

We are trapped in an unwelcome pandemic fog.

Most of us know how little we know and stay mum. Others, motivated by a political fever, talk about COVID-19 as if it was a Russian submarine. They mask clues and invent fake cures.

But what about hindsight?

Merriam-Webster defines hindsight as the “perception of the nature of an event after it has happened.” In hindsight, it's clear there were alternatives. Hindsight is 20-20.

But it can be muddled by “hindsight bias.” That happens when, long after the event, someone or some group claims they knew the outcome all along – when in fact they could have only known the outcome in hindsight. They bend their recollection to fit their prediction, perhaps to avoid apologizing or accepting the consequences.

Hindsight only arrives after the fact, after the argument is lost, the prediction dashed. Like snakeskin lying in the desert long after the snake has slithered away, we can see what it was by looking at the veneer left behind, unraveled and ominous.

When hindsight arrives, some of us will look back and think we were lucky. Not right, or wrong, just lucky.

When hindsight arrives, no one will look back and say, “no, that’s not what happened.” Hindsight will be proof that some policy decisions were good and others were disasters. In hindsight, World War II was always winnable, even though there were dark days when Paris fell.

Darwin was right, in hindsight. So was Henry Ford – the assembly line works.

When will hindsight about COVID-19 arrive? At about the same time we learn the truth. The truth about disease, about pandemic spread, about certain death because of community spread, about the need to put life ahead of the next election. If, in hindsight, we had insisted on testing first, then pushing for a pill or a vaccine, we would have acted on aforethought. Hindsight will arrive when policy makers give voice to medical science, and tell political science to wait its turn.