of legitimization are explained and justified according to the stage of formation or learning experienced by the individual. Thus, for example, at the pre-theoretical level will be the infants who have just begun their incorporation into social life through the family institution, where they will begin by assuming a "system of linguistic objectivations" (vocabulary) that allows them to advance to the next stage of legitimization, given that they will already be in a position to know and, to a certain extent, understand, at least

conceptually, the "rudimentary theoretical propositions" historically assumed by the group. Such propositions make up "pragmatic explanatory schemes that relate to concrete actions" (p. 121) and that are synthesized in moral maxims, sentences, morals, sayings, proverbs, proverbs, etc., which provide the individual with an axiological *corpus* that allows the understanding and justification of his behavior, as well as the behavior of others.

With the development and assimilation of a linguistic *corpus* that allows social interaction with others belonging to his group or society, and with the elementary definition of a set of values that guide his behavior and justify it, the individual prepares himself in a basic way for the knowledge and assimilation of "explicit" or specialized theories that correspond to the third level of legitimization of the social order. The complexity increases significantly when the individual is inserted in an experience where the knowledge he receives is concentrated in a sector of reality, be it of an economic, political or cultural nature, attending to the particular interest of each person or to the demands of the group that may arise in this sense. At this stage, the individual recognizes the "division of labor" and focuses on an area of knowledge that is transmitted by "specialized personnel" who contribute to the theoretical explanation of that sector of reality. It is the apprehension of social, economic, political or cultural theories that people analyze and understand from their own subjectivity. "With this step, the sphere of legitimations reaches a degree of autonomy *vis-à-vis* the legitimized institutions and can eventually generate its own institutional processes" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 122).

It is at this level where the sociogenetic process of political vocation begins to intensify, since the individual, upon gaining autonomy, is in a position to rethink or question the mechanisms of institutionalization to which he has been subjected, i.e., reality itself. The acquired autonomy gives way to the fourth and last level of legitimization of the institutional order: the symbolic universes, whose importance is central to the process of social construction of reality and as such to the sociogenesis of political vocation.

### Symbolic universes

The symbolic universe of each individual represents what he or she conceives as the totality of the social world. It is the particular conception that each individual has of the world based on his own world. For Berger and Luckmann (2008)

[...] the symbolic universe is conceived as the matrix of all socially objectified and subjectively real meanings; the whole historical society and the biography of an individual are seen as events occurring within this universe, even marginal situations such as dreams (p. 123).

Symbolic universes also represent the coordinates that allow subjects to orient themselves in the course of their everyday life and, therefore, in the social life that develops along the biographical trajectory. It is the culminating moment of the process of social construction of reality that, although it is never definitive, or rather, never ends, it manages to generate in individuals a "general frame of reference" that provides a conception of all human activity based on all the meanings that constitute this symbolic universe in the subject. Therefore, to understand them "it is necessary to understand the history of their production, which is all the more important given that these products of human consciousness, by their very nature, are presented as mature and inevitable totalities" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 124-125). Although symbolic universes are rooted in the individual consciousness, they are the product of social objectifications that the individual assumes as cognitively valid and normatively justifiable within the institutional order where he/she develops daily through the roles he/she plays.

It is easy to see that the symbolic universes of the subjects comprise the three moments of time: the past, the present and the future. Regarding the past, in the symbolic universe a series of significant memories of the individual biography are sedimented, a memory in which everything that has been relevant in the subject's life appears and which makes it possible for him to understand his present. Regarding the future, symbolic universes project in the individual desired scenarios that motivate or direct the orientation of his daily actions. Here, as in much of their theory, Berger and Luckmann base themselves on the

approaches made by their contemporary predecessor Alfred Schutz (2008) on action, project and motive, when he states that "all projection consists in anticipating future behavior through imagination; it is not the process of the action in progress but the act that is imagined already accomplished that constitutes the starting point of all projection" (p. 49). Following this logic, vocation would then be the projection of the individual into the future, but also the set of actions developed to reach or build such an imagined scenario. While the profession would be the act, that is, the fulfillment of that projection and its corresponding actions.

For individuals, the past, present and future are understood from their symbolic universes constructed through the interweaving between the objectivity of the preset institutional order and the subjectivity of the individual conscience in the framework of their daily life that forges their biographical trajectory. It is in this way that

[...] society as a whole acquires meaning; particular institutions and 'roles' are legitimized by situating them in a broadly meaningful world. For example, the political order is legitimized by reference to a cosmic order of power and justice, and political 'roles' are legitimized as representations of these cosmic principles (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 132).

