

## **Order Out of Chaos: Art, Ritual, and the Pandemic**

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**Abstract:** The pandemic caused internal chaos that continues to plague the world as we look toward solutions that we hope will bring us back to the normalcy of our pre-pandemic lives. Ancient peoples believed that there is constant change in life which causes various forms of suffering, making the phenomenon of the pandemic not that unusual, in the grand scheme of things. This paper claims that if this is so, then what is “normal” and “abnormal” seem to differ only in terms of *degrees* of change and suffering, and not in terms of absence or presence of suffering. This implies that the solution to the current crisis is not to find a way to go back to “normal”, but to find a way to cope with disruptions that may come our way. Ancient traditions have prescribed engagement in art and the performance of ritual as coping mechanisms in times of crisis. Using Nietzschean and Buddhist insights on life and suffering, and Nietzsche’s Aesthetics as framework, this paper shows how creativity and ritual have been used by different traditions to address disruptions in life, and how we may follow their lead to survive the current crisis and promote holistic healing.

**Keywords:** Art, Ritual, Nietzschean Aesthetics, Buddhism, Pandemic

### **Introduction**

Any long-standing crisis is distressing not only because it disturbs the comfortable routine of everyday life, but even more so because of the chaos it causes inside, disturbing our psychological well-being. Prevented from engaging in activities that we have gotten used to and unable to do things “as usual,” we are left disoriented and unable to cope. The COVID-19 pandemic is one such crisis that keeps us feeling anxious as we try to navigate its difficult and unpredictable road. We wish to be rid of it. We wish for it to be over so that we could go back to “normal” and go on with our lives the way we used to, the way we liked it. The vaccine promises hope and we look forward to getting back to the way things were before COVID-19. But what was the world like in pre-pandemic times? How did things use to be? Was it really that different from the way things are now?

Many ancient world views are based on the belief that there is constant change in life which causes various forms of suffering, making the phenomenon of the pandemic not that unusual, in the grand scheme of things. This paper claims that if this is so, then what is “normal” and “abnormal” seem to differ only in terms of *degrees* of change and

suffering, and not in terms of absence or presence of suffering, or in terms of constancy and disruption. This, in turn, implies that the solution to the current crisis is not really to find a way to go back to the “normal” that we used to know, but to find a way to cope with it and other distressing events that may come our way. Ancient traditions have prescribed engagement in art and the performance of ritual as coping mechanisms in times of crisis. Using Nietzschean and Buddhist insights on life and suffering, and Nietzsche’s Aesthetics as framework, this paper aims to show how creativity and ritual have been used by different traditions in the past to address disruptions in life and the world, and how we may follow their lead to survive the current crisis and promote holistic healing.

### **Change, Suffering, and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Both Nietzsche and the Buddha, although contemplating on life from different perspectives, concluded that there is suffering in it. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche (1995, p. 8) writes of the tragedy of life,

....King Midas hunted in the forest a long time for the wise Silenus....[and] asked [him] what was the best and most desirable of all things for man [sic]. ...the demigod...gave a shrill laugh and broke out into these words: ‘Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do ye compel me to tell you what it were most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is beyond your reach forever: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you—is quickly to die.’

The Greeks, according to Nietzsche, “knew and felt the terror and horror of existence” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 8) all reflected in their tragic narratives. The only way they were able to survive it was to shield themselves from direct contact with it.

Siddhartha Gautama, achieving Buddhahood 2,500 years earlier, came to the realization that there is suffering in life. But the truth of suffering that he spoke of is one that results from a misunderstanding of the nature of reality. Everything, the Buddha observed, is impermanent (*anicca*). Things constantly change, but some processes of change are so minute and so slow as to give the illusion of permanence, thus, making it easy to think of them as permanent and cling to them as such. The *Samyukta Agama* relates that the Buddha said,

“You should contemplate form as impermanent. One who contemplates like this has right insight. One who has right insight arouses disenchantment. One who has disenchantment eradicates delight and lust. One who eradicates delight and lust, I say, liberates the mind. (“Discourse on Impermanence,” *Samyukta Agama*, Ch. 1, pp. 6-7)

“Not understanding form, not having knowledge regarding it, not eradicating [desire for] it, [1b] not being free from desire for it, one is unable to eradicate dukkha. In the same way not understanding feeling ... perception ... formations

... consciousness, not having knowledge regarding it, not eradicating [desire for] it, not being free from desire for it, one is unable to eradicate dukkha. (“Discourse on Not Understanding,” *Samyukta Agama*, Ch.3, p. 9)

Simply put, all forms are constantly in the process of changing. To be deluded into thinking that anything lasts poses the danger of attachment which, when the seemingly imperceptible changes finally manifest themselves, give rise to suffering. Why are things not the way they used to be? They never were! We held on to something that could never be held. Birth turns to old age, and old age paves the way for death. Things wear out. The hands of time constantly turn. The liberated mind, the mind free of enchantments, understands this, is free from the dangers of attachment, and is free from suffering. But to liberate the mind seems to be a most difficult thing to achieve.

