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# The frugal life and why we should educate for it

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## Abstract

The article begins with a fictional example of a life that has been spent frugally in several different ways and for different reasons over time: in wartime, through many decades of simple living, through a period marked by anxiety over the threat to future generations from the depletion of global resources and the climate crisis, to the COVID-19 emergency. The mini-biography serves as an introduction to a more systematic account of these various perspectives on frugality and reasons for adopting a frugal way of living. This provides the framework for a discussion of different aspects of education for frugality in the main body of the article. There are two brief sections at the end dealing, first, with a caveat about the climate change argument for education in frugality and, second, with wider issues that the topic raises.

**Keywords:** frugality, aims of education, justice, climate change, well-being

Like other British people who were children in the Second World War, Sylvia lived frugally for most of her early years. She has lived a moderately frugal existence throughout her adult life. Now, near the end of it, she feels constrained to make it yet more frugal in certain specific ways.

I have begun with this fictional micro-biography, which I will now fill out, because it neatly reveals different, but related, ways in which we can think about frugality. Its purpose is to serve as an introduction to a more systematic account of this notion and reasons for following a frugal way of life, which I explore in the section after next. This is en route to discussing the place of frugality in education in the rest of the article.

## Three kinds of frugality

### In wartime

During the Second World War, food and clothing were rationed in the UK, foreign holidays were out of the question and a minimal amount was spent on entertainment, gifts and other goods. Existence was basic. This was not by choice, but because the country had to live within its means, taking into account expenditure on the armed forces and limits on what food it could grow, and what food and other goods it could still import.

In 1751, Hume famously wrote that 'all prospect of success in life, or even of tolerable subsistence, must fail, where a reasonable frugality is wanting' (quoted in Aiken, 1948: 226). His immediate targets in that passage were 'worthless prodigals, having consumed their fortune in wild debauches, thrusting themselves into every

plentiful table and every party of pleasure, hated even by the vicious and despised even by fools' (Aiken, 1948: 226).

It may seem from this that frugality has to do with not living beyond one's means. This is part, I think, of what is commonly meant by the term, but it does not take us far enough. After all, a multibillionaire can enjoy his several private jets, superyachts and mansions, while scarcely denting his income. He lives well within his means, but not at all frugally. Frugality is more than living free from debt. Danielle Zwarthoed (2015: 287) puts it like this:

I define 'frugality' as follows. Frugality is a combination of knowledge, value orientations, preferences, emotional susceptibility, practical skills and habits. This combination disposes the agent to behave frugally. A frugal agent is capable of living as well as a less frugal one with fewer material resources. This capacity is coupled with a stable disposition for little consumption.

British people such as Sylvia certainly built up 'a stable disposition for little consumption' during the six years of war and, indeed, into the continuing austerity that succeeded it. This was a kind of frugality, but whether it matches all aspects of Zwarthoed's definition is a further question. I am not convinced that all those who lived off rations during the war were as capable of living as well as the few rich who could dine out in restaurants and lead more comfortable lives – or that all, or indeed many, of them showed a preference for, or emotional susceptibility towards, the wartime kind of consumption. Their frugality, including Sylvia's, was not a choice on their part; it was forced upon them, unavoidable. Most people were prepared to accept it as a necessary price to pay if Britain was not to lose the war.

### The simple life

Is the most basic kind of frugality, perhaps, 'a stable disposition for little consumption'? As we have seen, Zwarthoed's (2015) definition adds other features to this to do with valuing and preferring such a way of life. We will see more later of what she has in mind here. Meanwhile, a word about the 'moderately frugal existence' that has run through Sylvia's adult life to date.

She has found most fulfilment in life in relatively uncostly pursuits. The most important ones have included sharing enjoyable times with her many friends; reading fiction, biographies and material on current affairs; creative writing as a member of a local literary group; walking in the local woods and fields alone and in company; tending her garden. She has never had her eye on living in a bigger property than her two-bedroom suburban garden flat; on expensive clothes, food and meals out; on exotic holidays.

