

An Introduction to the Duke Lectures

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Michael Polanyi's Duke Lectures were given in February and early March of 1964 when Polanyi was in residence in the spring term at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, as the James B. Duke Distinguished Professor in the Department of Religion. William Poteat, a professor in the Department of Religion and a scholar deeply interested in Polanyi's thought, seems to have been primarily responsible for setting up the five-lecture series that had the title "Man in Thought." The titles for the lectures delivered on Monday evenings (and followed by a discussion on Tuesday afternoons) beginning February 10 are as follows: (1) "The Metaphysical Reach of Science," (2) "The Structure of Tacit Knowing," (3) "Commitment to Science," (4) "The Emergence of Man," and (5) "Thought in Society." [1]

The Duke Lectures are one lecture set of several that Polanyi delivered in the early and mid-sixties. All these sets of lectures, as well as Polanyi's 1966 book *The Tacit Dimension*, reflect Polanyi's effort to move from the more expansive philosophic discussion of *Personal Knowledge* to a more focused and concise treatment of his theory of tacit knowing. In November 1961, Polanyi gave the Jefferson, or Virginia, Lectures when he was a distinguished professor for the fall term at the Thomas Jefferson Center for Studies in Political Economy of the University of Virginia. In February 1962, Polanyi gave the McEnerney Lectures at the University of California; these four lectures (available for downloading as audio files from the Polanyi Society web site) are almost identical to the Virginia Lectures. In October 1962, Polanyi gave the Terry Lectures (a set of three) at Yale University. The Duke Lectures were the next set in this sequence.

Polanyi biographers Scott and Moleski note that the first Duke lecture, "The Metaphysical Reach of Science," was written in Oxford in November and December of 1963 and was subsequently published in revised form as "Science and Reality" in 1967 in the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*. [2] They describe the last four Duke Lectures as "essentially a repetition" (254) of the 1962 Terry Lectures. *The Tacit Dimension* is the 1966 book that is based on the 1962 Terry Lectures, but Polanyi's "Acknowledgments" page in this book suggests that the theme of the book goes back to his time at Oxford (1959-1961) and was first treated in public lectures in 1961 at Virginia. He notes that the ideas in the book were developed further in his 1962 stay at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavior Sciences at Stanford, in his time at Duke in 1964 when he gave the Duke Lectures, and in his stay at Wesleyan University at the Center of Advanced Studies in 1965-66. *The Tacit Dimension* is a very compact text that has only about two thirds as many words as the Duke Lectures, but the overlap is clear. [3]

Two copies of the typescripts of the Duke Lectures were given by William Poteat to the Duke University Library and are available there. However, unpublished copies of these materials have for many years circulated among those interested in Polanyi's

thought. The clarity of the writing in this set of Polanyi lectures is noteworthy. Some scholars such as Marjorie Grene have used quotations from, or made references to, the Duke Lectures in publications.[4] Polanyi did intend to publish the Duke Lectures with Doubleday/Anchor, and the publication process was unfolding in the mid-sixties, but Polanyi apparently had earlier signed an agreement with Yale University Press to publish *The Tacit Dimension*. There are eight letters in the Papers of Michael Polanyi which suggest that, although Polanyi was initially advised the Duke Lectures could be published, ultimately Doubleday lawyers decided against publication since they anticipated possible legal problems with Yale University Press.[5] Yale University Press never actually published *The Tacit Dimension*, but Doubleday/Anchor did in the U.S.A. in 1966 and Routledge and Kegan Paul in London in 1967. The project to publish the Duke Lectures was never resurrected after Doubleday/Anchor became the American publisher of *The Tacit Dimension*. Thanks are due to Professor John Polanyi for granting permission to the Polanyi Society to post the Duke Lectures on the Polanyi Society web site.[6]

Endnotes

[1] Several details here and below are drawn from William Taussig Scott and Martin X. Moleski, SJ, *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2005), 254-256. This section of the biography provides a rich account of Polanyi's time at Duke. References below to *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* are in the text in parentheses or are listed by the authors' names and page.

[2] Scott and Moleski, 321, note 22. Polanyi's essay, "The Metaphysical Reach of Science," was published in 1967 in a revised version in *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* (18: 177-196); it is also available in Michael Polanyi, *Society, Economics and Philosophy, Selected Papers*, ed. with an introduction by R. T. Allen (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 225-247. The 1967 published essay was titled "Science and Reality" and this is the same title used for the first Riddell Lecture (i.e., the opening chapter of Polanyi's 1946 book *Science, Faith and Society*). See Polanyi's final footnote in the published 1967 version (*BJPS*, 196. n. 1 or *SEP*, 247, n. 15).

[3] Walter Mead has done a numerical analysis of the literal and paraphrased elements found in both texts. See his essay in *Polanyiana*, Vol. 19:1-2 (available online at <http://polanyi.bme.hu/periodical/period.php?n=2010-01&d=2010-01&p=42>). His analysis also suggests that de-emphasis on the "necessity of commitment" that Polanyi identifies as a feature of *The Tacit Dimension* [see p. x in the 1966 edition and pp. xvii-xix in the 2009 edition and the 1964 "Preface" to the Torchbook edition of *Personal Knowledge*, xi] likely actually comes after the Terry Lectures but before the Duke Lectures and is incorporated in *The Tacit Dimension*.

[4] See Marjorie Grene, *The Knower and the Known* (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1966), 17, 18, 219-220, 241, and 250.

[5] Box 6, Folder 5 in Papers of Michael Polanyi, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A. See Phil Mullins' essay, which complements Walter Mead's essay in *Polanyiana*, Vol. 19.1-2 (available online at <http://polanyi.bme.hu/periodical/period.php?n=2010-01&d=2010-01&p=42>).

[6] Thanks are also due to Richard Gelwick, Marty Moleski, Walter Gulick, Walter Mead and Paul Lewis for help with the project of putting the Duke Lectures on the Polanyi Society web site.

Duke Lectures of Michael Polanyi February-March 1964

Lecture files are PDF files.

Lecture 1: ["The Metaphysical Reach of Science"](#)

Lecture 2: ["The Structure of Tacit Knowing"](#)

Lecture 3: ["Commitment to Science"](#)

Lecture 4: ["The Emergence of Man"](#)

Lecture 5: ["Thought in Society"](#)