

Chapter 4

Common Sense, Myth and Technology in Miki Kiyoshi

Fernando WIRTZ

1. Introduction

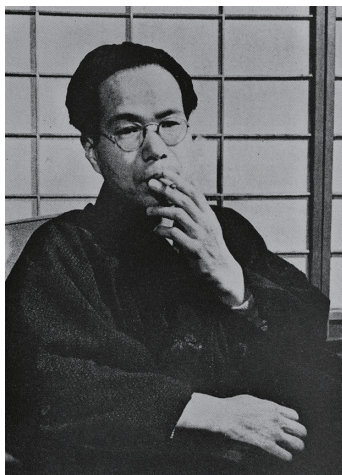


Figure 1. Miki Kiyoshi

Source: (MKZ 1)

In this chapter, I want to look at what Miki concretely says about common sense. I start by talking about the concept of common sense in 1932 in a text from Miki, then I move to the latest Miki in 1941. I will compare Miki's concept with Tosaka's in *Analysis of Common Sense*, and then I will give a little reflection on a possible relation between common sense and technology.

2. *Doxa* as a Form of Social Knowledge

Miki's concept of common sense is not centered on the systematicity of self-evident propositions, but rather on its essential sociality and pragmatism. The work *Shakaikagaku Gairon* (『社会科学概論』 [*Introduction to Social Science*]) (1932) was published in the series *Philosophy* by Iwanami Shoten.

This book is strongly influenced by the sociological work of Max Weber and Karl Mannheim, the latter of whom was Miki's tutor during his time at Heidelberg University. The term "social knowledge" that Miki employs throughout the book does not refer simply to knowledge about how our society works, but also to the forms of knowledge that circulate in a society.

This is also the object of what Mannheim calls "a sociology of thought." The thesis of Mannheim's most famous book, *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) which certainly served as an inspiration for Miki, is that some modes of thought can only be understood by analyzing their social origins. This accounts, for example, for what he terms "prescientific knowledge":

Hence, it is not to be regarded as one of the anomalies of our time, that those methods of thought by means of which we arrive at our most crucial decisions, and through which we seek to diagnose and guide our political and social destiny, have remained unrecognized and therefore inaccessible to intellectual control and self-criticism. The significance of social knowledge grows proportionately with the increasing necessity of regulatory intervention in the social process. This so called pre-scientific inexact mode of thought

however, (which, paradoxically the logicians and philosophers also use when they have to make practical decisions), is not to be understood solely by the use of logical analysis. (Mannheim 1979: 1–2)

Ironically then, even sociology, by trying to provide a rational explanation of society, has to admit that some social processes do not rely on a pure “rational” understanding of facts or decision-making. This point seems especially important for Miki. He is interested in the more fundamental forms of thought that are disseminated in a social context. In this direction. He writes:

For example, common sense is often seen as just pre-scientific knowledge, and is not always the subject of special interest of philosophers, but common sense is a special existence that can never be seen merely as a prescientific stage. The form of knowledge of common sense will be of almost incomparable importance to the case of knowledge about nature, especially in relation to social knowledge. (MKZ 6: 292)

In the course of his description, Miki points to two basic forms of social knowledge: *doxa* and *mythos*. Far from dismissing these forms as pre-scientific (in the sense of “a-scientific”), Miki insists that they should be regarded as proper scientific objects of study and sources of cognition. While the latter refers to the form of knowledge that proliferates in a period of political anxiety, the *doxa* refers to the “normal” state of a society, and Miki explicitly includes common sense as a component of *doxa*.

Doxa expresses a givenness, what is “already” (*sude ni* 既に) given in a society as knowledge. It is a mere immediate assertion. For this

reason, argues Miki, the *doxa* provides no value of truth or falsehood. It does not provide truth (*shin* 真); it establishes correctness (*tadashisa* 正しき). Of course, this does not hinder a “correct” *doxa* from being true, but truth and *doxa* belong fundamentally to different “modes” of being. This is because a *doxa* could be different; it is not eternal in the sense of ideal truth. The contingency of *doxa* is historical and contextual. Nevertheless, the *doxa* is not to be understood as an individual opinion but, rather, as something social, which is where Miki finds its political relevance.

The condition for *doxa* to exist as social knowledge is what Miki calls a society in a “normal state” (*jōtai* 常態), in which there is a tendency toward an equilibrium that is able to maintain a certain social stability. This is what distinguishes an organic historical period from a critical one. Common knowledge is necessary for the reproduction of society, and it operates through the repetition of customs and practices. However, this is not its only function. It is also the field for the social communication of science. In this sense, Miki’s *doxa* is not opposed to science. “What is necessary for the social *praxis* is not the knowledge that is formative, but rather the knowledge that is a conclusion” [MKZ 6: 302]. This is what Miki calls the “making of common sense” (*jōshikika* 常識化), which speaks to knowledge that can be appropriated through the form of a “slogan” (*surōgan* スローガン) (MKZ 6: 302).

