Climate scientist Michael Mann said doomerism and efforts to shift responsibility to individuals is the new face of climate denial. In a Guardian article, Rebecca Solnit quotes Mann who calls those who feel it is too late to reign in climate change “inactivists” and “doomists”. In his book “The Climate Wars” Mann says defeatism is the successor to climate denial and he describes it as, “the great obstacle to addressing the crisis.”

As explained in an article by Bryan Schatz, Mann is a scientist who has been viciously attacked for exposing climate denial from the fossil fuel industry and the GOP, now he is fighting doomers who think the climate fight is futile. Mann refers to “doomerism” as the other “D” and explains that doomists are the ‘other force of inaction’. The cult of doom is represented by the writings of people like David Wallace-Wells and Jonathan Franzen.

Solnit wrote “amateurs and newcomers tend to be more alarmist and defeatist than the insiders and experts.” and this gives them an excuse to do nothing. Those who believe we can address these challenges are derided as “techno-optimists” by doomers and they are dismissed as being high on “hopium”. Like climate deniers, doomers cherry-pick evidence and ignore contradicting evidence.

David Romps, Goldman Distinguished Chair in the Physical Sciences, Professor, Department of Earth and Planetary Science, Director, Berkeley Atmospheric Sciences Center echoed Mann’s sentiments:

“To those who say we are already doomed and so there is no point to switching away from fossil fuels, let me be clear: As bad as the warming has been, it is only one-tenth of the warming we are capable of causing, which would be a hellishly altered Earth. Yes, there is cause for mourning: By failing to act over the past 30 years, we have caused irreparable harm to our climate. But that is not an excuse for wrecking the climate even further for all generations to come.”

As reviewed in 2019 by Business Insider, climate experts railed against the inaccuracies of Jonathan Franzen’s ‘climate doomist’ opinion column published in the New Yorker. In an essay titled “What If We Stopped Pretending,” Franzen wrote that the destruction of the planet by human-induced climate change is inevitable and that environmentalists and climate change activists are delusional for trying to stop it. Climate author Alex Steffen called Franzen’s essay, “the worst piece on climate change yet published this decade” he went on to say it is “flawed in both concept and execution, morally cowardly, and lavishly self-indulgent.”

Franzen’s article was also criticized by academics including Leah Stokes, assistant professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara; and Gernot Wagner, climate economist and professor at New York University professor, and Jonathan Foley, environmental scientists and a director of Project Drawdown.

“It’s hard to imagine major outlets publishing essays declaring efforts to reduce poverty hopeless. Or telling cancer patients to just give up,” John Upton, an editor at Climate Central, wrote on Twitter. “Yet this Climate Doomist trope flourishes — penned, best I can tell, exclusively by older, comfy white men.”

It’s not too late but it will be if we fail to act

The situation is indeed perilous but there is still time to avert catastrophe. While sensationalism may garner headlines, the defeatist testimonies of the prophets of doom do not stand up to scrutiny. Ben Piven recently wrote that those who fear it’s too late to change the planet’s future should heed the views of experts who think humanity still has time to turn things around. The data indicates that as of 2021 there is around 419 ppm of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO2) the primary greenhouse gas (GHG) driving climate change. In 2018 the IPCC indicated that humanity has until 2030 to avoid potentially irreversible climate disruption. By this time we will need to draw down emissions by at least 45 percent compared to 2010 levels. A more precise estimate suggests we have just over 6 years to cut atmospheric emissions in half.

A notion related to the defeatism of doomers is that it is too expensive to address the climate crisis. This is another ruse. Economists suggest that if we act now we could fix climate change with less than 1 percent of world GDP. What makes the situation even more urgent is the fact that the longer we wait the more it will cost. An array of economic assessments provide cost-benefit analyses that overwhelmingly support the logic of immediate climate action. There are also a host of economic opportunitiess associated with building out a green economy.

There is no point at which climate action becomes pointless. While we cannot stop climate change, we can minimize some of its most serious impacts. Climate action is not an all-or-nothing proposition, we can limit warming through mitigation efforts and minimize adverse consequences through adaptation. However, as explained by the U.N. Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, we need urgent action to address the climate crisis. Time is of the essence and the sooner we act the better our chances.