The list of her fulfilling occupations also includes teaching in schools and enjoying their collegiality. Before her retirement, she taught citizenship in comprehensive schools. One among many aspects of this was making students aware of the role of advertising in getting us to consume more and more, as well as the financial and mental health costs associated with this way of life. Later in this article, I come back to this and other roles of citizenship education when I relate the conceptual points I am currently making about frugality to issues of whether, and if so how, schools and parents should prepare children to lead more frugal lives.

I would label Sylvia's a moderately frugal existence. It is an example, perhaps, of what Emrys Westacott (2016: 28–30) calls in his book *The Wisdom of Frugality* 'simple living', in the shape of 'being content with simple pleasures'. As he points out, there

has been a long tradition of this approach to life going back at least to Epicurus in the fourth century BC, who 'especially praises ... such things as plain but good food, satisfying work, the contemplation of nature, and friendship' (Westacott, 2016: 29). It is always possible, of course, to think, within this tradition, of more frugal existences than Sylvia's. That is why I have called hers 'moderately frugal'. Frugality of this kind comes in degrees.

The frugality that Sylvia has experienced in her adult years is different from the sort she knew in the war. It has not been forced on her, but has been dependent on her autonomous choices. Unlike wartime frugality, there is no problem relating it to Zwarthoed's (2015: 287) 'value orientations, preferences, emotional susceptibility'. Does Sylvia's case, though, fall under Zwarthoed's (2015: 287) 'a stable disposition for little consumption'?

If the latter involves the intentional pursuit of a low-consumption life, Sylvia's case does not include this. It is true that she has no interest in shopping, apart from essentials, and that the kinds of pleasures that bring her most fulfilment are uncostly. But she is not living as she does *because* she wants to consume little. She may indeed have 'a stable disposition for little consumption', but, if so, this is a by-product of her lifestyle, not a sought-after constituent of it.

### **Future generations, the climate emergency and COVID-19**

Sylvia is now in her 80s. She still lives as frugally as ever in the way just described, but the growing climate change crisis of recent years now makes her think she should try to do her modest bit to ensure a sustainable life for future generations and to save the planet. She puts what she can in the recycling bin, takes her own coffee mug to her local cafe and in other ways uses as little plastic as possible. She has sold her little petrol-driven car, had solar panels installed in her roof and is scrupulous in saving energy, not least in central heating and the use of hot water. She has given up eating red meat.

Her life has become more frugal but now in a different way. Her new frugality is no by-product of a way of life that, *as it happens*, involves little expenditure. It is something consciously in her sights, something she feels strongly about and wants to push further. This kind of frugality indeed involves 'a stable disposition for little consumption', as well as all the other elements in Zwarthoed's (2015: 287) more complete definition quoted above.

In one way these latest years of Sylvia's life carry an echo of her early years during the war. Both periods have given her the 'stable disposition' just mentioned. The difference is that she has now *chosen* to embrace this disposition. In the war, it was forced on her, but today no one is compelling her. She now feels a moral obligation, as well as a decades-old inclination, to be like this, when she could have acted otherwise. There is no government policy that leaves her no other option – even though there are moral pressures, both from government and from wider global opinion, which steer her that way.

For a period of many months after March 2020, the point just made about an absence of governmental compulsion did not apply. Sylvia was obliged to self-isolate during the COVID-19 lockdown and, for her, being in the category of 'vulnerable persons', this lasted longer than for others. Although in many ways the restriction suited her usual life, in which activities such as reading, gardening and walking in the woods played a large part, for a long time she was not able to have modest meals out or take short holidays away. The life of greater frugality which she has experienced since taking measures to mitigate climate change became for a while even more pronounced.

## Types of frugality: A summary and elaboration

The thread running through these various understandings of 'frugality' in Sylvia's story is consuming little. A major division under this heading is between being *compelled* to consume little and *preferring* lower over higher consumption.

Examples of being *compelled* to be frugal in Sylvia's biography have to do with her experience of wartime at the beginning of her life and of lockdown as a result of COVID-19 towards the end of it. In each case, there were government directives that restricted people's consumption. Sylvia never experienced poverty personally, although as a teacher she worked with many children from poor families. With poverty, it is lack of money rather than the law that forces one to consume little.

Our second category, *preferring* frugality, brings with it a further subdivision, depending on whether one's reasons for this preference are *intrinsic* or *extrinsic*.