It is possible, of course, to understand the symbolic universes of individuals as "social worldviews" (*Weltanschauung*). These, according to the French-Brazilian sociologist Michael Löwy (1991), incorporate a set of elements such as "values, representations, ideas and cognitive orientations internally unified by a certain 'perspective', by a certain socially conditioned 'point of view'" (p. 12), which in Berger and Luckmann's theory (2008) is conceived as the "definition of reality" that individuals make, that is, the social construction of reality that they have attained both objectively and subjectively. Thought of as "social visions of the world", these symbolic universes comprise

[a relatively coherent set of ideas about human beings, society, history and their relationship with nature, which are linked to certain 'social positions', that is, to the interests and situation of certain social groups and classes (Löwy, 1991, p. 12).

Therefore, we speak of symbolic universes in the plural and not in the singular, since the different sectors of society set in motion processes of social construction of reality according to their own interests, values and idiosyncrasies, but also in relation to the socioeconomic position they occupy in a class society. Western societies presume to have as one of their main characteristics political-cultural diversity or plurality, a situation that not only evokes the possibility of coexistence between different symbolic universes within the same society, but also raises the unavoidable competition between them. Such competition evidences the political character of every symbolic universe, its tendency to impose itself as a guiding principle for others.

As social visions of the world, symbolic universes are rooted in the conscience of the individual and are sustained by social objectivations (institutions, roles, social order) that are sedimented through legitimization mechanisms applied from the first stages of life of the subjects through the process of primary socialization and always under the social imperatives of the groups to which one belongs from birth and which correspond to the history or tradition or traditions of a collective, group or society. However, the socialization process that constitutes the subjective reality of society internalized in the individual and that has as its purpose: "the broad and coherent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or a sector of it" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 164), comprises two stages: the aforementioned primary and a secondary one. In these stages of socialization, the "conceptual mechanisms for the maintenance of symbolic universes" are applied according to the levels of legitimization already mentioned.

These conceptual mechanisms of legitimization may vary due to the different idiosyncrasies of the groups or societies to which one belongs, but in general they present characteristics of a mythological, theological, philosophical and scientific nature (Berger and Luckmann, 2008), which contribute to the transmission of knowledge and the justification of the institutional order. The character assumed by these mechanisms will depend on the degree of economic development of a given group or society, observed in the lesser or

greater complexity of the social division of labor, i.e., the number of specializations required for the functioning of the institutional sectors that make up the social order.

A legitimization that requires only a predominantly mythological or even theological character will correspond to social groups whose institutional order is relatively simple, that is, where the "roles" played in the institutions do not require such differentiated or specialized knowledge among individuals. Whereas the mechanisms of legitimization that acquire philosophical and scientific characteristics tend to be constitutive of so-called complex societies, where the social division of labor is greater in terms of the specializations required for the functioning of the institutional order.

Given the plurality of symbolic universes due to the complexity of the social division of labor, it is noted that although social integration is achieved thanks to the mechanisms of legitimization that also provide inter-institutional coherence, these universes expose social visions of the world of which one or some may manifest at a certain moment a dissident or contesting attitude to the extent of entering into conflict with power, challenging conceptually and paradigmatically the *status quo* or the established order and its holders. In this regard, this constructionist theory points out that

[the process of transmission of a symbolic universe from one generation to another poses a problem [in which] some individuals inhabit the transmitted universe more definitively than others, and that the problem is accentuated if some groups of 'inhabitants' come to share divergent versions of the symbolic universe" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, pp. 134-135).

This is what Alfred Schutz (2008) understands as "the problem of social reality", when he points out that "the fact that I can define the 'same' situation in a radically different way from that of my peer leads, from a philosophical point of view, to the problem of reality" (p. 24). It is here where the sociological theory of Berger and Luckmann (2008) acquires political aspects that precisely make it possible to think, among other things, the way in which, from the process of social construction of reality, individuals experience the phenomenon of political vocation, either based on the feeling of a need for change or transformation of the

state of things (the individual projects a change) or, on the contrary, on the conviction of the maintenance and conservation of the established social order (the individual projects himself in the same reality).

