

Paul Diesing & Social Science:
A Career Review Essay*

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Social science produces a multiple, contradictory truth for our time—that is, a set of diversified perspectives and diagnoses of our changing, tangled, and contradictory society. These truths live in the practices and understandings of a research community, not in particular laws, and when that community peters out, its truth passes into history along with the society it tried to understand (Paul Diesing, How Does Social Science Work?, p. 364).

A great philosopher of the social sciences retired a few years ago, but hardly anybody noticed. Paul Diesing is not listed in Who's Who in America; his name does not appear in Current Biography; he is not to be found in American National Biography; you will find no reference to him in the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy or in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and his name is not in the American Political Science Association's 2001 Centennial Biographical Directory of Members. However, he does appear in the 2001 edition of Who's Who in the World. Although Diesing published six important books during his career, none became particularly famous. Nor did he teach in one of the top universities in the United States. So in what sense is he great? The following career review essay will attempt to give the reader sufficient information to decide for himself or herself.¹ Since relatively few people are familiar with Diesing's books (his articles are not reviewed here), I will describe each of them in turn.

¹ In order of publication, Paul Diesing's books are: Reason in Society: Five Types of Decisions and Their Social Conditions, Urbana: University of Illinois Press [rpt. Greenwood, 1973]; Patterns of Discovery in the Social Sciences, New York: Aldine, 1972; Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises, with Glenn H. Snyder, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977; Science & Ideology in the Policy Sciences, New York: Aldine, 1982; How Does Social Science Work?: Reflections on Practice, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991; and Hegel's Dialectical Economy: A Contemporary Application, Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1999.

The Man

Until his retirement, Paul Diesing taught in the Political Science Department of the State University of New York at Buffalo. But he does not consider himself a political scientist. Indeed, he says he has no disciplinary identity.² Diesing majored in education as an undergraduate at Concordia College and then enrolled at the University of Chicago in music—subsequently switching to philosophy (social ethics). Diesing served as a private first class in the U.S. Army from 1943-1946. In graduate school at Chicago, he wrote a dissertation entitled “An Action Program for the Fox Indians”³ and lectured at the same university from 1950 to 1952. In the latter year, Diesing took a position in the Philosophy Department of the University of Illinois. In 1962, he published his first book, Reason in Society: Five Types of Decisions and Their Social Conditions. However, Diesing’s contract was not renewed at Illinois. He did not fit in well with the individuals and with the dominant intellectual ideology of his department: logical empiricism.⁴ The following year, Diesing had a visiting position at the University of Colorado. His next academic appointments were in the departments of Philosophy and then Political Science

² After many years of being “eccentric, weird,” Diesing says that he found an intellectual home in a changed philosophy of science, in particular those scholars associated with the Society for the Study of Social Science. Interview, Buffalo, N. Y., August 25, 1984. Also see How Does Social Science Work?, p. 343.

³ This was part of the Fox River Project, directed by Eric Wolf.

⁴ Interview, Aug. 25, 1984.

of the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he taught for the rest of his career. Shortly after moving to Buffalo, Diesing was offered a position at the University of California, Berkeley, but did not accept it. For the 1966-67 academic year, he was Research Associate at the SUNY-Buffalo Center for International Conflict Studies.

Diesing's life work has been the study of all the social sciences. He studied them by "doing them." In a sense, Paul Diesing is a philosopher, a political scientist, a sociologist, an economist, a psychologist, and an anthropologist. He has read and worked in most of the major research/ideological groups in the social sciences—including formal modeling--which crosscut disciplines.

Diesing's First Four Books: A Personal Perspective

The major problem with Diesing's intellectual legacy is that few academics really care how social science works—as opposed to how their own discipline works. Nor are many people equipped to understand what Diesing is talking about. His major books are written for advanced professionals and are not easy reading—although Diesing's writing itself is clear, precise and often witty. Books such as How Does Social Science Work?: Reflections on Practice (1991) are demanding because most of us are not that familiar with developments in disciplines other than our own. Another problem is that most of us are not open to fundamental changes in perspective. Even if we are psychologically capable of radical change, it is simply not worth the investment in a career sense. For most professors, there is little professional payoff for reading and assimilating Diesing's

books—even if we know about them. Moreover, Diesing did not advertise himself and his work in the manner of most successful academics. The result is that, for most of his career, he was working in a vacuum. Diesing writes:

The worst fate a publication can suffer is to be ignored. This happens when there is no community that can use or build on its ideas and data, and also no community whose turf is threatened by it. Such a work exists in an empty space... (How Does Social Science Work?, p. 195)

This is clearly an autobiographical statement. Elsewhere in this book (p.362), Diesing writes that peace researchers and a “third, more eclectic school of researchers have also been irrelevant to government policy (a bitter realization for me).”