The first of these, *intrinsic* reasons, have to do with living a simple, low-consumption life because this or its components are seen as good in itself or themselves. Sylvia's adult life has been lived in this way. It has not, or hardly at all, been lived out of *ideological commitment* as it might have been in a thinker like Epicurus. It is more that Sylvia *merely happens* to have found fulfilment in simple, for the most part uncostly, pleasures such as reading or gardening.

One can also prefer a low-consumption life for *extrinsic* rather than intrinsic reasons. In her 80s, Sylvia has done so to help later generations lead a satisfactory life and – this is subtly different, as will become clearer below – to help with the climate crisis.

I also said above that one of Sylvia's concerns as a teacher of citizenship was to discuss with her students the negative aspects of a high-consumption life, such as being in thrall to advertisers and possible financial and mental health costs. She did this because she wanted them to consider the reduced dangers of these negative aspects as reasons for embracing a low-consumption way of life. These reasons, as with helping later generations and combatting the climate crisis, are also extrinsic, but they differ from both of these in that they are concerned with the well-being of *specific individuals*.

The distinctions made in this section are helpful for the next, on education for frugality.

## Education for frugality: Intrinsic reasons

The remainder of this article is mostly about education for frugal living as something willingly adopted, for intrinsic or extrinsic reasons. We can make short work of cases where one is *compelled* to be frugal, as in wartime, the period of the COVID-19 crisis or poverty. Being educated for a frugal life makes no sense where there is no other alternative. What comes closest to it is being brought up so as to be able to cope with or manage such a life – as Sylvia was brought up in the Second World War to make the best of having to eat things such as spam, powdered eggs and grey wartime bread. But coping with X is very different from being forced to be X. On the other hand, the coping itself can be seen as something of an educative force in a wider sense of 'education'. Sylvia's lifelong love of reading may well have been triggered by the set of Dickens novels which her family happened to have in the house when she was a child during the war. More broadly, how far listening to birdsong, developing a new interest in gardening, working from home without a tiresome commute and engaging online freely or inexpensively with films, music and academic material, which for many

people have been such features of the COVID-19 lockdown, outlast that crisis is still to be seen.

This brings us to *preferring* to embrace a simple or low-consumption life where there is no compulsion on one to do so. We look first at educating for this where it is to be pursued for *intrinsic* rather than extrinsic reasons.

Some parents may bring up their children disposed to adopt simple living as a philosophy of life. As well as these ideological parents, there are other parents, as well as some teachers, who may want children to become disposed to engage in simple pleasures for their own sake without setting these in any overarching belief system. I am assuming here that these simple pleasures are intrinsically worthwhile and contribute to the individual's flourishing. I am taking as read, too, that these exclude enjoyments such as eating candies and harmful ones such as pulling legs off spiders and that they include inexpensive activities in which one can become wholeheartedly involved – such as cycling, singing in a band or, as in Sylvia's case, reading literature, walking in the countryside and enjoying the company of friends. Lying behind these assumptions are further claims, for example, that one good reason for educating someone is to help them to lead a flourishing life, and that a flourishing life revolves around successful and wholehearted involvement in worthwhile activities pursued for their own sake. There is clearly far more to say in elucidation and defence of these ideas, but this article is not the place to explore this – I do so in White (2011).

Before turning to the topic of educating young people to live frugally for *extrinsic* reasons, I must confront a problem that faces teachers and parents who encourage children towards simple, uncultured pleasures as ends in themselves. The problem is paternalism. The educator is deciding for the child what kind of life is good for him or her and steering him or her towards it. But this goes against the need to help the child to become an autonomous person who decides for themselves how they are going to live. (Again, there is an assumption here, also explored in White (2011), that being an autonomous decision maker is a necessary condition of human flourishing, at least in an advanced industrial society such as our own.) It is surely an affront to young people's autonomy to manipulate their choices in this way. Why not leave them freer in an unpressured way to choose what they will, if they have the money – exotic foreign holidays and luxurious homes and wardrobes full of attractive clothes on the one hand, and, on the other hand, 'simple life' pursuits such as reading Thoreau in their tiny semi and wearing the same blue sweater for the seventh day on the trot? As we saw with Sylvia, she has known for a long time about the existence of very expensive options and, at least until her retirement, had the means to pursue them; but her preferences have always been for something more low-key. She has been brought up to have a mind of her own about how she should live, and she has not been channelled into her mentors' own views on this.