Although they represent apparently sedimented definitions of reality, symbolic universes are not unique, fixed and unshakable. Indeed, their predominance as: "matrix of all socially objectified and subjectively real meanings" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 123) can be threatened or seriously challenged by reason of various circumstances to the point of provoking serious doubts in the subjects about the definition of the assumed reality. This situation provokes two fundamental tendencies that generate socio-political conflict: one towards transformation and the other persistent in conservation. It is precisely both proclivities that expose the pre-existence of a political vocation in individuals that may motivate them to want to: "participate in power or influence the distribution of power" (Weber, 2000), with the purpose of generating the changes that are considered necessary or to strengthen the maintenance of the established social order in the face of perceived threats against it.

As long as the need for change or transformation of the social order is not propitiated, the legitimization of individuals over their institutions and consequently of the established social order will prevail. In other words, compliance, conformity and plausibility over the *status quo* will remain.

However, as a consequence of the increased complexity of social life as a result of the deepening of the division of labor, subjects may come to forge a knowledge that transcends the thresholds of the generalities of common sense. Although common sense allows them to functionally develop in the institutions in which they participate (abiding by the agreed roles), it is not enough for them to ask questions about the constitution of the institutional order that they contribute to maintain through the legitimization of the roles they play. The questioning of the institutional order can only manifest itself when individuals gain more and more autonomy, which is only possible from the third level of legitimization of the objective reality proposed by Berger and Luckmann (2008), i.e. that of "explicit or specialized theories".

The degrees of autonomy acquired here correspond to stages in the individual's biographical trajectory in which he/she begins to receive knowledge no longer from his/her primary group (the family), but from groups that possess and administer specialized and therefore differentiated knowledge that forge in the individual an increasingly autonomous identity. This is then the secondary phase of the socialization process, which is defined as "the internalization of institutional underworlds whose scope and character are determined by the complexity of the division of labor and the concomitant social distribution of knowledge" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, p. 172). The degree of individual autonomy comes to maturity in the fourth level of legitimization which are the symbolic universes, which, as "differentiated bodies of theoretical tradition come to conceive all human experience within a general frame of reference" (Berger and Luckmann, 2008:120), where not only the institutional order or objective reality is complied with, but also questioned for the purpose of consolidation and conservation or criticism and transformation.

Throughout this process of social construction of reality implied in the course of the biographical trajectory of the subjects, their political vocation develops. This type of vocation begins to be perceived after individuals have reached a point or level of legitimization of the institutional order where they no longer only abide by and shape their behavior according to dispositions, conventions, norms, guidelines, rules, traditions and customs historically inherited by their social group, but in which they begin to configure a perspective that projects, with increasing strength and clarity, their individual autonomy based on a theoretical *corpus* whose knowledge generates a specialized and complex approach that in turn allows them to define a "social vision of the world" that may be relatively or radically in accordance with or differentiated from reality, social order or *status quo*.

### **By way of conclusion**

By rethinking the topic of political vocation after, as pointed out in one of the most recent works on the subject, "studies have partially addressed it, or have worked on concepts related to the theory of elites based on approaches based on the professionalization and

career of politicians" (Alarcón and Trujillo, 2020, p. 4), we try to fulfill the purpose of reconsidering the theoretical and empirical relevance that we believe this phenomenon has today.

The death of Max Weber a year after the publication of the work that contains his first and only approaches in this regard, *The Politician and the Scientist* (1919), prevented the possible development and systematization of a theory or perhaps a broader research work on politics as a vocation. Likewise, the religious and spiritual charge or at least the romanticization that continues to be attributed to vocation as if it were a concept that only idealized the figure and behavior of politicians, has been another factor that may have reduced interest in its analysis, considering it as a biased concept. Also, as the Spanish political scientist Manuel Alcántara Sáez pointed out in his work on *El oficio de político* (2017), "the development of representative democracy led political science studies to place more emphasis on the role played by the sovereign people or by the institutional rules that inspired it" (p. 16), which meant neglecting the study of the specific individual who exercises power in the decision-making process.

