

THEIR TURN UNDER THE SUN: MATTHIAS FRITSCH AND THE QUESTION OF INTERGENERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

MICHAEL NAAS

Department of Philosophy, DePaul University (USA)

mnaas@depaul.edu

ABSTRACT

This essay addresses Matthias Fritsch's argument in *Taking Turns with the Earth* that in order to respond properly and responsibly to today's climate crisis one must begin with a rethinking of ethics in terms of intergenerational responsibility. After affirming Fritsch's argument that ethics must indeed be reconceived through an analysis of our fundamental intergenerationality and our obligation to "take turns with the earth" alongside other generations, the essay retraces Fritsch's use of the work of Derrida on time, ethics, mourning, and the turn-taking of democracy to make this case. Finally, the essay proposes Homer's *Iliad* as a friendly supplement to Fritsch's plea to take turns with the earth insofar as ethical responsibility is there understood in terms of the way successive generations—like plants, or like leaves that grow, wither, and die—take their turn not only with the earth but *under the sun*.

KEYWORDS

Deconstruction, intergenerational responsibility, climate crisis, Derrida, Homer.

Mine, thine.—"This dog is mine," said those poor children; "that is my place in the sun." Here is the beginning and the image of the usurpation of all the earth.—Pascal

Even as are the generations of leaves, such are those also of men. As for the leaves, the wind scattereth some upon the earth, but the forest, as it bourgeons, putteth forth others when the season of spring is come; even so of men one generation springeth up and another passeth away. Howbeit, if thou wilt, hear this also, that thou mayest know well my lineage . . . (*Iliad* 6.146-149)

It is, it seems, "my turn" now to say something, my turn to respond to Matthias Fritsch's *Taking Turns with the Earth: Phenomenology, Deconstruction, and Inter-*

generational Justice.¹ But what a fearsome task, for how is one to respond in a meaningful and responsible way to a book that is this meticulously researched, this powerfully argued, this broad in its scope and implications, and, of course, this urgent not just for philosophy but for all of us who have inherited the earth and who have some responsibility for passing it on? How can one really respond? But then again, and given all that, how can one not respond when the stakes are this large? How can one not, at the very least, try to celebrate the accomplishments of this extremely important new book and try, however inadequately, to give something back, that is, to give something of oneself in return?

Since part of Fritsch's argument is that we are ineluctably linked to past and future generations, to those we overlap with directly and those we do not, then returning to the history of philosophy and literature in the West and beyond is more than just a scholarly exercise. It is a form of obligation and the recognition of a debt. I will thus attempt to give less a "reading" of Fritsch's book than a personal response to it, a response that will include just a few supplementary comments on texts and figures from Greek philosophy and literature, Plato and Aristotle, whom Fritsch mentions, and then, as in my epigraph, Homer, whom he does not. I do this because Fritsch's book has, as it were, turned me back to myself and my own interests with a different eye and a renewed perspective. Nothing I say will contradict or contest anything that Fritsch says in this uniquely powerful work and everything can be attributed to the inspiration I have taken from *Taking Turns with the Earth*.

Let me begin, then, by recalling just a few of the premises of this work. Fritsch's starting point is our contemporary climate crisis, which no discourse, and least of all philosophy, can today deny or ignore. This is, therefore, by all appearances, a sort of "contemporary issues in ethics" book, where the author takes a particularly urgent contemporary problem—the climate crisis—and assesses various ways of responding to it. But as Fritsch brilliantly demonstrates, the contemporary climate crisis ends up teaching us something essential about intergenerational responsibility more generally, something that *will have been* the case since time immemorial, something about our fundamental relationship to birth and to death, to past and future generations, that will have always made us who or what we are. Hence the contingent event of the climate crisis will have provoked reflection on, and a recognition of, what will have always already been our common human predicament. Climate change will have given us the "chance," if one can call it that, to reconceive of ourselves as generational be-

¹ Matthias Fritsch's *Taking Turns with the Earth: Phenomenology, Deconstruction, and Intergenerational Justice* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2018); hereafter abbreviated *TT*.

ings and, indeed, as turn-takers with the earth. As Fritsch writes in the opening pages of his work:

Climate change in particular has helped, in recent years, to move the topic of justice for future people . . . from a marginal to a central problem for society and in the theoretical literature. Global warming has come to crystallize intergenerational and environmental concerns in a particularly urgent way. (*TT*5)

What is contemporary will have thus helped “crystallize” recognition of what will have always already been the case, namely, that we are fundamentally intergenerational beings and we have a relation to the earth as turn-takes. Too bad, one might say, it has taken coming this close to ruining or destroying the earth and everything that lives on it for us to rethink ourselves as the essential turn-takers of the earth that we are.

