

A Conversation with Nishida: The Future

The master was standing by the window, his hand held above his brow as if to shield his eyes from the sun. He is squinting, appearing to be watching for someone.

“Who are you looking for, *sensei*?” I ask.

“Not who. What.”

“Alright, then *what* are you looking for?”

“I am looking for the future. If you believe you can see what is ahead, then I can do the same. I expect it should be along any time now,” he replies quite casually.

Nishida has always been skeptical of this thesis inquiry. Perhaps making a claim on ‘the future of organization’ is a tad grandiose, but a doctoral investigation is, by definition, new knowledge. And that necessarily concerns itself with what becomes foundational for the future. I decide to play along.

“Is it here yet?” I demand, like a petulant child.

“Not quite,” he responds.

I wait for a minute, my eyes fixed on Nishida’s unflinching gaze. “How about now?”

“Still waiting.”

Another two minutes pass, as do many pedestrians with far better things to do than stare out a window for something that will inevitably never arrive. Ahhhhh...

I pull up a straight-back, wooden chair from among Nishida's sparse furnishings and take a seat, all the time keeping my eyes on the master. I know where this is leading and, for a change, I think I am prepared. But then again, I've been fooled by Nishida before. This time, though, I decide to wait out his game.

For forty-two minutes, Nishida stands by the window, nary shifting his stare. *Zen-zen*. He glances towards my direction and sees my bemusement at his apparent folly. He is clearly annoyed that, for once, I was not drawn in by the temptation of his seeming absurdity.

“You sit and laugh at me,” he scolds, “an old man, standing here for nearly an hour in pursuit of the same end as you? Have you no pity? Have you no shame in sitting there watching my suffering?”

“You may have been suffering, but I am not,” I say, performing my best Nishida imitation. “Our objectives cannot be more dissimilar.”

“Oh?” he asks. “Perhaps it is your turn to provide enlightenment for the lesson.”

“Here,” I offer. “Sit.” He plops his ancient frame onto the hard-backed chair. “You claim to have been looking for the future—”

“As do you!” he interjects.

“Not exactly.”

“And how is that?” The eyebrow raises.

“I cannot predict the future, because the future never arrives. It is always, well, in the future. What I am looking for is what we can anticipate now—the *future* of the future.”

“Ah yes.” Nishida nods his head, quite pleased that his student has begun to understand. “And the future of the future—”

“—is the present¹. I see you’ve been reading my McLuhan books.”

¹ McLuhan & Nevitt, 1972, p. 134.