From sociology and in particular from the sociology of knowledge under the approach of social constructionism, contributed by the Austrian sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (2008) when developing theoretically the process of social construction of reality, we have tried to understand the political vocation as a sociogenetic phenomenon that is gestated during the biographical trajectory of each person and occurs when this, by acquiring individual autonomy, legitimizes or delegitimizes the social order that has been experienced throughout their daily lives. In this way, we seek to demonstrate, at least theoretically, that this phenomenon is more complex than is commonly thought, that is, that the vocational question is not merely a matter of motives and incentives for the exercise of an activity. We believe that every vocation is a social construction because it stems from individual experience in particular social conditions and circumstances. However, political vocation emerges specifically from the posture that the individual has before the reality that has happened to him during his biographical trajectory, and which is distinguished by the

fact of manifesting his conformity or plausibility with the state of things he has experienced or his non-conformity and inadmissibility before it.

Understanding political vocation as a sociogenetic phenomenon allows us to establish at least two assumptions that we consider relevant as possible contributions both for political theory and for political sociology and science. On the one hand, if political vocation emerges by legitimizing or delegitimizing the reality that prevails in the daily lives of individuals, and this makes them prone to the maintenance or transformation of the *status quo*, it opens the possibility of constructing a typology in which substantive differences and similarities of this phenomenon are established. We maintain that the construction of a typology of political vocation is viable because it contributes to understand from its origin and in a more objective way the affinities and distances between the diverse political identities that people come to define, opting for one or another of the political alternatives offered through the traditional partisan organizations.

Of course, a typology of political vocation is not limited to conservation and transformation tendencies, but will depend fundamentally on several substantial aspects related to "how" the maintenance or change of the lived reality is to be achieved. Both aspects imply a conception of power in each individual. To seek the preservation or transformation of the *status quo* is to want to maintain or change the way in which power is exercised from the institutions. This implies then that the person has a conception of power forged from the experience he/she has had with that power or set of powers at the time of belonging to different institutions during his/her biographical trajectory. Such a conception of power would then expose how it should be exercised for its conservation or transformation. Therefore, political vocation can also be understood as a vocation for power and, consequently, be characterized according to the way in which the exercise of power is understood, independently of its preserving or transforming orientation. Thus, for example, taking as a reference "the four anthropological forms of power" developed by Heirich Popitz (2019, pp. 51-65), we could speak of four types of political vocation: action (power as

passion), instrumental (power as coercion), authoritative (power as domination) and data-instituting (power as manipulation).

On the other hand, as this vocational phenomenon manifests itself in the first critical positioning of the individual in front of the reality he has experienced, it makes it possible to consider this fundamental political moment as a decisive antecedent of the ideological definition of each person. The event of the political vocation in the individual would then represent the prelude to the identity or political ideology assumed. Thinking of this phenomenon as an ideological antecedent is relevant when trying to understand certain attitudes, behaviors and decisions of people in the face of the political question, both those who participate in power and those who are outside of it. This possibility takes on greater importance today, given the increase in the number of political transfuguism that has increasingly called into question the consolidation of the ideological definition of the people and of the political parties themselves. Knowing the sociogenesis of the political vocation of each individual, especially of those who participate and influence in one way or another in political power, is a valuable resource that contributes to a broader and more objective explanation of this expression of pragmatism that today represents the political defector.

Finally, we believe that the broad and deep study of the phenomenon of political vocation, precisely because of what has been argued in the previous paragraphs, would be relevant both for political parties and their internal dynamics, as well as for the democratic life of the people. Regarding party organizations, the fact of being able to have detailed information about the political vocation of their militants and particularly of those who seek to run for a position of popular representation, implies the possibility of having the certainty that such militant or aspiring candidate really converges with the ideology of the party and therefore represents the political identity of the party. This is important especially due to the current discredit that weighs on political parties, which are now -some more than others- with strong problems of solidity in their convictions and in the responsibility they have before the sector or group of sectors they represent.

Likewise, democracy as a complex political system cannot be understood only from the point of view of the institutions or the party system that compose it, but fundamentally from the point of view of the individuals who participate in such institutions and party organizations. As we have reiterated in the present reflection, people assume an initial posture in the face of the reality they experience in everyday life. Said reality, at least in what corresponds to our times, presumes among other things a democratic character that will finally be legitimized or not by the individuals themselves due to the experience they have had in what has been presented and transmitted to them as democracy. Participation or abstention in democratic processes or any other form of individual manifestation in democratic conjunctures (annulment, for example), will also represent an expression of the political vocation of individuals. Therefore, the study of the sociogenesis of political vocation can also contribute to the explanation of people's democratic experience and, consequently, of their diverse postures in the face of presumably democratic realities.

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