It must be noted that the Buddha was raised as a *ksatriya*, royalty in the Hindu tradition which also holds the belief that the world constantly changes. In the Hindu *Puranas*, the god Vishnu is said to rest supported by the seven-headed celestial serpent, *Ananta*, floating in the endless ocean. His consort Lakshmi, massages his legs and he falls asleep. As he sleeps, he dreams, and a lotus flower grows out of his navel, which reveals the creator-god, Brahma. When Brahma opens his eyes, the whole world comes to be. When he closes his eyes, the world disappears. The cycle continues until the great dissolution, when the lotus flower on which Brahman sits retreats back to Vishnu’s navel and Vishnu awakes. The world returns as Brahma reappears when Vishnu falls asleep and dreams again. (Dimmit, 1978)

The Hindus call this great cycle, *Mahayuga*, believing that each time, the whole universe is born in perfection, becoming less and less so after each rebirth until Shiva, the Lord of the Dance (the *Nataraja*) dances the world into total destruction, so that Brahma can create it anew. (Dimmit and Van Buitenen, 1978; Campbell, 1990)

....Siva is regarded as the agent of this inevitable universal dissolution, whenever it occurs, just as Brahma is the agent of each new creation. These gods act as

agents of the cosmic process, however, and so does Visnu, the preserver, as well. The gods do not act by will or whim in their creative and destructive acts, but according to the *inevitable pulsations of a dynamic universe*. (Dimmit and Van Buitenen, 1978, p 151) [emphasis supplied]

This Hindu cosmogonic myth also accepts the inevitability of change. Just like all origin myths, it shows that birth, even of universes, is followed by decay, by the process of wearing away from perfection to imperfection, to absolute dissolution. Again, there is nothing to cling to, as everything slips away. If we don't focus on the moment, we lose everything, and suffer.

This is one of the core teachings of Zen Buddhism, the Japanese form of Buddhism. Everything is *empty*, being a product of conditions, and is therefore never self-existent. But since, as stated earlier, those conditions that give rise to things are never permanent, things also devolve into nothingness as soon as they arise. To an unenlightened mind, this can only cause panic, and it takes a very different perspective to cure this. The following parable best exemplifies the Zen attitude.

A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled, the tiger after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, mother tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him.

Two mice one white and one black, little by little started to gnaw away the vine. The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. How sweet it tasted! (Reps, n.d., pp. 22-23)

Living in the moment is our only chance for joy. If we worry about the future or regret the past, we waste everything, since we have no control about either one of them. The world will continue to unfurl

and go back to nothingness no matter what attitude we take. It is therefore best to enjoy the present moment, unencumbered by the mistakes of the past or the fear of the future.

Similarly, Lao Zi, reputed author of the *Daodejing*, which is one of the core texts in Daoism, observes the comings and goings of things in the world. He writes that Dao, the eternal reality, is the source and end of all things. For as they arise out of Dao, they all also end in Dao.

The Great Tao flows everywhere  
All things are born from it,  
yet it doesn't create them.  
It pours itself into its work,  
yet it makes no claim.  
It nourishes infinite worlds,  
yet it doesn't hold onto them.  
Since it is merged with all things  
and hidden in their hearts,  
it can be called humble.  
Since all things vanish into it  
and it alone endures,  
it can be called great...(Ch. 34)

One of the central ideas in Daoism is that of the Yin and Yang. Traditionally associated with the shadowed and lit part of a mountain, respectively, Yin and Yang came to represent the opposites in the world. But they are not mere opposition. Yin and Yang are a dynamic pair, each one containing the other, showing that everything nurtures within itself the seeds of its own opposite. Thus, reversal is inevitable when something is brought to the end of its limits. The *Tao Te Ching* says, "Return is the movement of the Tao, [y]ielding is the way of the Tao." (Ch. 12). For instance,

Fill your bowl to the brim  
and it will spill.  
Keep sharpening your knife  
and it will blunt....(Ch. 9)

Yet, things continue on their natural processes, and Yin gives way to Yang, and Yang gives way to Yin, round and round, without end, for this is the Way, the Dao.