Fritsch gets to this point by thinking our contemporary climate crisis in terms of our ethical relations not to our contemporaries, to “our” generation or generations, but to noncontemporaries, to past and future generations. Instead of beginning, as most ethical theorists do, with ethical relations to those who are assumed to be present to and contemporary with us and then extending those relations to the special case of past and future persons and generations, Fritsch begins with this so-called special case, that is, with those who are not our contemporaries. We then come to see that the so-called special case reveals a fundamental truth about human beings in general, that is, it reveals that all human beings—through their births and their deaths—are essentially generational, intergenerational beings. “We are generational beings,” writes Fritsch, “and the intergenerational relations and the time of birth and death co-constitute who we are” (*TT* 21). It is in this way that Fritsch is able to escape what Stephen Gardiner calls the “tyranny of the contemporary” (*TT*2).

It is, again, today’s environmental crisis that has allowed Fritsch to develop a new model of intergenerational relations and justice *in general*. Only by thinking our ethical obligations toward others, past and future, are we able to think what we must do here and now, in the present. As Fritsch later says, “We must see ourselves as only one generation among many others before and after us, while *also* seeing ourselves as unique in being singled out by a special responsibility” (*TT* 158). What is thus today necessary and urgent is a model of ethics and of ethical obligation that takes into account what it is to be “a human being who is born of a previous generation and leaves the world to future people” (*TT*3). The task is to come to see how we ourselves, we contemporaries, are constituted by those who are not contemporaneous with us. Only *then* can we come to see that, even among “us” contemporaries, there is a measure of the noncontemporaneous, that is, something to which we ourselves are not com-

mensurate, something absent or nonpresent, inappropriable—beginning with the “earth.” *Taking Turns with the Earth* is thus Fritsch’s plea to his contemporaries to take account or responsibility for our contemporaries and for what is noncontemporaneous within the contemporary, or, indeed, for what is “infinite” within what might appear to be series of finite demands. As Fritsch argues through Levinas and his notion of an infinite obligation toward the other:

The demand to let others live may be called “infinite” not only because the presently living cannot fully acquit themselves of a demand that is co-constitutive of their subjectivity, but because, in taking asymmetrical responsibility for overlapping future generations, the demand transitively extends to children’s children, their children, and so on. (*TT* 55)

This is thus a book for our time and, in being for our time, it is a book for all times, a book provoked by the contemporary that speaks of a fundamental relation to others—at once human and non-human, animals, plants, the inorganic, and, in the end, the “earth.” It is a book for us, for Fritsch’s contemporaries, for his generation or his “birth cohort” (*TT* 22), as he calls it, though it is also a book that will have a life beyond this generation insofar as it develops a compelling and sophisticated argument for our obligation toward what is, precisely, beyond the present.

Taking Turns with the Earth is a response to the climate crisis and a plea to recognize ourselves as intergenerational beings with an obligation to take turns with the earth. A response and a plea, it is also an exemplary work of philosophy. By turns rigorously analytical and profoundly moving, scholarly and innovative, careful and inventive, masterful in its reading of texts and yet modest in its rhetoric, this is the work of a mature scholar who is able to bring his formidable analytical skills and tremendous erudition to bear on his subject. Fritsch defines his terms and situates his approach within a vast swath of the scholarly literature.² This work also has the great merit of putting continental philosophy into conversation with an Anglo-American analytic tradition. We thus find references not just to Heidegger, Derrida and Levinas but to Rawls, Nozick, and Parfit, not just to Arendt and Butler but to Kittay and Nussbaum. And all this is then put into the context of the already large and fast-growing literature on intergenerational justice and ethics, climate change, and so on.

² Fritsch canvasses the scholarly literature masterfully throughout this work. To give just single example, when he is trying to situate his own way of rethinking intergenerational relations he lays out no fewer than four *kinds* of challenges for thinking such relations and then four *types* of responses to each of these challenges (see *TT* 24-38). We thus get sixteen different ways of approaching these problems or challenges, many of them closely related, of course, but each, in Fritsch’s clear and illuminating prose, distinct.