There is more than one response to this charge of paternalism. First, how many options does one need to qualify as an autonomous chooser (Sardoč and White, 2018)? The 'simple living' route offers a host of them. Second, parents and teachers would certainly be at fault if they used indoctrinatory techniques to pressurize children towards more frugal pursuits, for example, by keeping them from contact with alternatives. But there is little likelihood of the latter in a media-rich society such as our own, where, as Zwarthoed (2018: 835) points out, 'companies and the advertising industry ... strongly bias children to prefer expensive, consumerist lifestyles. Therefore, if parents actively impart frugal ideals to their children in our societies, their children are likely to be exposed to a wider range of lifestyle'. Third, again as Zwarthoed (2018: 834) puts it in the same article, 'Even if at a first stage (childhood) people acquire

inexpensive habits in a non-autonomous way, at a second stage (adulthood) they could still subject them to rational criticism, provided that parents also attend to the development of their rational and critical skills.’ The only qualification I would make here is: why wait until adulthood? Adolescence could well be a fruitful time in which, at home and in school, young people are introduced to rationally discussing the pros and cons of frugality, as well as those of more lavish ways of life – in the expectation that they would follow their own considered preferences where these did not have to bow to moral reasons.

Whether these responses are enough to allay all anxieties about paternalist steering is doubtful. Such steering is not the same as indoctrination. Even if parents do not deliberately try to prevent children from knowing about alternatives to low-consumption living, their focus on the latter may well lead children highly influenced by their parents’ preferences to stay with the simpler life. We come back to the problem of allaying these anxieties later in this article.

This concludes what I have to say for the moment about education for a willingly adopted simple or low-consumption life that is valued for *intrinsic* reasons. The same kind of education can also be valued for *extrinsic* reasons. Three of these reasons are worth exploring, as will become clear in the next section.

## **Educating for frugality with further ends in view: Justice, climate change and children’s well-being**

### **Justice**

In recent years, many of us have rightly become increasingly alarmed at the global depletion of resources brought about by a high-consumption economy, as it means that less will be available for future generations. The idea that we should manage with less is fast taking root. Danielle Zwarthoed has been particularly interested in the educational aspects of what, as she puts it, justice requires of us in this way in liberal democratic societies. She argues that schools and other educational institutions should teach frugality as a virtue in such a way that ‘children acquire as *firm and stable* frugal dispositions as possible’ (Zwarthoed, 2015: 291, emphasis in original). In her later piece about parental education in particular, Zwarthoed (2018: 830) argues that parents, being in a position to shape how their children are brought up, have general duties, as liberal-democratic citizens concerned about sustainability, to prevent their children from developing expensive consumption habits.

This is as much as I want to say at this point about the *first* of the three extrinsic reasons for education for frugality – protecting the well-being of future generations. I agree with Zwarthoed that justice requires us to act in this way and that parents and teachers are justified in urging children towards a low-consumption life, as there is no reason why the interests of those currently alive should be privileged in comparison with those who come later. This is also because, as discussed in White (2011), the aims of education should not be restricted to those directed towards students’ well-being, but should also seek to promote the well-being of other people.

### **Climate change**

The second extrinsic reason is to help combat climate change. As we saw, Sylvia in her 80s has been influenced by this reason, as well as by the justice argument. Not being a philosopher, she has not clearly separated the two reasons in her mind. This is scarcely surprising, since to a large extent the arguments overlap. A changing climate means



hardships ahead for those, for instance, who have far less arable land to meet their own and others' needs. There is no good reason why we should privilege our own needs over those of people still to come.

But do the two arguments overlap *completely*? In her articles already referenced, Zwarthoed, like Sylvia, has not engaged with this question. Commenting on climate change, Zwarthoed (2015: 290) says: 'Climate change is a factor of sea level rise, meteorological hazards, new diseases, the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity', and she goes on to point out that human consumption of food, fuel and other products is a cause of this via greenhouse gas emissions. 'To the extent that consumption levels are responsible for climate change and that climate change threatens the achievement of justice, these consumption levels are incompatible with liberal democratic principles' (Zwarthoed, 2015: 290).