In 1982, Diesing published a remarkable book entitled Science and Ideology in the Policy Sciences. When I interviewed Diesing in Buffalo in the summer of 1984, he told me that to date, the publication had been reviewed in only two professional journals. I was astounded. Science & Ideology... was the best book I had read in a decade, and it related directly to all the policy sciences. The lack of professional response may partially reflect Diesing’s disinterest in self-promotion, but beyond this is the “community” problem. Scholars are recognized within disciplines, but there is only a tiny “community of social science.”⁵

The first time I saw a reference to Paul Diesing was in an article by Aaron Wildavsky entitled “The Political Economy of Efficiency” (Public Administration Review, 1966)—a critique of the indiscriminate use of cost-benefit analysis. At the time, I was living in Nashville, Tennessee. I had returned from ten months of field research in Bogotá, Colombia, having studied transportation policy and the Ministry of Public

⁵³ I am not counting those who, like the logical empiricists and Karl Popper & Co., talk about what social scientists should do rather than about how social science is actually practiced.

Works. My organizing concept was “administrative responsibility,” but nobody knew what it meant. (Charles Gilbert had discovered twelve different meanings of “responsibility” in the professional literature [Journal of Politics, 1959]). I found my answer in Reason in Society, in the Vanderbilt University library. Here was something I had not encountered during my graduate school years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison: a practical, overall framework of the social sciences!

Diesing describes five fundamental types of rationality in decision making: technical, economic, social, legal, and political, each of which has “substantial” and “functional” aspects. Each type of rationality is appropriate for dealing with a particular type of problem. (He would have added ecological rationality, had this paradigm been well developed in 1962 [interview, 1984]). The different types of rationality are interdependent, but also conflicting, since they represent different values. For example, the essential value of technical and economic rationality is efficiency (efficiency being defined more broadly for economists). Integration is the essential value of social rationality, a type of decision making associated with psychiatrists and anthropologists. I concluded that if there were five basic types of rationality, there should also be five fundamental types of administrative responsibility—one for each type of problem. I had my answer! Several years and much mental reprogramming later, I published my own book: Roads to Reason: Transportation, Administration, and Rationality in Colombia (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), the title reflecting its intellectual heritage. It is an attempt to show how to use Diesing’s framework of types of rationality in studying public policy and administration.

I remember my struggle to understand Reason in Society. It involved typing out dozens of pages of paragraphs verbatim. The problem was that really understanding the book meant learning how to think like an engineer, an economist, a sociologist, an anthropologist, a legalist, and an organizational theorist (political rationality). It was like trying to become fluent in five languages. Then came the problem of reworking my research in terms of this new framework of the social sciences.

Reason in Society became an influential work for scholars in a number of disciplines.⁶ However, in my opinion, it never became as important as it should have been. The title may have something to do with this. The book is fundamentally about the five (now six) types of “rationality” in decision making. Each type of rationality has substantial and functional aspects. Substantial rationality is ultimately creativity, while functional rationality is order. The problem is that the word “rationality” appears neither in the title nor in the subtitle of Diesing’s book. For decades, I have made a point of checking the bibliographies of books and journal articles dealing with the concept of “rationality.” Reason in Society hardly ever appears. I suspect that this is partially because of the title problem. However, it could also be that academics who write on “rationality” have made up their minds what it is and prefer not to deal with a book which takes a fundamentally different perspective.

⁶ Talcott Parsons wrote a long review of Reason in Society in the July, 1963 issue of Industrial & Labor Relations Review (Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 630-631). Although he made some fundamental criticisms of the work, Parsons ended his review by writing: “The Diesing book is ... an important contribution to the theoretical development of the social sciences, notably of the conceptualization of the social system as such. It deserves a wide audience among professionals in these disciplines, notably perhaps sociology” (p. 631).