Incapable of commenting on Fritsch's reading of either this literature or these more analytic sources, I can say with a bit more authority that as a reader of Heidegger, Levinas, and, especially, Derrida—the most significant interlocutor for this work—Fritsch is second to none. He is able to read Derrida comprehensively and synthetically, across works, early to late, *and* in detail, following Derrida's texts in their letter (see, for example, Fritsch's remarks late in the work on Derrida's notion of the posthumous, its relation to *humer* and *humus*, and so on (*TT* 205-7)). Moreover, Fritsch seems to have heard an injunction or implication in Derrida's work that most scholars or commentators have missed or ignored. Indeed, he seems to have heard in this phrase from *Specters of Marx* something that seems to address the question of today's environmental crisis by recalling us to our essentially intergenerational being: "No ethics, no politics . . . seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born" (*SM* xix/17; cited by Fritsch at *TT* 169).

But Fritsch follows Derrida throughout this work not only thematically but methodologically. Recall what was said earlier about Fritsch's strategy of beginning with a consideration of our obligation *not* toward those who are present but toward those who are not, those who are not our contemporaries. Well, that is precisely the way Derrida argued we should try to begin to think. In a text appropriately titled *Limited Inc*, Derrida speaks of beginning always at the limit, that is, with what seems to be the limit or marginal case, the accidental case or event—like climate change—in order to reveal something more original or fundamental about a system or structure. Whereas the tradition tends to concentrate on what it considers to be essential or central, treating the accident or the liminal as outliers to be accounted for after the essence or the center has been determined, that is, while the tradition tends to *concentrate* on the center, on the present, Derrida professes to doing just the opposite. "I deconcentrate," he says, "and it is the secondary, eccentric, lateral, marginal, parasitic, borderline cases which are 'important' to me and are a source of many things, such as pleasure, but also insight into the general functioning of a textual system." As Derrida goes on to say, it is always the "marginal" or "fringe" cases that "constitute the most certain and most decisive indices wherever essential conditions are to be grasped."³

Now I began by saying that I wanted to try to give something back, something in return, just a little something that is not directly mentioned in *Taking Turns with the*

³ Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc a b c . . .," trans. Samuel Weber, in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 44, 70; "Limited Inc a b c . . .," in *Limited Inc* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1990), 90, 134.

Earth. Let me simply recall here that in the *Iliad*, in the lines just after those of my epigraph, that is, just after a passage in which human generations are compared to the changing of the seasons, we seem to find Homer affirming, to use Fritsch's language, the essential "intergenerationality" of human existence. This occurs, most astonishingly, on the battlefield, as two warriors, one fighting for the Greeks (Diomedes) and the other for the Trojans (Glaucus), square off to confront one another. But before engaging one another in battle, the first of these two warriors asks the second of his lineage, and the second responds:

Great-souled son of Tydeus, wherefore inquirest thou of my lineage? Even as are the generations of leaves [*phyllōn*], such are those also of men [*andhrōn*]. As for the leaves, the wind scattereth some upon the earth, but the forest, as it bourgeons, putteth forth others when the season of spring is come; even so of men one generation springeth up and another passeth away. Howbeit, if you wilt, hear this also, that thou mayest know well my lineage; and many there by that know it. There is a city Ephyre in the heart of Argos . . . (*Iliad* 6.145-150).⁴

After a general claim about the nature of human generations, the two enemies exchange words, they recount their lineages, and through an exchange of tales rather than blows, they come to realize that their grandfathers had once been guest-friends. The two warriors thus recognize there on the battlefield a common bond between them, a bond that was created generations earlier but that appears nonetheless binding to them in the present, binding but in need of reaffirmation. Diomedes continues after the discovery of this bond:

"Let us make exchange of armor, each with the other, that these men too may know that we declare ourselves to be friends [*xeinoi*] from our fathers' days." When they had thus spoken, the twain leapt down from their chariots and clasped each other's hands and pledged their faith. And then from Glaucus did Zeus, son of Cronos, take away his wits, seeing he made exchange of armor with Diomedes, son of Tydeus, giving golden for bronze, the worth of an hundred oxen for the worth of nine. (*Iliad* 6.230-236)⁵

We thus find in Homer a recounting of lineages, the memory of an ancient guest-friendship, and then a renewal of that friendship through an exchange, an irreciprocal exchange, of gifts after the invocation of Zeus, god of hospitality and of guest-friendship, the deeds of war thereby giving way to the words and deeds of guest-