Colors blind the eye  
Sounds deafen the ear.  
Flavors numb the taste  
Thoughts weaken the mind.  
Desires wither the heart.

The Master observes the world  
but trusts his inner vision.  
He allows things to come and go.  
His heart is open as the sky. (Ch. 12)

Finally, just like the cosmogonies of other traditions, the *Tao Te Ching* affirms that “All things are born of being. Being is born of non-being (Ch. 40), echoing the Buddhist pronouncement that “Form is voidness, and the void is form.” (Hsuan, 2000, p. 5)

Like the *Tao Te Ching*, another classic in Ancient Chinese thought that is based on the Yin and Yang is the *Yi Ching*, or *The Book of Changes*. As a divinatory tool, it uses a solid line or a Yang line to indicate a positive response to a query, and a broken line or an Yin line as a negative response. As the title reveals, it holds the belief that the cosmos is always undergoing a process of change which is based on the movement of opposites that, as explained above, passes from one to the other, in an endless cycle. Failing to understand these cosmic workings causes a rigid mind to suffer for it tends to cling where, again, there is nothing permanent to which one can cling. On the other hand, going with the flow of these processes allows one to glide along transformations, knowing that nothing is permanent, making room for hope that even an unfavorable situation will eventually change to a more favorable one. (Wilhelm, 1979; Yu 2010) The lines in an *Yi Ching* oracle are always *moving* lines. Yin turns to Yang, and Yang turns to Yin. (Reifler, 1974)

Among the Native Americans, the idea of time passing and effecting change is accepted as a fact of life. Gifted with an inherently ecological view, they generally accept reality as observed in the workings of nature. Keenly aware of the agricultural cycle, for instance, a seventy-year-old Huron says, “What! Would you wish that there should be no dried trees in the woods and no dead branches on a tree that is growing old?” (Nerburn, 1999, p. 48) On suffering and death, Big Elk, an Omaha Chief says,

Do not grieve. Misfortunes will  
happen to the wisest and best of  
men. Death will come, always out  
of season. It is the command of the  
Great Spirit, and all nations and  
people must obey. What is past  
and what cannot be prevented  
should not be grieved  
for....Misfortunes do not flourish

particularly in our lives—they  
grow everywhere. (Nerburn, 1999,  
p. 48)

All of these ancient world views are cognizant of the fact of change and how change, inasmuch as it breaks the illusion of permanence, leads to suffering. Naturally, there are changes that are welcome, particularly those that improve a situation. The philosophy of the *Yi Ching*, for instance, is founded on this. But for the most part, change is difficult because it creates chaos. It disturbs the order that one has gotten used to.

The phenomenon of the pandemic has brought such a change. Like all catastrophes, it is a drastic change, one that reveals the illusion of permanence. Suddenly, our routine is broken. All the things on which we rely on a daily basis disappear. We are cut off from things and people that can lull us into thinking that everything is going to be well. We start thinking in binary terms of “normal” and “abnormal.” We identify this as abnormal and long for the return of normalcy. But as the world views discussed above show, a more holistic perspective will allow for the understanding that such changes, whether as drastic as a volcano erupting or the slow formation of rings around a tree trunk, are in fact normal. The world, as Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus described it, is in constant flux.

If these peoples knew since the ancient times how terrible life could be, as Nietzsche said, then it is worth looking into how they coped with the chaos to make life bearable.

### Dramatic Arts, Sand Painting, and Some Good Manners

As Nietzsche relates, the Greek’s response to King Midas’ predicament, having been given the truth about life by Silenus, is art. He is convinced that the institutionalization of the Greek drama, specifically tragedy, was the ancient Greek’s way of shielding themselves from the terrors of life. Tragedy, because it speaks of the unpleasant truths about ourselves in an indirect manner—through actors on stage—allows us to confront these truths in an “enlivening, even intoxicating” way, offering us “a paradoxical form of redemption.” (Ridley, 2007, pp. 9-10) Tragedy shows life as it is—full of anguish, despair and frustrations—where the hero always perishes in spite of whatever victory he might

achieve. But it portrays it in an organized way, through characters acting out an organized plot. It is like looking at a brilliant light through tinted glass, without which one would be blinded. The art of tragedy serves as a filter, a pair of gloves that allows us to hold something terribly hot without getting burned. It offers a flimsy veil of illusion, just enough to allow us to handle life without perishing out of terror.