Ironically, as I was learning to use Diesing's five/six types of rationality, he himself was losing interest in it. The U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965, followed by the Vietnam War experience, made him lose faith in the U.S. government. The 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia brought disillusionment with the Eastern Bloc countries as well. By the time of our interview in 1984, Diesing had shifted to a neo-Marxian framework, having decided that the Parsonian functionalism which had informed his earlier work was no longer adequate. Reason in Society is not even listed in the bibliography of his 1991 book, How Does Social Science Work?.

Diesing's evolving "leftist" views are evident in his 1971 publication, Patterns of Discovery in the Social Sciences, although only in the concluding chapter (see pp. 322-323). This book contains three sections. The first is entitled "Formal Methods and Theories," the second "Participant-Observer and Clinical Methods," and the third, "Methods in the Philosophy of Science". Diesing describes in great detail how social scientists actually work, the topic he treats more abstractly in his 1991 book.

Diesing had become self-conscious about his own role in the intellectual/scientific process. On pp. 17-18 of Patterns of Discovery in the Social Sciences, he describes his own variety of scientific method:

My approach is essentially anthropological; I treat various methods as subcultures within the general culture of science. . . There are as many methods as there are distinguishable communities of scientists, and the boundaries of each method are those of the community that uses it. A community is located by finding people who interact regularly with one another in their work. . . . Conversely, the boundary of a community is marked by noninteraction, and more definitely by interminable polemics and unresolved misunderstandings.

In the final chapter of Patterns of Discovery..., Diesing notes that philosophers of science he talked to usually disagreed with his suggestion that one may find standards for scientific method which are implicit in actual practice (p. 319). Some philosophers also objected to his turning philosophers into scientists by considering their methodology. To this, he replied:

I do not wish to belittle our centuries-old philosophic heritage of great ideas... But if one wishes to speak of truth, the goal of science, that is a different matter. Over the last century or so we have come to realize that truth is a much more difficult thing to achieve than was earlier supposed, and our critical standards have risen accordingly. The difficulties that have been discovered may be summed up under three heads, associated with the names Freud, Marx, and Durkheim. They are the difficulties of unconscious personality bias, class bias, and cultural bias. The remarkable thing about the social sciences is that they are able in some measure to overcome all these difficulties, while philosophers, I am afraid, rarely even recognize them (p. 321).

The year 1977 saw the publication of a massive empirical/theoretical study entitled Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making and System Structure in International Crises, co-authored by Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing. Snyder, a well-known International Relations specialist at SUNY-Buffalo, conceived and designed the study. In addition to collaborating on the design and direction of the study, Diesing wrote most of Ch. II, Formal Models of Bargaining, and all of Ch. IV, Information Processing, and Ch. V, Decision Making. He also worked with the nine-person team which wrote the twelve formal case studies upon which the book is based. What initially appears to be a discipline-specific book thus fits into Diesing's life-long enterprise of learning how we discover truth by participating in the process. In this case, the problem for Diesing, Snyder, et al, was to uncover the facts about complex and ideologically

tinted international crises and then to formulate an adequate theoretical structure by which to analyze them.

In his 1982 book, Science and Ideology in the Policy Sciences, Diesing critically examines all the major schools of policy-related social thought from 1930 to 1970. He deals with Neoclassical Economics and its various applications, the Keynesians, the Systems Approach, the Schumpeter perspective, the Critical Intellectuals, the Pluralists, the J.K. Galbraith School, New Left Marxism, and the Ecological Paradigm of Schumacher and others⁷. The various schools are distinguished according to location in society: subject and object. The world looks different if your perspective is that of a rational small businessman working in a society of hypothetical perfect competition, as opposed to that of a proletarian, looking up at your oppressors. As in Diesing's other works, Science and Ideology lifts us above our own disciplinary maze to view the patterns of social science as a whole. I consider this to be the most brilliant of Diesing's books. Like all of Diesing's works, it remains highly relevant today.

One day in the late 1980s, when I was teaching in Valdosta, Georgia, I received a letter from Paul Diesing. In it, he said that his long-time publisher had gone out of business and that his latest manuscript had been rejected by two publishing houses because of negative reviews by some philosophers. I immediately called Jane Flanders, my editor at the University of Pittsburgh Press. Having worked with my book, she knew about Paul Diesing. I suggested that she call him immediately, which she did. The

⁷ Ch. 10 of Science & Ideology..., on Schumacher and Appropriate Technology, would be the basis of "ecological rationality"—the 6th type of rationality—if Diesing were to revise Reason in Society today.

manuscript in question ultimately became a Pittsburgh Press book entitled How Does Social Science Work?. I will deal extensively with this work because it presents Diesing's overall conclusions about the nature of social science.

