

Bubble-Wrap: Why it's hard to think about climate change

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What happens in your head and heart when you hear 'bad news' about climate change? We all have some kind of 'bubble-wrap' to protect us from being overwhelmed by fear and anxiety. Collectively our defences against facing up to climate crisis resist change and enable us to continue 'business as usual' even though we know this is not working.

These include:

- wishful thinking, optimism, hope for the best
- focus on small practical things and ignore the big things
- feeling overwhelmed with immediate problems and choosing to push climate problems aside
- deny the science and drawn to doubt, cynicism and conspiracy theories
- 'I'm all right', withdraw into personal security.

Sally Weintrobe is a psychotherapist, climate activist and author. She describes the ways we ignore and deny climate change as a 'climate bubble'. We are kept insulated and we are not even aware of it. She speaks about the unconscious cultural and group pressure to push climate to the end of the 'to do list'.

Climate is split off, and it's kept as a separate isolated problem. Inside the bubble people can act without counting the cost. The climate bubble has been seeded, inflated and maintained through a culture of un-care; a culture whose perverse aim is to encourage people to distance themselves from the part of them that cares and is socially responsible. It has involved planning to extract all for now, for the few, with storms and instability for the rest. It is a fraud bubble, designed to quell felt moral unease about this extractivism and its consequences.

How do we protect ourselves against the unbearable?

People ordinarily use illusion and bubble thinking to protect themselves against feeling unhealed, fearing death, facing loss. However the climate crisis faces us with a very different order of the unbearable, involving anxiety about the security of our planet which is our very home, and about its viability to sustain us and life itself. We now start to fear the death of everything. This tragically can lead to further myopic bubble thinking, which only causes increased destructiveness and damage, because when you're in the bubble you don't see the destructiveness or the damage. The bubble is designed to keep it out.

Weintrobe calls us to step out of the bubble:

It is deeply replenishing to emerge from a bubble, which is a collective psychic retreat from reality, to see the real picture more clearly. Stepping out of the bubble enables us to see strength and beauty in the interconnected systems that support life. And also to see the fragility in those systems, and the moral imperative for humans to respect their limits and the way they live their lives.

Sally Weintrobe, "Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis," lecture at the NZ Association of Psychotherapists Conference, online, March 2021 (also the title of her new book).

- What are the 'bubbles' that insulate you from the harsh predictions of climate change?
- How are you being subtly encouraged to deny reality by 'status quo' forces that benefit from your inaction on climate change?
- How can you increase your ability to receive new information about climate change?
- What strategies do you have for managing emotional overload?