

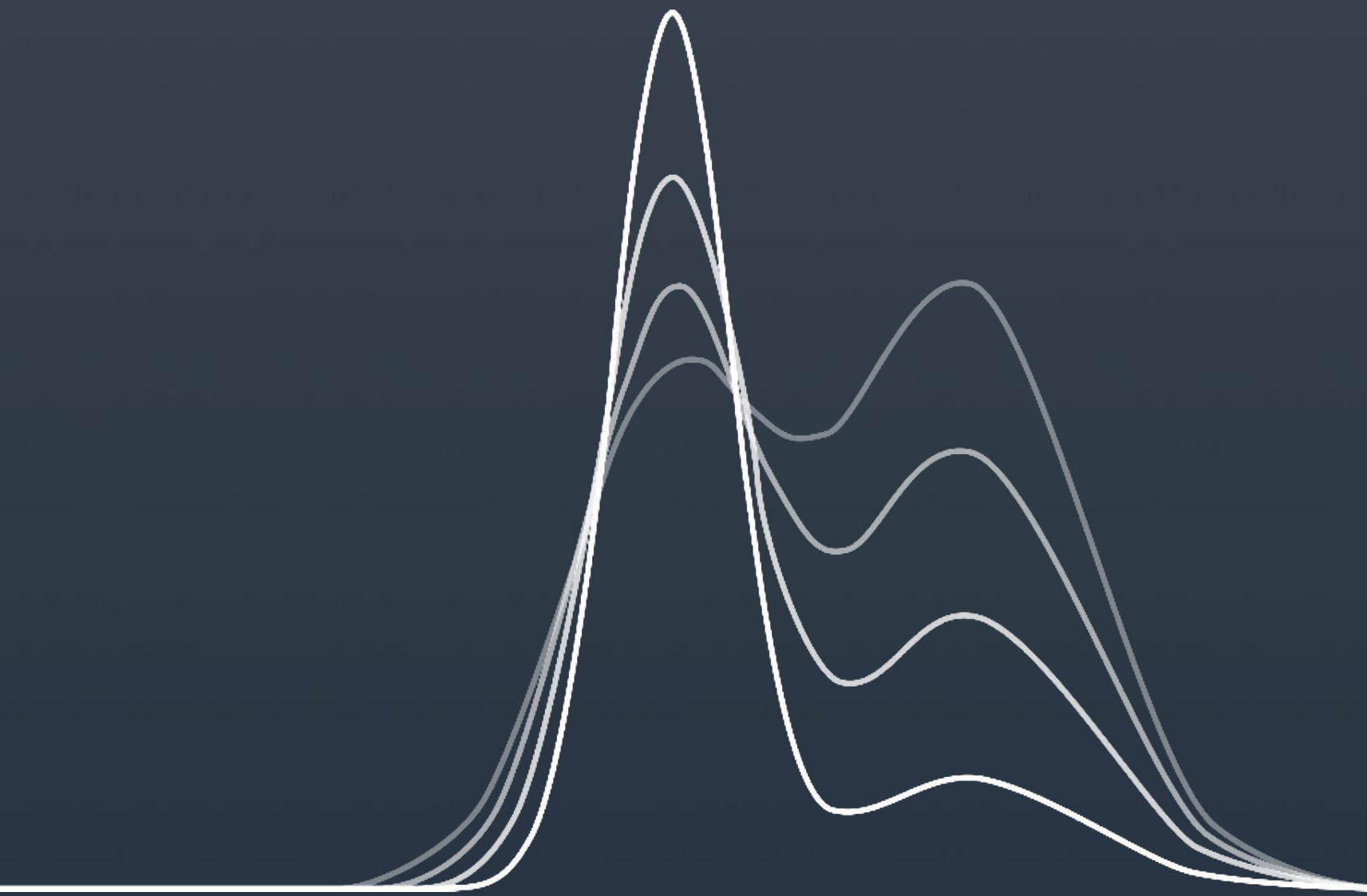
Forecast Friday

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Forecasting Extraordinary Events

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Forecasting Existential Risk Is Hard

Forecasting human extinction is hard because we've never gone extinct before

- There's no clear base rate at which our species goes extinct
- The observer selection effect means 100% of all species that consider the possibility of their extinction have never gone extinct
- We have no direct way of judging how accurate our existential risk forecasts are

Estimating Existential Risk

But we can use other approaches to estimate the risk of human extinction

- We can consider the extinction rate of a broader class of species goes extinct (e.g. hominids, mammals, etc.)
- We can estimate how long humans will survive by assuming our place in history is random
- We can use techniques to minimize our errors in forecasting judgment