We see here that her concern about climate change is part of her argument against high consumption levels and for education in frugality based on justice as a liberal democratic principle. I have no problem with this argument, except that it does not go far enough. Zwarthoed's (2015) appeal to climate change considerations is just one of an array of arguments, based on liberal democratic principles, to do with fairness to succeeding generations. It has no special status in her case.

I think this is to underestimate the significance of climate change caused by the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We are talking about an impending calamity, one that – as David Wiggins (2011) points out – may well by 2100 involve a significant destruction of life on Earth and of the physical environment that supports it. Zwarthoed's (2015) basic concern is with our doing our duty to future generations by avoiding a high-consumption lifestyle. Her position is one that in broad outline has exercised many others during the past 70 years. But the existential threat from climate change is something that most people have become aware of, and increasingly so, only in the past 20 years or so. It brings with it a call for frugal living of a different order. At its root is not justice, but *survival*. The more we continue to rely on fossil fuels – for transport, industry and for concrete used in building, as Wiggins (2011) mentions – as well as methane-producing cattle farming, and the greater threat there is to carbon-capturing rainforests, the closer calamity comes. We have to adopt the 'reasonable frugality' that Hume mentions (Aiken, 1948: 226) and that Wiggins (2011) uses as the title of his article.

There is another reason why climate change considerations deviate from those of fairness to future generations. The latter are about the fortunes of other human beings. But, as Wiggins (2011) emphasizes, climate change is a threat not only to human existence, but also to that of other living organisms, plant and animal, as well as to Earth itself – in its beauty as well as in its physical make-up – on which all these things live. Wiggins (2011: 180) writes of 'the highly questionable idea that our concern with the earth is exhausted by our concern for human welfare'.

### Children's well-being

This brings us to the third of our extrinsic reasons in favour of educating children for frugal living. This has to do with their own flourishing.

Zwarthoed is interested in education for frugality for the sake of children's well-being, as well as for reasons of social justice; this is evident in Zwarthoed (2015: 292–6) and Zwarthoed (2018: 830–6). These are, respectively, about what teachers and other educators should do, and about the responsibilities of parents in particular. In these passages she argues, among other things, that teachers and parents should bear in mind that expensive consumption habits have been shown to lead to anxiety, depression,



low self-esteem and compulsive shopping addiction; that children's involvement in consumer activities tends to be at the expense of the goods of childhood, such as playing and household conversations; and that if children are brought up to live inexpensively, this can increase their bargaining power as adults in the labour market and help them to become economically self-reliant by consuming less than their income allows.

In general, I am well-disposed towards these arguments, as I know Sylvia would have been in her time as a teacher of citizenship. All the data that Zwarthoed (2015, 2018) adduces can be used in civics classes such as Sylvia's as elements in class projects and to promote discussion. Yet Zwarthoed's approach is problematic. What is striking about her list of considerations is that, with one exception, they have nothing to do with activities in which children engage *for their own sake*. For Zwarthoed, children's acquiring a frugal disposition is mainly beneficial to them for *extrinsic* reasons: being shielded from unhappiness, shame and guilt, depression and anxiety; having an improved position in the labour market. The exception is her reference to 'the goods of childhood', such as playing and household conversations. These bring us back to the topic discussed in an earlier section: *intrinsic* reasons for educating in frugality. Since Zwarthoed's (2015, 2018) concern in these passages is with children's well-being in general, it would have been helpful if she had laid more emphasis on the intrinsic goods of childhood, rather than burying her brief remark on this among other material that concentrates on extrinsic benefits. As well as her own two examples of intrinsic goods, Zwarthoed might also have mentioned things such as being with their friends, riding their bikes, reading stories, engaging in creative artistic activities, finding things out, going on country walks. Both teachers and parents have a major role in encouraging interests such as these.

All the intrinsically valuable childhood activities mentioned are relatively inexpensive. (Even bikes need not be top of the range and could be second-hand.) If children engage in them wholeheartedly and with some success, they may well be at the beginning of the road to acquiring the 'stable disposition for little consumption' that Zwarthoed (2015: 287) sees as central to frugality. If so, this is not because they are actively seeking to be frugal; their stable disposition is a by-product of their involvement in the childhood goods in question.

