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Title: How doomed are we: climate change and the limits of science
(Abstract)

Climate scientists are frequently asked some version of the question “Are we doomed,” or more pessimistically, “How doomed are we?” This talk will address this question, including both its scientific and non-scientific aspects. I will argue that one’s answer depends both on what one means by “doom,” and to whom one refers by “we”. To the extent that the question is about predicting specific catastrophic outcomes in the future, one limit on our ability to answer comes from the uncertainties of climate science, and I will discuss some of those. (There is a lot we can’t predict about climate, though we can probably predict it better than we can predict most other existential risks). To the extent that the perception of doom is an emotional response to an uncertain future, it is in any case personal, and probably also political. Either way it can be informed by science, but can’t be validated or refuted by it. The doom question is, however, sometimes a proxy or prelude to another, perhaps more productive question about climate change: “what should we as individuals do about it?” I will offer some thoughts about this, both as a working scientist and as a concerned citizen.