Now, as science can become *doxa*, there is also the possibility for *doxa* to become science. Nevertheless, in this case, the *doxa* becomes a dogma; it ceases to naturally incorporate new elements and begins to operate teleologically *in order* to maintain social cohesiveness. In science, there is an element of pursuit that keeps a field perennially open to new theories. When common sense becomes fixated, it becomes a dogma because the limit that it sets “is not inherent in the essence of science.” As such, dogma is not real science, because it is sealed from

new discoveries and paradigm shifts.

As mentioned earlier, *doxa* is only to be thought of with its counterpart: myth. Later in his text, Miki says that since human consciousness mediates between the subject and the object, the fact (*jijitsu* 事実) and the being (*sonzai* 存在), *doxa* and myth offer two ways in which to relate to this dialectic: while myth is the consciousness of the transcendental discontinuity between fact and being, *doxa* posits within the awareness of its internal continuity (for the role of myth and ideology in Miki see also Stromback 2020; Wirtz 2020).

3. Common Sense and Philosophy

In 1940, Miki published his *Tetsugaku Nyūmon* (『哲学入門』 [*Introduction to Philosophy*]), a product of a series of lectures that he gave in 1938. As the title indicates, this book is not directed at specialists, but at a general audience. There, he assigns an entire section to the notion of common sense, where he shares the following definition:

Common sense is the accumulation of social experience, and many of our actions are carried out according to common sense.

Common sense is, first of all, active (*kōi-teki* 行為的) knowledge. Common sense is said to be practical, but practical means empirical and active. Actions, as actions in the environment, are technical (*gijutsu-teki* 技術的), and common sense is always technical knowledge. Practical means also everyday-like (*nichijō-teki* 日常的), and common sense is related to daily life, and its characteristic is that it is everyday-like. (MKZ 7: 33)

It should be stressed that, for Miki, as Nishida's student, experience

is never merely passive. Therefore, this “accumulation of social experience” does not refer to an imposed sedimentation of habits, but instead, to an active self-construction of traditions. In this light, common sense is “active.” This is also observed in the “negative resistance” in which common sense sometimes manifests. The pragmatism of common sense reminds us of Miki’s concept of *doxa*. Here, he also defines common sense in nature as simply assertive and organic. This is the condition for maintaining social spatial cohesion, although it may vary from place to place. What is clear is that while the common sense of one society can be in contradiction with the common sense of another society, within one society, common sense functions harmonically. “In a certain society, one common sense does not collide with another common sense, and if it collides, it is not called common sense” (MKZ 7: 36).

While there are many similarities, it can also be observed that Miki seems to exclude the disruptive element of myth from this new formulation. In this sense, he seems to emphasize social homogeneity at the cost of diminishing the revolutionary potential. However, this is only partially accurate. Even if it is true that Miki seems to relegate his notion of myth, he also employs the term “critical spirit” (*hihan-teki seishin* 批判的精神) to refer to the internal tendency toward change that arises in a society and pushes common sense to its limits, destroying it. Nevertheless, common sense always reinvents itself, as old conventions are replaced by new ones.

Now, science, under the impulse of the critical spirit, transcends common sense as it elevates to a logical, theoretical, and abstract point of view. However, as mentioned before, common sense cannot be eliminated. Here, Miki explains that cultural progress is the result of the scientification of common sense. It is here that technology comes into play:

As science becomes technology and enters into the everyday life, it enters into the common sense. Electricity becomes common sense when electric lights and trains are made, and it becomes a lack of common sense not to know about electricity. This is because common sense is originally knowledge from the position of action, and science is also actually transferred to the position of action in [the case of] technology. The fact that common sense and science are different does not mean that it is impossible or meaningless to make science common sense. It is important for the progress of common sense and the development of science to make science common sense, but it requires a special method. It is a lack of common sense to not respect science just because it is different, and it is also unscientific to think that common sense can be completely replaced by science. (MKZ 7: 42)

4. Tosaka's Analysis and Everydayness

Another author who was actively engaged during this time with the concept of common sense was Tosaka Jun, Miki's younger colleague [see Goto 2008]. In 1935, Tosaka published what is now his best-known work, *Nihon Ideorogī Ron* (『日本イデオロギー論』 [*Japanese Ideology*]). Included was the text “*Jōshiki*” *no Bunseki* (「〈常識〉の分析」 [*Analysis of “Common Sense”*]), an essential text to understand Tosaka's articulation of his theory of ideology.