Aristotle agrees that the tragic emotions of pity and terror—what mythologist Joseph Campbell calls “the preconditions of existence” (Campbell, 1997, p.236)—are cleansed through witnessing the performance of tragedy that portrays the same. In place of it, a sense of wonder arises, and in the meantime, one is able to think clearly and carry on, until these emotions are again pent up in the business of living life. (Ch. 6, *The Poetics*)

In the same vein, the Hindus developed their dramatic arts based on the principle of *rasa*, literally “flavor,” rooted in Vedantic sacred literature (*Vedas* and *Upanishads*) which guided the performance of a sacred ritual (Sankaran, 1973) Bharata, author of the *Natyashastra* which defines classical Hindu dramatic dance arts, lists eight sentiments or *rasas*: fear, joy, anger, wonderment, disgust, love, heroism, and compassion.<sup>1</sup> (Bharatamuni, 1951) Latent in the spectator, these emotions are triggered in a more generalized fashion such that they become universal, removed from ordinary individual experiences, turning them into a spiritual phenomenon. The experience of *rasa* in this manner fulfills the Vedantic goal of eliminating the suffering ego (*atman*) and allows spectators a glimpse of the eternal, beyond the cycles of rebirth (*samsara*).

...the contemplation of a work of art leads to an attitude of mind which is quite impersonal. Whatever strain of conscious effort may be required for getting into that attitude, when once it is attained man forgets himself altogether; and he will be aware then of nothing beyond the object or the situation portrayed by the artist...and probably as a consequence of such self-forgetfulness, the contemplation of

art yields a kind of spontaneous joy. (Hiriyanna, 2017)

Self-forgetfulness is also the goal of mandala-making. The practice of creating beautifully decorated circle (Sanskrit *mandala*) is shared by many cultures, both primitive and otherwise, all over the world. They often represent the world, the *kosmos* or order, drawn in order to provide some bearing (e.g., cardinal directions) for the performers and practitioners of ritual. (Fincher, 1991). Perhaps the most popular and intentional use of it is found in the Indian traditions, both Vedic and non-Vedic. In Buddhism, in especially in Tibetan Buddhism, the monks create them as a form of meditation. (Fincher, 1991) With colored sand, they spend days with intense concentration building multicolored and intricate mandala designs, only to destroy them in one sweep.

Mandalas have outer, inner and secret meanings. On the outer level, they represent the world in its divine form. On the inner level they represent a map by which the ordinary human mind is transformed into an enlightened mind, and on the secret level they depict the perfect balance of the subtle energies of the body and mind. The creation of a sand painting is said to effect purification and healing on all three levels. (Roberts and Register, 2004, p. 20)

When monks destroy the mandalas that they labor over for days, it is to remind them of the impermanence of all things (Roberts and Register, 2004), a thought that is central to Buddhist philosophy. The act of destroying in one moment something that takes days to build is therefore a practice in letting go, in non-attachment, curing the illusion of permanence that one might otherwise cling to, thereby eliminating the possibility of suffering from disillusionment.

Similarly, Zen monks in Japan from the 1300s through the 1500s, together with the development of their particular version of the tea ceremony, helped develop the art of *Wabi-Sabi*. Literally referring to something that is old, lonely or

<sup>1</sup> A ninth *rasa*, tranquility, was later added by commentators. (Sankaran 1973)

desolate, *Wabi-sabi* draws out beauty from the ugly and imperfect, blurring the binary oppositions that often create desire and, therefore, suffering. (Juniper, 2003; Koren, 2008) Often poor and unable to acquire additional resources, they managed their humble temples and teahouses by using objects they found in their environment—wildflowers and broken bamboo as vases for the blooms, stones, driftwood, and the like. Unlike fine art, these objects are not normally looked upon as beautiful. Their imperfections being so obvious, they also display the process of decay. But surrounding themselves with these, the monks were constantly reminded of the impermanent, the simple, and most of all, the randomness of nature. These objects “all came to symbolize *mujo*, which is the Buddhist tenets of impermanence and continuous flux.” (Juniper, 2003, p. 11) Again, these symbols serve as reminders to see things as they are and avoid attachment, lessening the possibility of suffering due to a mistaken notion of reality.

The Zen ritual of the tea (*chado*), therefore, is imbued with the aesthetics of *Wabi-Sabi*, where the slow, intentional movements involved in making tea become a form of meditation, performed in order to cleanse the mind of all anxieties brought about by the cares of the day.