It would have strengthened Zwarthoed's case for teachers' and parents' encouraging children to be frugal, therefore, if she had put more emphasis on what she calls 'the goods of childhood' and somewhat less on extrinsic reasons. In this respect, nursery and primary schools can take further the work for which parents have already begun paving the way – by building into their timetabling plenty of room for young children to become absorbed in uncostly activities that they enjoy and can learn to get better at under guidance from their teachers. This includes not only interests that they already have, but also new uncostly activities to which the school can introduce them – including more academic pursuits such as arithmetic and history with which many children would be unfamiliar, but which some might find especially absorbing. Since building up stable dispositions is a function of time spent in activities, the combined efforts of parents and schools in the direction indicated would surely pay dividends.

Zwarthoed (2015, 2018) could also have strengthened her case for teaching children to be frugal if, as well as saying more about 'the goods of childhood', she could have added to them other uncostly intrinsic goods which children could enjoy when they become *adults*. Both parents and schools have a role in introducing young people to an array of these from which they can make their own autonomous choices. Many of these, of course, are often more sophisticated versions of goods first encountered in

childhood – such as reading, listening to music, making things, being close to nature (in the garden or in the countryside), enjoying inexpensive sports – but some will be exclusive to later life. Examples are sexual relationships, fulfilling paid work of different sorts, setting up a home and bringing up a family. True, all of these except fulfilling paid work could rack up expenses, but in our world, the arguments of Zwarthoed (2015, 2018) and Wiggins (2011) show that more frugal versions are preferable. Parents and teachers may have good reason to encourage young people in the direction of Westacott's (2016) 'simple living' mentioned above.

Whether they *do* have good reason brings us back to the charge of paternalism discussed in a previous section. Our discussion since then has provided grounds for thinking that this charge can be overcome. Doubts about the permissibility of steering children towards a low-consumption life can be allayed if we accept, as I have done in this article, the validity of considerations both of justice towards future generations and of climate change. The justice argument trumps the argument that children should not be steered towards frugality, and the climate change argument – about the far more serious, existential threat to the survival of all life on Earth, and of Earth itself as we know it – trumps the argument from justice. There is no doubt that teachers, parents and citizens generally are now morally obliged to bring children up with a disposition to live a life of little consumption.

## Implementing education for frugality

### Parents

On parental education of children, there is little to add to what we have said already – the need to build up firm and stable dispositions in favour of enjoying worthwhile uncostly activities and relationships for their own sake; combating pressures on children from peers, advertisers and salespeople to seek expensive goods; engaging adolescents – and indeed pre-adolescents, where appropriate – in discussions about frugal versus non-frugal ways of living. Climate change would be a topic of debate in these discussions. Here, too, as with avoiding expensive goods, parents could teach by example – in changing their diesel car to a hybrid, for instance, in reducing central heating temperatures or in giving up beef.

### Schools

In close collaboration with parents, schools could enlarge the work of the home, as has been said, by introducing children to further inexpensive intrinsically valuable pursuits, including academic, practical, creative and sporting activities. This could involve taster courses in all these areas, and those who were especially drawn to one or more activities could pursue them on an optional basis beyond the compulsory curriculum (Reiss and White, 2013: 18–19). As Zwarthoed (2015: 302) suggests, drawing on Dutch experience, schools 'should also offer a basic course in money, spending and saving to teach children how to budget, how to save and how to plan their finances in the long term'.

This compulsory part of the curriculum – and here I have in mind countries such as England that have a mandatory national curriculum – should, among other things, help students to understand the *factual background* to issues of frugal living in its different forms. This could include, for instance, data from all the sciences, as well as from geography, on climate change, its causes, human and other consequences, and possible future trajectories. Schools could also – via data from political and social history, sociology and economics – help to give young people a deeper insight into

a society based on mass consumption. This would raise questions of the kind that Sylvia dealt with as a teacher of citizenship about why there is endless pressure from peers and advertisers to buy and consume, the benefits of this to sellers, the costs and benefits to buyers, and the links between all this and both the nature of the labour market and social class differences in income and wealth. Work in all the areas mentioned in this paragraph lends itself to interdisciplinary studies, thus breaking the standard mould of subject-based teaching currently prevalent, especially in secondary schools. Another possible mould-breaker is the web. Not least since the COVID-19 emergency, there has been growing support for supplementing classroom-based learning with free online learning of the sort provided by the BBC ([www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize)), Oak National Academy ([www.thenational.academy](http://www.thenational.academy)) and Khan Academy ([www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org)), some of whose videos and other material are specifically about climate change (for example, Khan Academy, 2021), as well as on background subjects such as mathematics, science and economics. New technology such as this is also an ideal medium for more personalized learning than has been traditional, and it will help students to pursue their own paths.