Common sense has two contradictory aspects when contemplated commonsensically (*jōshiki-teki* 常識的). On the one hand, it means non- (or anti-) scientific, non- (or anti-) philosophical, non- (or anti-) literary, etc., negative or anti- knowledge. On the other hand,

it means, on the contrary, established, normal, socially applicable, practical, sound and common knowledge. (TJZ 2: 251)

So, what Tosaka finds irritating in the traditional concept of common sense is that it implies the idea of an average kind of knowledge.

To put it in very simple terms, if such a thing were possible, it would not be the same to sum up all the knowledge that each individual has as to calculate the average amount of knowledge of the totality. In a similar sense, if, in a given group of people, a minority acquires a higher level of knowledge (for example, by studying), this does not mean *per se* that the common sense of the whole group improves. Moreover, even if common sense is understood as “average common sense,” this does not explain how real common sense works. As a consequence, Tosaka draws attention to the ideal aspect of common sense, that is, to its function as an ideal or goal. Similar to bourgeois electoral systems, argues Tosaka, public opinion (*seron* 世論) does not reflect the real interests of the majority but, instead, works as a norm that pushes opinion in a certain direction. As a result, we can affirm that the two confronting sides of the concept of common sense reveal their source in the social tension between aristocratic and bourgeois understandings of the term.

To surpass the limitations of this commodified concept of common sense, Tosaka’s proposal is to rethink it from the perspective of what he calls “everydayness” (*nichijōsei* 日常性), a central notion of his philosophy. “When it comes to where the regulations of common sense go beyond the regulations of quantitative averageness and majority, it comes down to what can be called the principle of everydayness that I first mentioned before.” In his text from 1930, *The Principle of Everydayness and Historical Time*, he points out that history should be thought of from the concrete actuality of daily activities and practices.

This perspective is exemplified through the worker's temporality. For workers, work has to be finished "today," and they are not allowed to think in a wide and ideal historical time. Their locus of praxis is the everyday.

Nonetheless, how does everydayness translate itself into the debate surrounding common sense? For Tosaka, it is clear that journalism should play a central role in this regard. He writes: "This journalistic function of the newspaper, which opposes the academic function, is the most accessible proof of the principle of everydayness." Thus, it is possible to assert that, for Tosaka, the true manifestation of common sense is to be found in the activity of critical journalism. This is not the journalism that reproduces the views of the dominant class; it is the critical journalism that evaluates reality from the quotidian perspective of the working class. Journalism is, therefore, not something imposed to be consumed; it is a necessity of the masses themselves who are embedded in the temporality of the daily occurrence of facts.

5. Technology and Everydayness

It is not my goal here to evaluate Miki's political collaborationism or to defend it. It is quite clear that some aspects of his later thought, especially after 1935, can be read as a justification of Japanese imperialism (see Kim 2007; Harrington 2009). His concept of common sense somehow echoes this political development. While in 1932, in *Introduction to Social Science*, the concept of *doxa* was still in a dialectical relation with the transformative concept of myth, in his *Introduction to Philosophy*, a much more homogeneous notion seems to take hold. Unlike Tosaka, Miki is not interested in the internal tensions of common sense, because he grasps the concept as a holistic social phenomenon. Nevertheless, I would like to focus instead on Miki's

constant emphasis on reappraising common sense as an element within culture, technology, and even philosophy. For him, philosophy itself should be grounded in common sense's pragmatic modality.

Miki opposes a narrow understanding of technology that separates culture (*bunka* 文化) from civilization (*bunmei* 文明), where the former is “spiritual” and the latter “material” (MKZ 13: 464–474). Such an understanding of technology as opposed to culture privileges the view of Western supremacy. For Miki, no technical innovation should be made without consulting common sense. It is true that many elements of his reflections on common sense can be described as populist: his rejection of “politics,” his indistinct notion of people (or masses), and the idea that a good leader is one who carefully listens to and interprets people's demands. However, there are some aspects that go beyond populism, such as his highlighting of the inevitability of common sense as a function in every society, its pragmatism, activeness, and technicity. These elements are compatible with an understanding of everydayness as a field of active innovation.

However, can we think of global common sense in relation to technology? When Miki writes that electricity becomes common sense, he probably does not mean that people necessarily have the same specialized knowledge of electricity as that of a physicist or an engineer. In a similar way, our practical contact with computers, cellphones, vehicles, or medical implements is not based on a direct understanding of scientific knowledge, which does not prevent us from using them. This “parallel” lower system of knowledge that treats high-tech from a low-tech pragmatic perspective, precisely because it does not belong to academic institutional networks and their restrained norms, is able to introduce technical innovations for itself. Thus, even if common sense cannot structurally change a certain technology, it can modify its use or create small-scale variations. Arguably, this implies, rather,

a broad notion of technology, but this would be precisely one of the achievements of grassroots innovation to re-signify and expand our understanding of technology. These innovations can adopt different forms, from using an online platform in a totally unforeseen way to local sustainable gardening. Improvements in farming and its tools and new ways of cooking or drying food should also be included here. Empirical evidence largely supports the fact that technological innovation does not require direct contact with academic institutions (For more detailed information about “grassroots innovations,” (see, for example, Seyfang and Smith 2007; Ross et al. 2012; Singh et al. 2020; Khalil et al. 2020).

