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ARTICLE

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Why Democrats Should Be Committed to Future Generations

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Abstract

In response to the claim that democracies are inherently short-termist, this article argues for a new way to understand them as being committed to future generations. If taking turns among rulers and ruled is a normative idea inherent to the concept of democracy, then such turn-taking commits democrats to a fair turn with future generations.

Résumé

En réponse à l'inquiétude importante selon laquelle les démocraties sont intrinsèquement court-termistes, cet article propose une nouvelle façon de les comprendre comme étant engagées envers les générations futures. Si le principe du tour de rôle entre gouvernants et gouvernés est une idée normative inhérente au concept de démocratie, alors ce principe engage les démocrates à donner aux générations futures un tour juste.

Keywords: democracy; climate change; future generations; office rotation; equality; liberty

1. Introduction

Today, ecology confronts democracy with a number of severe challenges. Global heating and environmental destabilization are cumulative and wicked problems that call for large-scale action and policy coordination by many actors across nation-state borders and long timescales. Under conditions of global capitalism, many of these actors are caught in collective action problems. As a global and long-term intergenerational problem that is connected to a deeply entrenched fossil fuel-based economic infrastructure, climate destabilization challenges national — and usually

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short-termist — democratic governments to consider non-citizens (especially the global poor, non-human beings, and future generations) in addition to protecting the basic safety of the populace and securing constitutionally guaranteed rights of citizens.

Despite the so-called "Paris Agreement of 2015" (Conference of the Parties, or COP 21) — which some saw as a success given (albeit voluntary) agreement to the goal of maintaining an average warming of under 1.5 degrees Celsius with 2.0 a fall-back option — greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have continued to rise dramatically since the much-discussed failure of the 2009 UN climate change negotiations in Copenhagen, the so-called "COP 15" (Clémençon, 2016; Skidmore & Farrell, 2021). The last COP (COP 28 in Egypt, 2022) failed to deliver any meaningful results on mitigation and adaptation. As I write (spring 2023), it is clear to experts that, at 1.2 degrees currently, we will surpass 1.5 degrees in the next 10 to 15 years and are on track to exceed the 2.0 degrees of warming, which scientists have identified as a critical tipping point with a 50% chance of being reached by 2050 (Diffenbaugh & Barnes, 2023). The environmental and political consequences may very well be catastrophic.[1]

Many observers think that these failures are, in part, to be blamed not only on particular politicians or governments, or the weakness of global institutions, but also on democracy as the very form of government of major emitting countries as well as on the mainstream moral and political theories that support democratic institutions (Di Paola & Jamieson, 2018; Gardiner, 2011; MacKenzie, 2016a, 2016b). The many proposed remedies found in the scholarly literature include eco-authoritarian proposals for scaling back democracy. An increasing number of social scientists and political theorists are joining the older Neo-Malthusian discourse (Heilbroner, 1974; Ophuls, 1977), according to which natural limits to economic growth and to population growth demand suspending or abandoning key democratic principles and institutions. Even Hans Jonas, whose then-novel work in intergenerational justice influenced the famous UN Brundtland Commission on sustainability in the 1980s (WCED, 1987, 55; also see Schmidt, 2013), suggested that "a well-intentioned, well-informed tyranny … appears superior, for our uncomfortable purposes, to the capabilities of the capitalist-liberal-democratic complex" (Jonas, 1984, pp. 147). More recent authors claim to have sufficient evidence that today, under conditions of global capitalism and consumer society, democracy has adopted a form that is geared more towards the stabilization of the unsustainable *status quo* than its radical transformation (Blühdorn, 2013). Accordingly, some call for de-democratizing at least climate policy in favour of experts with long-term orientations (Giddens, 2009; Lovelock, 2010; Shearman & Smith, 2007).[2] Other authors do not recommend but predict

[1] See Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report (2022) for details.

