

Should our biggest climate change fear be fear itself?

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From apocalyptic forecasting to estimates of mass extinctions, climate change is a topic which is filled with fearful predictions for the future. In his latest research, published in *WIREs Climate Change*, historian Matthias Dörries examines the cultural significance of fear and how it became a central presence in current debates over climate change.

Climatic change, as represented by the media, often prompts headlines predicting disastrous events, frequently adopting fear laden language including analogies with war and warnings of the imminence or irreversibility of pending catastrophes. For Professor Matthias Dörries from the University of Strasbourg, a culture of fear is alive, and doing very well.

Professor Dörries looks at the issue of fear from a historical perspective, asking how our current society has come to conceive of [climate change](#) in terms of catastrophe and fear.

"Recently historians have underlined the necessity to revise the grand Enlightenment narrative of science as antidote to fear," Dörries stresses, "We should now look at how popular and scientific discourses frame fear, and study the constructive and destructive functions of these fear discourses in societies."

The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by an increasing appropriation of the future by science, leading to a rise of fear discourses by scientists themselves.

"For the very long run, science has indeed some terrifying prospects to offer for the planet Earth, and on a scale of decades, science has identified serious threats, such as anthropogenic climate change," Dörries remarks.

"The current discourse of [fear](#) over climate change reflects the attempts to come to grips with the long-term issue of anthropogenic climate change," concludes Dörries. "They are appeals for action, they imply claims to power, they stress that the issue is political and cultural, not merely a matter of science and reason alone."

Provided by Wiley

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