The accomplished tea practitioner was someone who could orchestrate all these elements—and the guests in attendance—into a quietly exciting artistic event that thematically cohered. At its artistic zenith, realizing the universe of *wabi-sabi* in its fullness was the underlying goal of tea. (Koren, 2008, pp. 31-32)

In the tea ceremony, therefore, both ritual and art come together in order to soothe the soul. The Zen monk Ikkyu “promoted the tea ceremony and even went so far as to suggest that it could be more productive than hours spent in solitary meditation.” Juniper (2003, p. 37)

Also steeped in ritual and respect for the natural environment, the Native American tribes, like all tribal communities, have rituals for every aspect of life, carrying the person across the changes brought about the various life-stages and events in nature. There are rituals for birth, for coming of age, for marriage, and death. The communities have rituals for hunting, thanksgiving, purification,

healing, and annual or seasonal rituals to acknowledge and accept change. (Mails, 1991) For instance, when there is an infant death, *The Constitution of the Five Nations* states that

...mourning shall continue only five days.

Then shall you gather the little boys and girls at the house of mourning, and at the funeral feast a speaker shall address the children and bid them be happy once more, even though by a death, gloom has been cast over them.

Then shall the black clouds roll away and the sky shall show blue once more. Then shall the children be again in sunshine. (Nerburn, p.48)

Rituals address the *physical* and the *psychical*. (Mails, 1991) The ceremonies must be performed properly, and participants “must exercise control over their emotion and hearts” allowing for an expansion of consciousness as they experience something beyond “the realm of the ordinary...” (Mails, 1991, 32) Rituals therefore help control the immediate emotional reactions to events that either cause difficulty or disorientation—those that cause us to “fall out of sync” with the workings of the universe. Rituals put us and the world aright, so to speak. Just like the Japanese tea ceremony, the order they provide have a calming effect that combats the chaos that a new or different situation brings about. They help repair the world gone awry. It is said of the Hopi, for instance, that they

...might be staggered or knocked down by adversity, but being strengthened and advised through rituals—give in advance what they needed to defend themselves—they immediately fought back and were soon on their feet and going again. (Mails, 1991, 83)

Like mandala-making among the Tibetan Buddhists, the Navajos also blur the distinction between ritual and art in their practice of sand painting, often performed in coming of age, magic or healing rituals. Like the mandalas, they are circular drawings on the earth, painted with earth, seeds and other natural materials or objects that are meant to

be ephemeral. (Cohen, 1987) They mimic the cosmos, with the cardinal directions, meant to symbolize the mending of a world broken by change, whether physical or psychical. After the ritual, the sand painting is also swept away. (Berlo, 2014)

China's greatest teacher, Kongzi, also understands the significance the ritual even in human relationships. Ritual regulates emotions which are likely to cause internal chaos when provoked by unpredictable or unforeseeable events. (Puett, 2016) Kongzi preaches the cultivation of the goodness in one's self in order to become a *junzi* or an ideal person, a model of ethical and proper conduct. Cultivation requires repetition of the desired behavior (*yi*) so as it becomes second nature to one's personality, which then develops benevolence (*ren*). This is the reason that Kongzi focuses on *li*, or ritual. It is said in the *Analects*, "The Master said, Once a *junzi* has studied broadly in patterns, and constrained them with *li*, indeed he will never turn his back on them." (VI, 27) Rituals lead to transformation of the self. Every time one performs good or proper behavior, she becomes a good person. Although it may start as something one does by rote, eventually, it becomes deeper and gets imbibed to be part and parcel of one's being. As Kongzi himself says,

At fifteen, I set my heart on learning. At 30, I took my stand.  
At forty, I was without confusion.  
At fifty I knew the command of *Tian*. At sixty, I heard it with a compliant ear. At seventy, I follow the desires of my heart and do not overstep the bounds. (II, 4)

A person such as he is a person of *ren* and has the power to harmonize the world through proper and benevolent relationships with others. He or she creates order in a world that is usually made messy by its constant changing.

### Art and Ritual: Order Out of Chaos

As the foregoing shows, the idea that the world is in constant flux, which causes suffering, is observed and accepted by major traditions in the world. Terrible catastrophes bring this fact to the

fore, but it does not mean that the continuous steady change does not happen from moment to moment. Change, therefore, is never absent, and thus, the possibility of suffering is always present. But there are degrees of change, and we often only react to the big and sudden, "life-changing" events. Blind to the fact that life is always changing, the lack of internal preparedness (not to mention the lack of external one) throws us into complete chaos, just as the pandemic has done and continues to do. We, therefore, might learn from the Ancient peoples who responded to this human condition with art and ritual.