For this reason, disregarding the *doxa* of a society from the point of view of philosophical narratives would insinuate an unnecessary epistemological reduction. In this respect, as the Argentinean philosopher Rodolfo Kusch (1976) once wrote, “In Europe, ‘*doxa*’ and ‘*noesis*’ are closer. They have a cultural continuity. And our problem is that we live far from Western *noesis* and we do not know anything about our *doxa*, because we segregate it. But it turns out that living is *doxa*, that is, opinion, and culture.” In a global geopolitical scenario, many *doxas* are replaced by the logic of capitalist realism in view of the fact that they are unable to generate large-scale technological profit. However, the same way that Miki does not understand ideology as false consciousness, *doxa* is also an active process rather than a passive one. Thus, intertwined cognitive, social, economic, institutional, and technological processes emerge in the middle of common sense and enable us to understand the circulation of social knowledge in a dynamic way.

References

Abbreviations:

MKZ. 1978. *Miki Kiyoshi Zenshū 20* (『三木清全集 20』 [*The Complete Works of Miki Kiyoshi 20*]), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten

TJZ. 1967. *Tosaka Jun Zenshū 5* (『戸坂潤全集 5』 [*The Complete Works of Tosaka Jun*]). Tokyo: Keisō Shobō.

Other sources:

Goto, Y. 2008. Tosaka Jun no Jōshiki gainen to Miki Kiyoshi (「戸坂潤の常識概念と、三木清」 [The Concept of Common Sense in Tosaka Jun and Miki Kiyoshi]). *Toshokan Jōhou Media Kenkyū* (『図書館情報メディア研究』 [*Library, Information and Media Studies, University of Tsukuba*]), 5(2), pp.57–87.

Harrington, L. E. 2009. Miki Kiyoshi and the Shōwa Kenkyūkai: The Failure of World History. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, 17(1), pp. 43–72.

Khalil, M. B., Jacobs, B. C., McKenna, K. and Kuruppu, N. 2020. Female Contribution to Grassroots Innovation for Climate Change Adaptation in Bangladesh. *Climate and Development*, 12(7), pp. 664–676.

Kim, J. N. 2007. The Temporality of Empire: The Imperial Cosmopolitanism of Miki Kiyoshi and Tanabe Hajime. In Sven Saaler (ed.), *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders*. London/ New York: Routledge, pp. 151–167.

Kusch, R. 1976. *Geocultura del hombre americano*. Buenos Aires: F. García Cambeiro.

Mannheim, Karl. 1979. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. (Louis Wirth and Edward Shils trans.). London: Routledge.

Ross, Tracy, Mitchell, Valerie A., and May, Andrew J. 2012. Bottom-up Grassroots Innovation in Transport: Motivations, Barriers and Enablers. *Transportation Planning and Technology* 35(4), pp. 469–489.

- Seyfang, Gill, and Smith, Adrian. 2007. Grassroots Innovations for Sustainable Development: Towards a New Research and Policy Agenda. *Environmental Politics* 16(4), pp. 584–603.
- Singh, Sonal H., Bhowmick, B., Sindhav, B., and Eesley, D. 2020. Determinants of Grassroots Innovation: An Empirical Study in the Indian Context. *Innovation* 22(3), pp. 270–289.
- Stromback, Dennis. 2020. Miki Kiyoshi and the Overcoming of German and Japanese Philosophy. *European Journal of Japanese Philosophy*, 5, pp. 103–143.
- Wirtz, Fernando. 2020. Myth and Ideology in Miki Kiyoshi. *European Journal of Japanese Philosophy*, 5, pp. 75–102.

Fernando WIRTZ



Chapter 4: Common Sense, Myth and Technology
in Miki Kiyoshi

Assistant Professor, University of Kyoto

Fernando Wirtz holds a Licentiate in Philosophy from the University of Buenos Aires and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen. During his Ph.D. studies he spent one research semester at the University of Ritsumeikan and is a postdoc fellow at the University of Kyoto. His postdoc project, funded by the Thyssen Foundation, is about the concept of myth in the Japanese philosophy during the 1930s. Besides Japanese philosophy, he also specializes in German idealism, intercultural philosophy and philosophy of myth. He is also a board member of the *Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Philosophie* (<http://www.int-gip.de>).