Paul Diesing and the Philosophy of Science

Diesing's rationale for writing How Does Social Science Work? is that few economists, political scientists, sociologists, etc., are likely to be aware of developments in the philosophy of science. Social scientists are likely to pick up a book or two and think that what we find represents the state of the literature. Consequently, we may not clearly understand what the enterprise as a whole is about or appreciate what has been learned in recent years.

How Does Social Science Work? is focused on three questions: 1) What are the actual goals of the various current research methods? (what is truth or knowledge?); 2) What social, cognitive, and personality processes occur or should occur during research, and how do they contribute to the outcome?; and 3) What persistent weaknesses appear in research, and what can we do about them (p. ix)?

Part I describes and evaluates the various philosophies of science: Logical Empiricism, Karl Popper and his followers, Kuhn and Stegmuller, Pragmatism; and Hermeneutics (the interpretation of texts). Diesing begins by tracing the development of logical empiricism, or positivism, through its "transformation and virtual abandonment by 1980" (p. x). This is important because "too many researchers have learned in

methods courses that the aim of science is to discover universal laws, and the method is to reduce casual hypotheses from more general theories and test them against masses of observable data” (ibid.). The following four chapters present alternative philosophies, each with its own problems or weaknesses.

Part II is entitled “Social Science Studies Itself.” It examines “our own unconscious cognitive processes, political commitments, economic exchanges, social class location, expressions of personality (to see how they have affected our research” (p. xi). This, writes Diesing, is a touchy subject:

I know from experience that some social scientists... will vehemently deny that they have any political or ideological commitments at all, or will angrily reject the thought that their personality affects their research in any way... I assume these people are correct about themselves. However, these same people will readily find ideological biases or personality influences or cognitive biases in other scientists. In such cases, I suggest, the material of chapters 6-10 can be used to understand the research practice of other social scientists, though not of oneself (p. xii).

Part II is the heart of the book. Chapters six through ten deal with the macro and micro sociology of social science, science politics, cognitive processes, and personality influences in social science. The discussion of Fundamental Attribution Error (Ch. 9) is an example of the material presented here. “This is the error of explaining our own behavior as an intentional response to the situation we are in, but explaining the behavior of others as caused by their personality, social background, and cognitive processes” (p. 253).

So if we classify welfare clients from the outside as a class of people, we naturally ask what the distinguishing characteristic of this class is. Is it their family structure, upbringing, IQ, time sense, low self-respect, inability to defer gratification, poor education...? But if we look at welfare as something we are

getting, we see forces coming at us: labeling, the phone bill, an unresponsive landlord, dead-end work, the pink slip. The forces are out there, and we do not see our role in shaping or encouraging them (p. 254).

Chapter 10, which deals with personality influences in social science, is my favorite in this section. Personality is important, writes Diesing, because “social science data are usually somewhat ambiguous, like the ink blots in a Rorschach test, so people with different cognitive styles will make different things of them” (p. 274). Thus Arthur Mitzmann, in The Iron Cage, argues that Max Weber projected his internalized parental identities onto German society, thus sensitizing him to the dynamics of authoritarian bureaucracy, something that other writers ignored. Similarly, Weber’s strict scientific method is seen as representing the internalized demands of his Calvinist mother. “Method demands complete control and repression of one’s values, feelings, desires, imagination” (p. 279). Diesing then adds: “If you think that way about research, notice it.”

Equally interesting are the discussions of gender and science and of “convergers and divergers”. Diesing summarizes the literature on “masculine” and “feminine” science as follows:

For the male scientist, his subject matter is the outside world, the arena in which he must demonstrate his skills and thus his masculinity. He is not part of that world, but separate from it just as he is separate from other people, and just as his discipline is separate from other disciplines. ... He must focus his attention on the world, not on himself. His inner states are not part of the outside world, so attending to them is not science, not man’s work, but daydreaming (p. 282).