⁴ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

⁵ Socrates famously refers to this passage at *Symposium* 219a when he teases Alcibiades by accusing of trying to exchange his bodily beauty, that is, his bronze, for Socrates's spiritual beauty, that is, his more genuine, more valuable beauty, in other words, his gold.

friendship: that is what immediately follows the comparison of human generations to the succession or the changing of the seasons and the death and regeneration of plants. In Fritsch's language, human taking-turns with the earth is there compared to the turning seasons of the earth. Fundamentally in agreement, it seems, with the idea that we are beings defined or constituted by "the time of birth and death," Homer seems to have known that we are intergenerational beings not accidentally or contingently but essentially and fundamentally, linked by birth and death to "other generations before and after us" (*TT*7). He seems to have known that "the time of birth and death is constitutive of human subjects in their interrelations with each other" (*TT*43). (And he seems to have known, as we see from this exchange between guest-friends in the *Iliad*, that there is always something excessive or aneconomic about every gift, a kind of madness of the gift that exceeds all exchange, a point that Fritsch demonstrates at length in his chapter on Derrida and Mauss.)⁶

Now once we recognize our fundamental intergenerationality, the way generations, at once past, present, and future, are linked to one another, the question becomes how we are to act and bear witness to these relations in our relation to the "earth," that is, how we are to be ourselves turn-takers with the earth. Fritsch's model for this taking-turns is, it turns out, nothing other than democracy as it is understood by Derrida in his 2003 work *Rogues (Voyous)*. For as Fritsch recalls, following Derrida's analyses in that work, democracy was first understood by Plato and Aristotle as a taking-turns between ruler and ruled. Because everyone cannot rule at once, one part of the whole, one segment of the citizenry, is elected to rule at one point in time, while another part, one that was formally ruled, is elected to rule at another. Both Plato and Aristotle thus speak of various groups of citizens "ruling in turn," or ruling in parts,

⁶ Later in *Taking Turns with the Earth*, Fritsch contrasts Levinas's notion of fecundity and the relationship between generations that this entails with "Plato's claim that, through offspring, moral subjects participate in eternal life (*Laws* 721b-c)" (*TT*90). This is indeed Plato, and Fritsch, who cites the *Laws*, could have also cited Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* for further confirmation of this view (see *Symposium* 207d). But there is another Plato, or at least another turn in Plato, that accounts for human time, and especially the time between generations, in a rather different way. It is found later in the same dialogue, *The Laws*, as the Athenian describes the way a married couple must leave their parents' homes as if they were going off to a colony, visiting and being visited, begetting and rearing children and so "handing on life [*bios*], like a torch from one generation to another" (*Laws* 776b). To be sure, Fritsch might come back to say that, however charming this image might be, it nonetheless suggests an essential continuity between generation, whereas, for Levinas, "offspring mean, not only for the parent but for all moral agents, an infinite, discontinuous time that requires an abdication of control over the life of the other, a renunciation of my survival and indeed an affirmation of my mortality" (*TT*90).

kata meros, with one “part” or *meros* ruling over the other in turn.⁷ Fritsch can thus argue that “generations are connected across birth and death by taking turns with the earth and with institutions, especially with *democratic* ones” (*TT* 13; my emphasis), because the turn-taking of democracy is the very model of the way in which generations do or should take turns with the “earth.” Just as the sovereignty of a state is, in democracy, shared over time through a democratic turn-taking, so generations within this democratic state should, following this model of democracy, take-turns with the earth. For turn-taking, Fritsch argues, is “especially suited to sharing things that cannot be shared by division”; that is, it is better able to “respect the holistic nature of certain objects” (*TT* 14), certain “objects” such as climate or, better, the earth, objects that Fritsch characterizes not as “wholes” or “holistic” but as “quasi-holistic.” (This is, in some way, Fritsch’s way of rewriting what is known in traditional ethical theories as the “tragedy of the commons” (*TT* 29), the commons here extending to the limits of our common earth and environment.) To recall my first epigraph above, while one can fall prey to the illusion or the phantasm of “mine” and “thine” in the possession of a dog or even a *place* in the sun or upon the earth, one can have no such illusion with regard to the earth as a “whole” or as a “quasi-whole.” For “quasi-holistic objects like earth and climate . . . necessarily precede and outlive generations, and for that reason they are not indifferent to, but co-constitutive of, the very being of generations, the subjects of sharing by taking turns” (*TT* 14).

