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ALAIN TOURAINE | JOSEFA FOMBUENA | ANGEL BELZUNEGUI | INMA PASTOR | FRANCESC VALLS | MANUELA GUILLÉN  
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## RESEÑA

# Antonio Lucas Marín. Sociología. The study of social reality / El estudio de la realidad social. Pamplona, EUNSA 2011

Reseña realizada por María Luz Rivera Fernández

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### Reseña:

As in any of the schools or traditions in sociology, in Spain and the broader field of sociology in the Spanish language, there is a vast number of sociological treatises. Like other disciplines, when writing a sociological treatise the authors must set sound criteria and make decisions that affect both the content and form of their work, that is, they must clearly define their theoretical approach. It is possible to make a distinction between authors who present, analyse and reinterpret the sociological tradition from a personal standpoint, and those who explore changing trends in the discipline, focusing on the main concepts and theories from a syncretic perspective and with a clear didactic purpose. This is the case of the work reviewed here, in which the author, Professor of Sociology at the Complutense University of Madrid, takes a phenomenological approach to share his vision of the discipline.

This encyclopaedic treatise of more than 400 pages in length stands out for its orderly and precise exposition, clear terminology and use of illustrations and graphics that contribute to our understanding of the topics dealt with. The author reformulates previous works on the same theme: the introduction to the science of sociology. In the best Anglo tradition, the author has, since the beginning of his academic career, been concerned with writing a manual of sociology for his students; a goal he first achieved in 1977 with his *Introducción a la Sociología*.

The author has made a wise decision in providing a balanced view of the various spheres examined in the text, which is divided into four main sections: Introduction to Sociology, Social Theories, Basic Dimensions of Sociology and Social Science Methods. The sections are sequenced in such a way as to permit readers to analyse and gain insight into the field of sociology: the origin of the discipline and its social context; the main theories in the field and their evolution and relationship to social structure and change; the basic elements that can be distinguished in all societies – the individual, culture, the normative world or socialisation processes – and finally, basic sociological research methods and the necessary tools to compare the theories and investigate our surroundings. This logical sequence, which takes the reader on a journey from the origins of the discipline to the present time by means of a rigorous

scientific methodology and explores the principal theories and main areas of sociological research, makes the treatise particularly appropriate in the higher education setting as it allows students to gradually progress in their knowledge of sociology and appreciate the key role this discipline plays in today's societies.

One of the most outstanding aspects of this sociological treatise is the clarity of the writing, which is expressed in a plain and precise language reminiscent of José Ortega y Gasset's defence of simplicity. Let us not forget that the complexity of authors and topics often give rise to failed manuals or textbooks that become unintelligible to the reader. For each author, theory and topic analysed, the author of this work describes the basic contents with clarity, thereby aiding the astute reader in understanding the core argument. Updated references, and references to the literature and websites on the Internet shed further light on the topic matter through clear and highly educational explanations. In this sense, the work fulfils its objective of providing a rigorous approach to a discipline that is key in the development of contemporary societies.

In a work of this scope there are always issues that remain to be explored. On many occasions, however, this is not possible as it would involve omitting others that are also relevant. Nevertheless, the treatise examines many interesting issues on which the author shows great expertise. While there are subjects that the author has written about in other works, and perhaps could also have been included in this one (although this is a remarkably comprehensive book), the choice of what to include is a difficult one. In a changing society like the present one, greater attention could have been given to contemporary sociology. For example, the theories of Castells merit greater attention (whether one supports them or not) as do those of Baumann or Ulrich Beck. Moreover, for students and those interested in the discipline, an analysis of the theories of these authors would permit the reader to delve more deeply into crucial aspects of today's societies such as social networking and new opportunities for social mobilisation, or the analysis of old and new processes of social exclusion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century relating to new technologies, globalisation and the crisis of post-modernity. Indeed, given the author's affinity for phenomenological currents and the broad knowledge he demonstrates throughout the treatise, more emphasis could have been placed on issues such as the Internet, which constitutes a new field of research as an "extended" social environment with respect to the physical world. Finally, a sociological treatise written in the Spanish language and within the context of a mature scientific community that has produced renowned authors and works in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (*The Revolt of the Masses* by Ortega y Gasset) and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (the trilogy by Manuel Castells, who was also Professor of Sociology at the Autonomous University of Madrid and currently teaches in the Open University of Catalonia) should also include a brief chapter on sociology in Spain

However, these are merely suggestions as this sociological treatise is a well thought-out work which serves as an initial introduction to a discipline that the reader can later explore in greater depth. Pleasant reading, this well-balanced and rigo-

rous treatise has been written in the best academic tradition, that is, to transmit the idea that sociology is a discipline that is worth learning more about and makes us free in today's constantly changing world.



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