A feminine social science... involves denying the sharp distinction between inner-personal and outside-impersonal world, and also the sharp distinction between the scientist and her object of study. Just as the slogan of the New Left women’s movement, ‘The personal is the political,’ denied the separation between personal

family life and outer, impersonal political life, so the slogan of feminist social science could be the 'The personal is the social' ...In this kind of social science, the scientist becomes a part of her subject matter or relates closely to it, empathetically sharing its experiences (p. 283).

Having distinguished between masculine and feminine science, Diesing immediately advises us to be suspicious of it: "it is too neat and simple" (p. 285). We are advised to follow Whitehead's motto for science: Seek simplicity and distrust it (p. xii).

Another useful (and potentially misleading) simplicity is the distinction in cognitive styles between what Hudson (1966) has called "convergers" and "divergers". (A person can be high or low on each dimension.)⁸

Convergers approach a problem by distinguishing its component parts and decomposing each part into subparts. Then they study each subpart separately, seeking clarity in the small... Their creativity consists in being able to disassemble a complex, messy situation into clearly distinguishable parts... They prefer to collect impersonal, precise data about the part they are studying... The preferred logic is mathematical, rather than dialectical (p. 295).

Divergers approach a problem by placing it in context, expecting the context to provide lines of study into the problem ... Divergers like to play ... multiple contexts against each other ... The result will often be to reveal ambiguities and dilemmas in what initially seemed to be a simple move. . . . They feel more at home in the obviously complex and ambiguous situations that convergers shun. Also unlike convergers, divergers accept and emphasize the emotional aspects of reality as integral to it; the diplomatic exchange is a response to, and expression of, hostilities, suspicions, hopes, illusions, loyalties, and despair ... (p. 296).

Reading the above passages, I recognized myself as being primarily a "diverger." My roommate at the time I first read the book, a Georgetown University professor on a Fulbright to Mexico, recognized himself as a "converger". This suggested a reason for the difficulty we had experienced in collaborative writing. A further moment of

⁸⁴ See Ian Mitroff and Ralph Kilmann, Methodological Approaches to Social Science, Jossey-Bass, 1978.

illumination was provided by Diesing's aside that "students don't like divergent teaching, because it leaves them floundering, not knowing what the right answer is" (p. 296)!

Part III summarizes the argument and attempts to answer the questions posed at the beginning of How Does Social Science Work?. First, what sort of truth or knowledge does social science provide? Diesing's answer is that "social process is in part lawlike, or can be treated as lawlike"—the logical empiricist conception of truth. For example, an economy can limit the viable forms of government (p. 305). But there is also "truth from the inside," as argued in the hermeneutic tradition. Kluckhohn wrote in 1949 that the point of anthropology was "to hold up a 'mirror for man' so we could see ourselves better" (p. 306). A third kind of truth, postulated by the Stegmuller structuralists, is "abstract structural dynamics [like mathematical models] that can be exemplified in empirical cases. " Thus, a ... treasury official in a Keynesian closed economy can shift fiscal policy to reduce the unemployment rate" (p. 306). Yet, there are no permanent, unquestionable foundations for science. In Abraham Kaplan's words, "truth is ... the ground beneath our feet as we move on" (p. 308).

Next, how is truth to be achieved? The argument is first that discovery and testing cannot be sharply distinguished. Truth is not determined by testing; "... tests can mainly only confirm, not disconfirm (except for details)" [p. 310]. Second, "the logical empiricist reduction of data to observables has had disastrous effects on the social sciences for decades" (p. 311). Social science can use four other kinds of equally valid information in addition to observable data: aggregate data; conversations with the subject

being studied; documents; and the researcher's own reactions in a situation. However, none of the above can be taken at face value, since "... data are in part a product of theory (p. 313). "... Theory produces the data that test it" (ibid.).

Lakatos, Stegmuller, and Kuhn, argue that "science progresses in research communities by working out the implications of some founding theory, paradigm, metaphor, set of categories, or metaphysical idea" (p. 318). The problem is that there seems to be no rational way to choose between paradigms or research traditions. Moreover, communication between different schools or theoretical approaches is difficult and often useless.

How Does Social Science Work? is dedicated to Paul Feyerabend, author of Against Method. Yet, Feyerabend, Diesing's hero, "has dealt with the problem of communication in the standard philosophical fashion, acrimonious argument" (p. 323).⁹ "This sort of debate has nothing to do with rationality, communication or truth. It is simply a verbal boxing match whose purpose is to demonstrate one's tough virility" (p. 324).