Before developing a bit more this notion of turn-taking in relation to democracy and the earth, we should perhaps first ask just what “earth” means in Fritsch’s discourse. We “take turns” with the earth, Fritsch argues, in a way that resembles the taking turns of democracy. But what is the earth exactly? Fritsch writes early on in his work: “Individual humans come to be from, and pass away into, the earth, understood as the *history and habitat of life*. We do not only have generations taking turns with the earth, but individuals being born of earth into a human generation, while returning to earth upon death” (*TT* 14; my emphasis). The “earth” is thus something that includes but is not the same as this big round ball of air, soil, water, and molten lava some twenty-four thousand miles in circumference; it is something other than a large “container” of the living and the non-living (*TT* 195). Having recalled earlier in the book Levinas’s notions of “the elemental earth” and of “the strangeness of the

⁷ “Turn” and “part”—these are obviously not the same thing, and, as translations of *meros*, they work in two quite different semantic registers. I would suggest that, in Fritsch’s analysis of the double-turn, the first kind of turn can be understood within the presentist logic of part and whole while the second kind of turn, a “turn” in the more proper sense of the term, is a turn away from the present and from the logic of part and whole, a turn toward the future or toward what comes next.

earth" (*TT* 99), Fritsch defines the "earth" as a "quasi-holistic 'object' of intergenerational sharing (*TT* 154), as "one name for the 'hetero' in the auto-hetero-affection that defines life" (*TT* 186), as "the constitutive outside" or "the history and habitat of life," as "the context in which *différance* plays out" (*TT* 194), as "the self-differentiating force in the habitat and history of life" that "precedes and exceeds life" (*TT* 209). As such, the earth as a quasi-object functions as something like the exterior the general, an exterior that can never be appropriated and so can never be "ours," only "shared" as what is *not* our own.

Now Fritsch goes on to speak, following Derrida, of a *double* turn-taking within democracy and with regard to the "earth," that is, he tries to "apply double turning to democracy" when "placed in intergenerational and environmental contexts" (*TT* 168). Unable to replicate here Fritsch's argument with any of the subtlety and complexity it deserves, this double turn can be characterized, at the risk of oversimplification, as combining a turn toward identity and sameness, on the one hand, and a turn toward difference and alterity on the other. On the one hand, the democratic turn attempts always to preserve identities, maintain institutions, assure continuity across elections and generations, that is, across turns. Hence the attempt in democracy to, for example, "restrict the successor to citizens who are tied to the same constitution and institutions." Fritsch writes:

It is a well-known paradox that freedom-granting constitutions also restrict the freedom of future peoples. A collective self, such as a family or a nation, may further seek to reestablish itself despite the mortality of individual members by tracing bloodlines, making bequests only to the oldest son, or at the national level, by (in the absolutist case) passing sovereignty from king to son or (in the democratic case) restricting national membership to those who belong to it by blood or by birth; hence, the link between democracy and fraternity and the hegemony given to the figure of the natural-born brother that Derrida seeks to loosen up in *The Politics of Friendship*. (*TT* 169)

In this first turn there is thus an attempt to reproduce the present, to master the future, to overcome, in short, the risk of a radical "turn" that opens the present to an unknown future. Both Plato in the *Republic* and Aristotle in the *Politics* attempt to reduce the radicality of the turn in just this way, minimizing the risk of a radical disjunction between generations, to say nothing of individuals. In both Plato and Aristotle, albeit to a lesser degree in the latter than the former, there is the recognition of the risk involved in giving authority over to another part of the whole, that is, to another generation, and thus the need to minimize the risk, to reduce the differences between one part and another, one generation and the next, and, at the limit, to make the next generation into the mirror image of the present one.

Hence the need, in both Fritsch's account and Derrida's, for a *second turn*. And so, on the other hand, democracy—especially as it is understood by Derrida under the title of the democracy-to-come—tries to “take account” of this unforeseeable future that the first turn risks closing down. As Fritsch recalls, “the second turning implies hospitality to the indeterminate future other; it entails the gift of giving way to another, letting another generation have its turn as one had one's own” (*TT* 169). According to this second turn, “we” take turns (with the earth, with sovereign power) in such a way that the very meaning of “we” is called into question, opened up to those who may not be our kin or our brothers, who may not even be human at all (see *TT* 157). For no limit can be set in advance to this welcome “extended to others, ranging from one's future self to other living humans, even to noncontemporary humans (the dead and the unborn) and to nonhuman others, including the inorganic” (*TT* 167). When Fritsch thus speaks of the passing on of the earth, the “human earth,” to future generations, and of the “gift of the world as humanly habitable earth” (*TT* 137), such a conception of the earth does not exclude, quite the contrary, the nonhuman.

