What can I say? It’s another gorgeous day, warm and sunny, so that’s something. I’m sitting outside, which is good, because as per usual, I’m not going anywhere. Because it’s really, really bad out there. Quokka told me, yesterday, that in his state, doonundah, they are on day 18 of zero cases. We, here? I think we had zero cases in my kitchen (as far as I know). Otherwise, not so good.

I owe you an apology. For the past several months, I have been admonishing, preaching, pleading, and demanding that if we can simply follow some pretty simple practices, we can get this thing under some form of control. You know what I’m talking about. And I suddenly realized that I have been completely wrong. I mean, not about what it might take to reduce infection and death, but talking about it. Who the freak am I to tell you anything?

There is an adage that goes like this: Rule #1. The customer is always right. Rule #2. When the customer is wrong, see Rule #1. Actually, it is not an adage. It is a quote from the young adult book series, The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants. I never read it, but I believe that it has something to do with a pair of jeans that perfectly fits the four protagonists, despite their different sizes and shapes. A character named Duncan Howe says this at some point. Now, lots of companies have this on their websites, and you can buy lots of posters and placards with the quote. (You can also buy a poster of a cat holding onto a rope with the words ‘hang in there.’) I don’t know who said that first, either. I think Winston Churchill.

The first part, though, about the customer always being right, was actually said by Harry Gordon Selfridge, John Wanamaker and Marshall Field, who ran department stores in the US and UK in the early parts of the 20th century (we do not know who actually said it first, but these three get the credit. This is despite the fact that Cesar Ritz, the French hotel magnate said “Le client n’a jamais tort” before this, but that was not at all the same thing, since it was in French). But regardless of who said it, this practice was a bit of a revolution in sales and service, prior to which the maxim ‘caveat emptor’ held sway. While we can argue about the extent that the ‘customer is always right’ dictum is true (or practiced), I am happy to recognize that you, dear reader (and therefore, in effect, the customer) certainly have the authority to decide if I am wrong or right, and I will agree (in principle). Unless, of course, you are wrong, in which case we will apply rule #2.
So, I will no longer exhort, cajole, or berate you to wear a mask, wash your hands, and maintain social distancing. I won’t implore, request, or admonish you to do everything you can to inform others of the importance of doing these things. Please do as your heart desires, and feel free to ignore any such recommendations. And if in ignoring such suggestions you or those around you contract the virus, which is a very high probability if you live in my country or much of Europe, South America, and lots of other places, and if you get very sick (not as likely, fortunately, but still the odds are only somewhat favorable that you will not) we will do our very best to care for you. And our best is pretty good, since many hospital ICUs have learned how to take care of victims of the Terrible Pandemic. And when there are no more beds in the ICUs, provisions are in place to utilize overflow facilities to ensure that you do have a bed. And we will make sure that there are sufficient doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals to service these facilities. Until, of course, we run out. Then we will do our best to recruit gardeners to help out (they generally do well with plants, so they should be able to take care of you, but I’m not sure that the leaf blowers will work as respirators. We’ll have to see.)

“But Mole,” you say (I’m listening, because Rule #1), “we have vaccines, now.” Yes, these are looking pretty good. But it is entirely up to you if you want to get one, when it becomes available. Which is going to take many, many months (but it is really good news that all indications are that they are, indeed coming). And we will figure out how to distribute it, which represents one of the most challenging things we have ever undertaken as a species. Oh, and if it is the vaccine that must be stored at $-80^\circ$C, then I’m sure that the loading dock worker who unpacked it has made every effort to ensure that it has been properly handled, since, of course, this is entirely up to said worker. (There are other vaccines that do not have this problem, but at least in my country, I am not sure we will have the choice). Anyway, yes, in time, most of us will have the opportunity to be vaccinated, should we choose to do so, and by all means, feel free to take no precautions before or after that happens, since it will certainly happen. Some day. It is entirely up to you.

In fact, as the weather gets colder and as holidays approach, I will not ask you, beg you, or entreat you not to travel, not to assemble, and not to spread disease among those you hold most dear. True, they (or even you) may become ill as a consequence, but the overworked health care professionals who are already giving up their holidays to treat the sickest victims can do without the two or three hours of sleep they are getting each day. And gardeners don’t work during the holidays anyway, so we have our backups. And they have leaf blowers. (I don’t know why I’m fixating on leaf blowers, but I see people walking around with these all the time, and they look like fun. Maybe I’ll get one just to blow stuff around. I’ll let you know. This is where I would normally go into a lengthy disquisition on the invention of the leaf blower and how it seems to have replaced the antiquated rake, but perhaps in realizing that I’ve been very preachy these last few months, I’ve also turned over a new leaf. I mean, you don’t really care about leaf blowers, right? But just in case you do, take a moment to look up and remember Dom Quinto. There, I’m following rule #1. Get it? A new leaf. Oh, man, I might be losing it).

Of course, please feel free to not only ignore, but do the opposite of what I’m saying. Feel free to practice all manner of safe conduct, and tell others to do the same. I’m just an insectivore who does not get out much (or at all), and should not tell you what to do (but now I really want to know more about the invention of the leaf blower and Dom Quinto’s story. And the role played by meticulous Japanese gardeners in the 19th century. Wait, no, I’ve stopped doing that). So again, my apologies, and I hope that whatever you decide to do, it works out for the best. And by the way, it is possible that all of this is just me being very sarcastic. It’s your call. I mean, the customer is always right. Right?