The concluding chapter of How Does Social Science Work? is entitled "Problems and Dangers on the Road to Knowledge." Diesing writes that "social science exists between two opposite kinds of degeneration, a value-free professionalism that lives only for publications that show off the latest techniques and concepts" (producing promotions and thus income) and "a deep social concern that uses science for propaganda" (pp. 350-

⁹⁵ "[Feyerabend's] articles are all directed against other philosophers of science, calling them incompetent (1978) and devoid of ideas (1981), or superficial readers, illiterates, and propagandists (1980, chap. 7); their writings are irrelevant to the practice of science (1970b)..."

51). A healthy science community must combine social interests and commitment, some detachment and self-skepticism, and a moderate level of professionalism (p. 353).

As an example of excessive commitment, Diesing writes:

The economics department at the University of Chicago lived through the time of the Keynesian revolution without changing a word in its courses or research projects... I never heard the name [John Meynard] Keynes mentioned in any of my undergraduate and graduate courses, let alone any Keynesian ideas or followers of Keynes ... Nor did I get the vaguest notion of what or who institutional economics was, even though I took a course entitled 'Neoclassical versus Institutional Economics' (pp. 348-349).

What of the future? According to Diesing, "it is quite clear that there is no possibility of anything remotely like a unified theory of society in the foreseeable future" (p.358). Has there then been progress in social science?

Some researchers will perceive definite progress since at least 1970: the decline of Keynesian fantasies, of functionalism, welfare state and peace research, and the rise of monetarism, public choice, microsociology, rational expectations, and supply-side and new institutional and Austrian economics.

Others will find progress in the 1950s and 1960s, with pluralist behavioralism, Keynesianism, functionalism, institutionalism, symbolic interactionism, modernization theory, ethnomethodology, and all the poverty and civil rights and community and unemployment and deviance studies.

Who is right? Let him whose thought is uninfluenced by personality or social factors make the first judgment. (pp. 362-63). In any case, the professionals remind us that there is unquestionable progress in techniques and methods (p. 363).

Hegel's Truth & Diesing's Truth

A friend recently sent me an e-mail with the following instructions: Read the four lines below and count the number of times the letter "F" appears:

FINISHED FILES ARE THE
RESULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC
STUDY COMBINED WITH THE
EXPERIENCE OF YEARS.

I followed the instructions, read the sentence carefully, and counted three F's. This is apparently the number most people identify. In fact, however, there are six F's in the sentence. For some reason, the human brain has difficulty processing the word "OF". I found this both interesting and disturbing. It bothered me that I, a trained academic who has worked with words all his life, was unable to correctly identify letters in a simple sentence. I had failed to identify objective reality. Diesing's latest book begins with a similar problem.

Paul Diesing's Hegel's Dialectical Political Economy: A Contemporary Application (1999) begins by listing a number of "absurd" misinterpretations of the great philosopher in published books by apparently reputable academics (p. 1). The author cites D'Hondt, 1988, p. vi) as saying: "Invariably interpreters have molded Hegel into their own image." Diesing himself writes:

If commentators succeed in reading their ideas into Hegel, they present their interpretations as Hegel's own ideas; if they fail, they criticize Hegel for his difficult and obscure writing, or for his errors. We all do that, of course; it's a standard human cognitive process, especially for men (p. 1, my emphasis).

After presenting his own understanding of Hegel, Diesing asks: "But how do I know that my interpretation is the only correct one?" His answer is: "I don't." The solution is simply to differentiate his approach from that of other scholars, indicating which writers he agrees with and which he disagrees with. According to Diesing (Kuhn, etc.), not only

may we fail to count the correct number of F's, but there is no objectively knowable reality.

Diesing wrote Hegel's Dialectical Political Economy "to show how Hegel's dialectic can be used in empirical research today. Then the results can be used to revise Marxist theory, expand institutionalist theory, or do other social research" (p. 8). In a sense it is a methodology book; it explains how to use the dialectical method. Diesing writes:

How does a researcher locate a dialectical process in society? One is looking for a pair of interdependent opposites, such as supply and demand or policymaking and implementation, and then for the pattern of their interaction over time and its context. Of course one can start with known opposites, such as worker and employer, or Hegel's favorite, universal and particular (example: policymaking and implementation). That is easy, perhaps too easy; one might just squeeze the opposites on to the data. But one can also look for new opposites! That's harder. (p. 31).