Putting these two turns together, “taking turns,” says Fritsch, gives us “a way of grasping the relation between irreplaceability and replacement, or singularity and multiplicity” (*TT* 163). It also provides us with a radical rethinking of time, an account of time as “divisible and yet not divisible,” an account that “does justice both to what we might call the presentness of the present, and to temporal succession” (*TT* 162). It is in this way that turn-taking between generations, between self and other, between the present and the future or the past, provides the model for the turn-taking that occurs within a generation or, indeed, an individual within time.

The double-turn thus involves at once a turn toward identity and sameness, toward the self in a return to self, *and* a turn toward difference and the other, toward the loss or dispersion of the self. What this means is that the promise to return to oneself is never assured, always open and vulnerable to non-return, for it is perpetually interrupted by or, better, constituted by, the injunction and necessity “to welcome unconditionally the future to-come as an alterity within oneself” (*TT* 167). As Fritsch argues, “taking turns with oneself is one way to reconcile these two demands: a self turns toward the future as other in order to turn back on itself as it has been” (*TT* 164). This is, of course, a “reconciling” without synthesis or final resolution. For turn-taking always turns in two directions that can never be completely reconciled or synthesized into an ethical vision that can then be deployed, counted on, or used as a rule or measure. (Derrida speaks of this double-turn in *Rogues* as an “autoimmune” relation, one that turns against itself and its own protections, a notion that drew much attention in the years after the publication of *Rogues* and one that Fritsch mentions but does not dwell on in this work.) The “double turn-taking among generations and

with earth”—the title of the penultimate chapter of *Taking Turns with the Earth*—thus at once affirms and rejects, it seems, a logic of part and whole. It affirms it insofar as institutions and relations allow various generations to see themselves in and as future and past generations, as being part of something bigger than themselves, as being part of a whole or as taking part in a whole. But it rejects such a logic insofar as neither the future nor the past can be appropriated or synthesized into a whole in this way.

In an attempt to combat the “presentist” understanding of time and of self that we spoke of earlier, that is, in an attempt to show the “intergenerational” nature of life itself, Fritsch in the final chapters of the book tries to rethink survival or *survivance* not as a contingent event that comes to effect a being after death but, following Derrida again, as a fundamental modality of life itself (*TT* 170). Fritsch writes in an extremely powerful passage, which I take the liberty of citing at length:

The turn-taking nature of time shows us that generational overlap, the relation of the young and the old in what is no longer a mere contemporaneity, is not a mere accident from which theories of intergenerational justice may abstract. Time is the time of survival, or *survivance*, each time surviving life’s denying but never coinciding with itself, a life or lifedeath that therefore consists in taking turns. Life involves exchanging positions and stations in life, as the young become the old and the unborn become the dead. The democratic assent to letting the others have their turn in governing is thus enabled by the turning nature of time. But the consent has also—quietly, perhaps, but necessarily—been extended to a generational, rather than just individual, turn-taking. (*TT* 170)

The result of the double-turn would thus be, Fritsch argues, or believes, or hopes, a different, more earthly or more humble form of sovereignty, a different or more or less human way of sharing the earth with others. Fritsch writes near the very end the book:

Double turning with generations and earth may be understood as a more *humble* sovereignty, one that is closer to the earth, less like the lion or the wolf, the owl or the eagle, and more like the mole or the hedgehog, of which Derrida says they are, like us, *terre-à-terre*. A sovereignty that embodies (or even inters) the promise to let the earth survive as a human world, even if it will not live forever. (*TT* 213)