This factual background is indispensable for another part of schools' work on education in frugality. Reminding us, once again, of Sylvia's work as a teacher of citizenship, this has to do with classroom discussion of various issues surrounding frugal living, many of which have been mentioned in this article. They include: What is frugality? Does it mean different things in different contexts? What kinds of considerations count in favour or against frugal living? Prudential, moral? Reasons based on climate change, those focused on simple living or those concerned with duties to future generations? What practical steps can and should individuals, schools, governments and other agencies take to promote uncostly ways of living, and to avert the calamities of climate change?

Wider aspects of school life could also further education in frugality. Solar panels, comfortable library spaces to encourage private reading, school gardens, vegetarian options in canteens, uniform policies, encouraging staff who drive to school to use electric vehicles, discouraging expensive overseas school trips – these and other things, some of which Zwarthoed (2015: 302) mentions, can give students daily reminders as they move around their school of frugal living and its importance.

### **The climate emergency: A caveat**

I have argued that the climate emergency gives us an overriding reason in the shape of the survival of life on Earth, and of Earth itself, for educators – parents and schools – to urge young people towards a frugal lifestyle. While this is true, it does not imply that living frugally is the most important contribution these young people can make to confront the emergency. Indeed, if they come to believe that they are 'doing their bit' by living more simply, and that nothing more is required of them, this may well be counterproductive. Pulling in one's horns, although helpful, may be of little avail if Brazil's rainforest disappears. The Greta Thunberg phenomenon has shown us that millions of young people all over the world see the number one priority as *direct action now*, to put pressure on governments and international bodies to make large-scale decisions to alleviate the situation. If direct action is indeed an important way ahead, schools' (and perhaps also parents') responsibilities do not stop with encouraging personal frugality. Schools should have a welcoming stance towards students' involvement in protest movements, even condoning and supporting school strike activity where this is not too threatening to other goals that require continuous presence at school. All this lies outside the remit of this article, which is more narrowly about education for

personal frugality. For a wider account of what schools should do about the climate emergency, see White (2020).

## Wider issues

On education for personal frugality, there is also a wider issue. Daniel Susskind, in his recent book *A World without Work* (2020), is the latest of many writers to suggest that we are soon likely to be living in a world in which paid work will far be harder to come by, and we shall have to consider measures such as drastically shortening the working week, as well as introducing something such as a participatory basic income to make sure that no one falls into poverty or other hardship. If, as more and more commentators are now suggesting (Skidelsky and Skidelsky, 2012: 192–7; Westacott, 2016: 241–8), we should combine a lower-consumption society with a far shorter working week, this would, among other things, give people more time to enjoy the delights of simpler living, especially given how pleasantly time-consuming these can sometimes be. A society reshaped along these lines would, among other things, create further ways in which parents and schools could engage with education in frugality.

The arguments in this article have been about education in frugality in the UK and other comparable affluent countries. I have not discussed this in relation to poorer countries. Even the most basic of existences in the UK during the Second World War would be a far cry from the desperate lives that millions of children lead today, from the slums of Rio de Janeiro to urban and rural hardship in many African and Asian countries. The points made above about learning not to over-consume have no purchase where under-consumption, not its opposite, is the problem: the issue is not how they can live more frugally, but how they can no longer have to live hand to mouth. Some might say that these very poor children need to learn not to be dazzled by reports of Western abundance – not to envy such a lifestyle or dream of sharing in it. More urgently, their education should include understanding and acting on the effects of, and ways of combating, climate change in general, and not least in poor countries such as their own, where droughts, storms, floods, deforestation and rising temperatures are perhaps already causing disaster.

## Notes on the contributor

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## Declarations and conflict of interests

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work.

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