Engagement in art<sup>2</sup> as the Greeks (and Nietzsche), the Hindus, the Buddhists, and the Japanese have shown, has a quieting effect on the psyche. It has a kind of a mesmerizing function that brings a spectator or an artist to a different plane of consciousness so that her awareness expands or gets out of the usual narrow confines of unreflective everyday living. For the Greeks, according to Aristotle, art in the form of tragedy purifies the spectator of the arresting emotions of pity and fear and allows clear thinking (and wonder or joy) once more. According to Nietzsche, it shields us from the terror of life so that we don't encounter it too directly and are able to bear it. For the Hindus, the dramatic arts also arouse in the spectator emotions, but in a generalized, universal way, such that one experiences them as something spiritual or divine, instead of particular sufferings. The Buddhists, including the Japanese Zen practitioners, on the other hand, make art works that function as reminders of how things really are. Surrounding them with objects that display constant transformation into nothingness, they are less likely to experience the suffering-inducing illusion. In this sense, art is the spiritual practice that allows one who engages in it "the qualities of mental clarity, mindfulness of the moment, wisdom, compassion, and access to revelations of higher mystic states of awareness." (Grey, 2001, p.107)

The proliferation of present-day Youtube art tutorials testify to the effectiveness of engagement in art as a relaxant or as a meditative escape from the turmoil the world was thrown into because of COVID-19. Perhaps this is the reason that, at the beginning of the lockdown in different places all over the world, some art supplies became

art, or what art does or can do to one who engages in it.

<sup>2</sup> We are not attempting a descriptive treatment of art here—we are not looking into what art is. Rather, we are discussing a normative function of

scarce. In this way, art truly saves, as Nietzsche intimated. It serves as an excellent buffer against stress and anxiety that the pandemic naturally brought.

Ritual, too, often rooted in something sacred, serves the same function. It provides structure amidst the chaos of life. (Campbell, 1973) As such, they serve as stabilizing elements in life that has been devastated by catastrophes. They give direction for return when one is thrown off the path. They make things right, so to speak. The Native American tribal rituals, the Japanese Tea Ceremony, and even the *ren*-inspired Confucian rites all seek to mend what is broken. Rituals do not transform the world. Like art, they transform our attitude towards things that we have no control over. They help in keeping us functional despite the unpredictability of things.

Modern day rituals are often removed from their sacred roots. Yet, they serve the same function. (Campbell, 1973). The loss of the natural daily structure when people were forced to work from home made work-related tasks so much more difficult to accomplish. Despite saving on commuting time, work seems to have doubled because no barrier stands between work-things and home-things, even if in some homes, a work space is somehow separate from home space. The creation of day to day rituals that will provide some structure and allow one to find her bearings when the usual markers are lost, might prove helpful. For this, one can find many inspirations in the traditions of the past.

### Conclusion

The pandemic caused by COVID-19, is indeed terrible on so many levels and people cannot wait to go back to "normal." But what is "normal?" If we mean by "normal" a kind of life that is stable and problem-free, then, as we have shown, there is no such thing. The wise ones of the ancient past have always known that life is fraught with difficulties at all times. Nietzsche saw it to be full of terror. The major traditions agree, seeing the inevitable flux as cause for suffering if it is not understood and accepted. It is therefore not a matter of whether there is terror or not—for given the nature of the world, there always is—but only a matter of how much terror has to be dealt with. What is "normal," it seems, is just a lesser case of change and accompanying difficulties, not the absence of them. If we are to search for a way to

calm the internal chaos we are experiencing, then we must search for it as a guide for all time, understanding the constant transformations in life, and not just to deal with the current pandemic.

We have shown that people since the ancient times have turned to art and ritual for survival. As Nietzsche, referring to the Ancient Greeks, puts it,

How else could this people, so sensitive, so vehement in its desires, so singularly constituted for *suffering*, how could they have endured existence, if it had not been revealed to them in their gods surrounded with higher glory? The same impulse which calls art into being, as the complement and consummation of existence, seducing one to a continuation of life...(Nietzsche, 1995, p.9)

As they have turned to the saving powers of art and ritual, so we, stricken by the pandemic, might also benefit from creative engagement and the discipline of ritual that could help us frame our experience better and develop an attitude that will allow us to go on not only despite the current crisis, but despite all and constant crises.

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