Routine Events

Routine events are ones that occur regularly throughout history

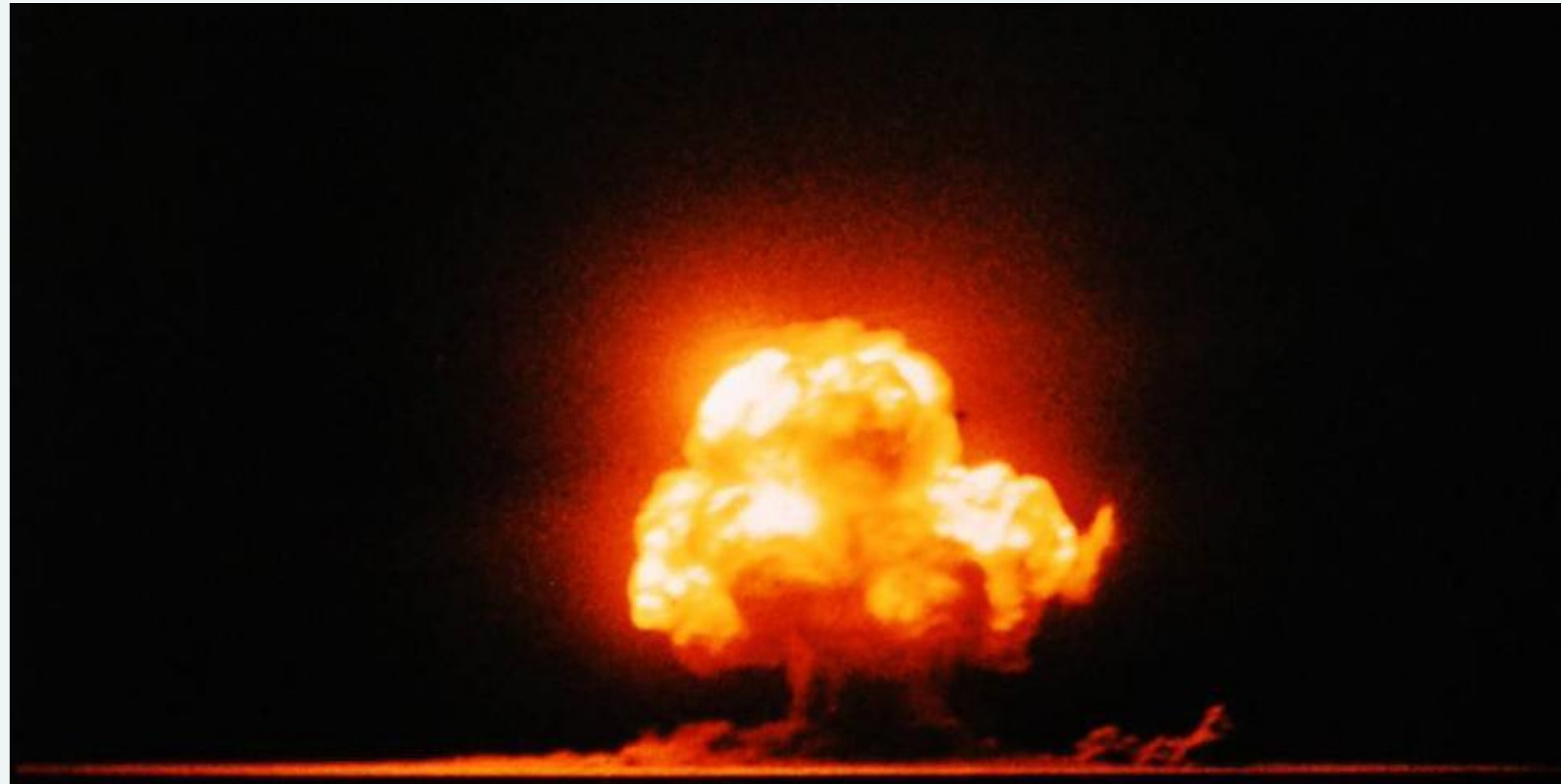
- Events can occur relatively infrequently but still occur regularly enough to be predictable
- Routine events can be extremely consequential and disruptive
- But because routine events happen regularly their impacts are also predictable
- Because they are routine, they tend to be part of longstanding historical patterns rather than altering them

Extraordinary Events

Extraordinary events are ones that have no clear precedent

- Extraordinary events may be similar to routine events in some ways, but are novel in some important way
- Extraordinary events may not always be consequential or disruptive
- But because extraordinary events do not happen regularly their impact is unpredictable
- Because they are not part of longstanding patterns, extraordinary events have a greater potential to alter the course of history

Extraordinary Events Have Unpredictable Consequences



Trinity test, July 16, 1945 (Jack W. Aeby)

Calculations suggested the first nuclear weapons test would not set the atmosphere on fire, but since it was a novel experiment it was hard to be sure

Approaches to Forecasting Extraordinary Events

Forecasting extraordinary events takes judgment and humility

- We can use our logical ability to project the trajectory of events
- We can compare extraordinary events to more routine events
- We can use the same methods we would use to produce accurate and avoid error that we would forecasts of routine events
- We need to be less confident about forecasts of extraordinary events

Thank you for coming!

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Telling the Future

Clouds and Clocks

Human societies are fundamentally more complex and more difficult to predict than orderly physical systems. But new research provides evidence that long-range forecasting is possible in certain circumstances. Karl Popper made a distinction between two archetypal types of physical systems: clouds and clocks...

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