

This extract from Albert Camus' *The Plague* is relevant when thinking about *normalcy bias* (a significant proportion of the population and the media will continue to deny reality, even as things fall apart) and *failure to learn*.

"Pestilence is in fact very common, but we find it hard to believe in a pestilence when it descends upon us. There have been as many plagues in the world as there have been wars, yet plagues and wars always find people equally unprepared. Dr Rieux was unprepared, as were the rest of the townspeople, and this is how one should understand his reluctance to believe. One should also understand that he was divided between anxiety and confidence.

When war breaks out people say: 'It won't last, it's too stupid.' And war is certainly too stupid, but that doesn't prevent it from lasting. Stupidity always carries doggedly on, as people would notice if they were not always thinking about themselves. In this respect, the citizens of Oran were like the rest of the world, they thought about themselves; in other words, they were humanists: they did not believe in pestilence.

A pestilence does not have human dimensions, so people tell themselves that it is unreal, that it is a bad dream which will end. But it does not always end and, from one bad dream to the next, it is people who end, humanists first of all because they have not prepared themselves. The people of our town were no more guilty than anyone else, they merely forgot to be modest and thought that everything was still possible for them, which implied that pestilence was impossible."