In speaking here of *humility* and of the earth, Fritsch is recalling a semantic schema deployed throughout Derrida’s later work linking humility to the earth, to the posthumous, to survival and remains. There are many different aspects of this semantic filiation, but, in the final chapter of *Taking Turns with the Earth*, all of them come to be concentrated around the question of the *corpse*. The theme is introduced through a line from Derrida’s *Glas*: “What is it to make a gift of the corpse? (*GL* 143/163)” (cited at *TT* 196). The corpse becomes central to both Derrida and Fritsch

because if anything about the self resists appropriation by oneself it is, of course, “one’s” corpse, a corpse that can never even be said to be “mine.” As Fritsch affirms: “The corpse—we cannot even write ‘my corpse’—signifies above all that agency, the power to live, move, go out into the world (of the earth) and come back to oneself, comes to an absolute limit with the interred condition of the corpse” (*TT*205). “The corpse,” therefore, Fritsch argues, “is Derrida’s name for this exposure and deliverance to the other. In fact, ‘other’ is, for Derrida, defined as that which or who will survive me” (*TT*207). As a result, the corpse cannot be thought without a reference to the earth as understood by Fritsch. For “earth is one name, even if only one, for the preceding and exceeding context of lifedeath that I cannot appropriate for myself but must *leave* for the other, the surviving sovereigns as well as the earth as recipient of the corpse” (*TT*205).

Hence the corpse becomes for Fritsch, as for Derrida, the site for thinking the always already “posthumous” nature of life itself. That is why Fritsch spends so much time in the final pages of his work turning around Derrida’s phrase—his now posthumous phrase—“I posthume as I breathe [*je posthume comme je respire*]” (*BS2* 174/248; *D* 26/28)” (*TT* 205). A play on the common French expression “*il ment comme il respire*,” “he (or she) lies as easily as he breathes,” “posthuming here means relating to a future horizon that has mortal openings in it” (*TT*206). This is, as Fritsch rightly suggests, another way of thinking what Derrida calls *différance*, that is, “to posthume by differing or deferring life or, what comes down to the same thing, deferring death” (*BS2* 174/249)” (*TT*206).

Fritsch thus focuses in the final chapter of *Taking Turns with the Earth* on the corpse that I give or that is given in spite of me to the next generation, the corpse as a limit to my mastery and my ability to appropriate for myself, the corpse as a cipher for alterity in general, in short, as another name for the earth, an irreducible site of ethical obligation for us as another or as an heir or, indeed, for others who are destined to become our heirs. For no matter how explicit or legally binding a Last Will and Testament may be, it is always up to the other, to the heir, always up to the next generation, to do what they can or will with the corpse one leaves behind. For example, to bury or cremate it—two different ways of returning it to the earth, even if Fritsch, still following Derrida in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, speaks much more of the former, under the name of *interment*, than the latter.

And yet, throughout Derrida’s *The Beast and the Sovereign*, written just over year before his death, Derrida speaks not only of interment, of burial, but of cremation, and of the fact that a large and growing number of people throughout the world are today faced with a choice between interment and cremation. There are, to be sure, other alternatives to these two, but for a large and growing number of people these

are the two primary options, a binary choice between interment and cremation, in short, between earth and fire, earth and sun. I would thus like to conclude these remarks, these wholly inadequate remarks, on Fritsch's magnificent new book, by suggesting that we take turns with the sun as well as the earth, that is, we take turns being in the light for a time, in the light of the sun upon the earth, before being either enfolded back into the earth or else incinerated by fire.

I would like to supplement, therefore, Fritsch's extremely powerful and persuasive analyses of "earth" by a few references to the sun, references that will bring us back to the ancient world and, in particular, to Homer. I suggest this supplement because one can easily imagine the earth as an encompassing or even a comforting whole, even if Fritsch is careful to recall, in the context once again of his reading of Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign*, that, for "Crusoe and Derrida, the earth is hardly every maternally comforting but often terrifying, for it trembles and opens up, threatening to swallow up 'alive' what it has, in fact, always already engulfed despite the differential separation constitutive of life" (*TT* 211). I recall the sun and its ability to reduce everything to ash even though, in Fritsch's discourse, the earth as an image of all that is "hetero" in auto-hetero-affection already includes the sun, just as interment, in Fritsch's analysis, already includes cremation. Fritsch writes, for example, "earth names the mortal condition of life, and as such, [it] is closely associated with receiving the corpse, whether buried, cremated, or whatever" (*TT* 194-195).⁸ And yet earth, not sun, interment, not cremation, remains central to Fritsch's discourse, for example when he writes, already in the introduction, "life is always already intergenerational and in-earthed, interred and interring" (*TT* 15). And one can of course understand why Fritsch would speak of the earth and not of the sun in the way, why earth, not sun, would be the name of the exterior or the other in general in this work, and why earth, not sun, would be in the title of Fritsch's work. For while one can *take turns* with the earth like one can with the sun, one can also, and this is of course Fritsch's central concern in writing the book, *take care* of the earth in a way one cannot with the sun, for the sun gives of itself completely without us and will one day, of itself, and without any influence from us, die out like every sun eventually does. In short, the sun is out of our orbit, beyond our sphere of influence, in a way that the earth is not. That is a good reason to speak, as Fritsch does, of "taking turns with the earth" and not the sun. But it is perhaps also a good reason to recall the sun.