Since I do not work in dialectical theory, this aspect of the work is not very useful to me, although it might be helpful for those who do take this approach. Beyond this, however, I do not see the point of studying Hegel at all. Granted, the scholarship behind Diesing's effort is impressive; it includes a careful reading of The Philosophy of Right in the original German—in addition to all the secondary literature. For Hegel scholars, Diesing's book may represent a considerable breakthrough. I don't know. However, if the point is to improve contemporary social science, why not simply cut to the chase? Why not skip the first four chapters and simply present and use a dialectical method for today's world? To an outsider, at least, the point of all the Hegel scholarship would seem more akin to legitimation than to social science. Perhaps grounding one's work in the

original dialectical method of G.W.F. Hegel is required for Marxist scholars to take Diesing seriously. Again, I don't know. It is hard for me to imagine, however, that contemporary theorists have not managed to create a dialectical method that is superior to what Hegel formulated in 1821.¹⁰

My major conclusion about Hegel's Dialectical Political Economy is that I am not well equipped to evaluate it. Since Diesing is working within a paradigm which is largely foreign to me, the description of the U.S. political system in Chapter 7 seems strange and heavily ideological. Churches are not considered as potential generators of community (p. 133); political parties are hardly mentioned; other political institutions are disparaged as simply creatures of interest groups; and the Trilateral Commission appears as a bogymen (pp. 133-139).

Conclusion

The objective of How Does Social Science Work? is to make us more reflective about our own research. Diesing is teaching by doing. The "masculine science" separation between ourselves and our work would be inappropriate here. In providing examples of propagandistic science, he notes that "the vivid examples that occur to me are naturally all conservative" (p. 350). As a "leftist," he says that he is naturally

¹⁰ On the otherwise blank page prior to p. 1 of the text, Diesing includes two quotations. One is Hegel's aphorism no. 54: "Ein grosser Mann verdammt die Menschen dazu, ihn zu explizieren." This translates into English as: "A great man condemns mankind (or "people") to interpret him." .

sensitized to distortions from the “right.” Diesing also notes the effect of his own personality:

This work, like all my writings, is a product... of the continuing conflict between two sides of my nature: the one that strives for order, system, clarity, neatness, and above all punctuality, and the other that enjoys empirical complexity, change, commotion, chaos, and a bit of tomfoolery. Over the years, the two of us have gotten to know each other quite well and have even learned to cooperate fruitfully...-- or so the orderly one deludes himself until he finds that he has once again been tricked by the other fellow (p. xii).

It would not seem accidental that in the conclusion of his first book, Reason in Society, Diesing defined “reason” in just this fashion. He wrote that reason has two fundamental aspects: order and the creation of order, or creativity.

I have not talked to Paul Diesing since 1984 and have corresponded with him only a couple of times since then. From his writings, however, it would seem that he has become increasingly discouraged with his own country and with prospects for the future of the world. In the conclusion of Hegel’s Dialectical Political Economy, Diesing has some positive things to say about Sweden, Austria and Switzerland, but that is about as far as it goes.

A large, global dialectical reversal is possible some day, and a dialectical thinker might see signs of its approach and hope to participate. But to hasten the presumed process along by staging a revolution would be disastrous. It should be clear by now that there can be no ‘great leap forward’ to pure capitalism, or pure Muslim fundamentalism, or any other utopia. Such revolutionary attempts have produced a period of mass misery and terror, and a replacement of the old guard by a similar new guard. . . . Hegel learned this lesson from the French Revolution, but failed to convey it persuasively enough; utopian thinking persists. Progress comes slowly, if at all (p. 173).

This approach to socialism is the opposite of Lenin’s (and Althusser’s) absurd rhetoric about finding the ‘weakest link’ in the world chain of capitalism; once

that link is broken, the chain will fall off the whole earth. Capitalism and the emerging new feudalism isn't an external chain; it is the totality of developing institutions of modern society (ibid.).

The objective of this career review has been to summarize and comment on the books of Paul Diesing, which have been enormously helpful in my own teaching and writing. In the past eight years, for example, I have used his early framework of six types of rationality (from Reason in Society) to structure a course entitled "Technology & Society," which I teach most semesters. I suspect that many other academics would similarly benefit from a close reading of Diesing's work.. My major concern at this point is that Diesing's work not be ignored.