⁸ Fritsch writes a few pages later: "The earth is also the earth of the dead, those buried and cremated, like Blanchot, who had just died and was cremated when Derrida wrote: 'The posthumous is becoming the very element, mixes in everywhere with their air we are breathing' (*BS* 2179/255)" (*TT* 208).

We take turns with the earth but we also take turns in the light, turns beneath the sun. I recall this not in order to resurrect the sun as an image of metaphysics par excellence, the sun as a privileged figure of the sovereign Good from Plato onward, but simply to recall that the sun is, on Fritsch's account, a part of the "earth," a part that can perhaps provide a shift in perspective. For the sun still *seems* to turn around the earth, it still *seems* to rise and set, and it—or the fire associated with it—still seems to offer an *alternative* to inhumation or interment and so to the earth in the narrow sense of the term. For while the earth is always beneath our feet, the sun disappears every day; it turns or it takes turns in a way that the earth does not. Despite our knowledge that it is in fact always "there," always "present," it continues to punctuate our lives with light and darkness, presence and absence, a life lived in the light and the eclipse of that light and that life. And, of course, we know that it will one day not be "there."

Let me return, therefore, one final time to Homer, who provides the West with its first great images not only of interment but of cremation, or rather of cremation followed by interment. For we must recall that Patroclus, whose death and funeral are central to the *Iliad*, was not simply buried in the earth after being slain by Hector but burned on a funeral pyre, his bones later gathered up, put into a golden urn, and only then covered over by earth in an aboveground barrow or monument—a *sēma*, says Homer—that would stand as a monument to Patroclus's life and death (see *Iliad* 23.236-56). Patroclus thus goes out or goes up in a blaze of light, a perfectly fitting end to a life understood as a being in the light, life as a living in the light of the sun. For, throughout the *Iliad*, *to live* is almost synonymous with *being in the light*, being able to look up at the light of the sun. In Book 19, for example, birth itself is described as a "bringing to the light [*phoōsde*]" (*Iliad* 19.103), a description that takes its full meaning only when juxtaposed with death as a taking leave of that light. At the beginning of the previous book, Achilles, having learned of the death of his dear friend, recalls that his mother, the goddess Thetis, had once declared to him that "while yet I lived the best man of the Myrmidons [Patroclus] should leave the light of the sun [*phaos ēelioio*] beneath the hands of the Trojans" (*Iliad* 18.9-11). And then, just a few lines later, Thetis herself says of her son, "never again shall I welcome him back to his home . . . And while yet he liveth [*zōei*], and beholdeth the light of the sun [*horai phaos ēelioio*], he hath sorrow" (*Iliad* 18.61-62). Life is thus itself, in Homer, a life lived on or with the earth, a taking turns with the earth as Fritsch describes it, though the language is here turned toward the sun, toward a taking turns beneath the sun. It is thus also, contrary to what we may think about life in the context of the West's first great poem about war, a fragile and vulnerable thing that requires the care and tending of others—the *émondage* of others, to cite Fritsch citing Derrida (*TT* 203;

see Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign II*, p. 9/32). For just before these words about life as a life lived in the "light of the sun," life, we might imagine, as the glorious shining of the warrior beneath the sun, Thetis speaks of her son living in the light not as a great warrior, not as a lion, wolf, owl, or eagle, and not as mole or hedgehog, but as a plant: "he shot up like a sapling; then when I had reared him as a tree in a rich orchard plot, I sent him forth in the beaked ships to Ilios to war with the Trojans" (*Iliad* 18.56-59). Achilles as a plant—we are back, it seems, to those leaves we spoke of earlier, the individual as a sapling and human generations like the leaves that fall in autumn and sprout again in spring. Matthias Fritsch's *Taking Turns with the Earth* recalls all of this, and it makes a plea that we recall all of this for our sakes and for the sakes of whoever or whatever comes next, that is, for whoever or whatever is to take its turn with the earth, its turn under the sun.