[2] In her overview, Amanda Machin (2022) helpfully suggests calling this the "skeptical imaginary" regarding democracy's ability to handle climate change. We may predict that the so-called "realist turn" (Valentini, 2012) in political theory strengthens the case for expertocracy and less democracy. If normative priority is given to peace, security, order, legitimacy, and so on (Galston, 2010; Williams, 2005), then the real world in which politics occurs will have to be taken more seriously in theorizing democracy. Today, this real world, of course, includes climate change, so one should not be surprised to find theorists who argue that citizen safety and community survival trump justice and democracy as grounds for legitimacy. Using

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that insufficiently mitigated climate change will force democracies in an eco-authoritarian direction (Lawrence & Laybourn-Langton, 2021; Malm & The Zetkin Collective, 2021; Mann & Wainwright, 2018). The destabilization of the environment destabilizes democracies by, for instance, widening inequality and further immiserating parts of the working class and the poor; destroying nature-based livelihoods and generating food crises; producing vast numbers of climate refugees pushing on the borders of democracies; climate wars; and so on. Accordingly, one must expect an impetus for more aggressive populist governments, and possibly the folding of neoliberal expertocracy and conservative climate inaction and denialism into forms of eco-authoritarianism or even eco-fascism.

In the face of these eco-authoritarian and expertocratic fears and recommendations, it is all the more important to seek out alternative proposals for reform and to rethink the democratic ethos, as I will attempt here. The host of proposals for "more democracy" range from inclusion of previous non-participants and deeper citizen participation to institutional reforms — especially regarding future people — all of which contribute to a significant upsurge in the extant literature, both empirical and theoretical, on environmental governance, democracy, and climate change. I have assembled an overview of this literature elsewhere (Fritsch, Forthcoming) and so will pose a different question here, namely that of what I just called the "democratic ethos": why should democrats care for the future in the first place?

A key problem that many authors see in democracy lies in the fact that those most affected by climate change — as indicated, non-human nature, non-citizens (especially the global poor), and future generations — are often excluded from the group (the demos) that engages in collective decision-making. The most vulnerable and affected groups tend to be left out of the democratic process. In this article, I will neglect the non-human as well as spatial-geographical side of the problem, not because these groups are not central to the issues at stake — they very clearly are — but so as to focus on the temporal aspect: the relation between democracy and future generations. And, on this issue, I am not so much concerned with the question of how future people can better be represented, but that of why democrats should be moved to do this. If we must worry that democracies will increasingly slide towards eco-authoritarianism — either because that seems the only way to achieve meaningful and effective action on mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage, or because increasing climate destabilizations will also destabilize democratic institutions — then what might motivate democrats to stem that slide and orient decisions to the benefit of the future?

Most work on this issue seeks to reform democracy on the basis of extrinsic (i.e., not necessarily democratic) supplements, such as theories of justice more generally: inadequate treatment of future generations just seems unfair to notions of equality, of rights, and so on — notions that need not be related to democracy, but may be so related, of course, at least in a broad way (Gonzalez-Ricoy & Gosseries, 2016,

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the COVID-19 pandemic as a recent example of arguably legitimate techniques of government that impose severe limitations on free movement and association, Ross Mittiga argues that climate change poses an even graver threat to public safety and therefore may legitimately require a similarly authoritarian approach (Mittiga, 2022).

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p. 4). Other than the argument presented below, I know of only one other internal argument linking democracy to concern for future people, namely the so-called “all affected” principle in deliberative democracy (Eckersley, 2000; Heyward, 2008; Jensen, 2015; see also Thompson, 2010). The principle determines who should be included in the democratic decision-making group by reference to all those whose interests will be affected by the decisions (Goodin, 2007). In Habermas’s well-known but more demanding version, a proposed norm, policy, or course of action attains normative validity only if all those affected by it could rationally consent to it (Habermas, 1996). Many “green” deliberative democrats or discourse ethicists have argued for the temporal extension of some version of this principle (Dobson, 1996; Goodin, 2003; Johnson, 2007; Shrader-Frechette, 2002). I have argued elsewhere that this strategy, important as it is and will remain, conflicts with core commitments of discursive ethics and deliberative democracy, as it renders agreement hypothetical and discursive participation virtual (Fritsch, 2021).

The argument presented here seeks to discover a new way of grasping democracies as being inherently committed to future generations. I will argue that another internal argument for understanding democracy in a pro-futural way is what I call the “turn-taking view.”[3] On this view, rotation among rulers and ruled is a central normative idea in the concept of democracy. Drawing, in part, from Aristotle, I present several reasons for the claim that democracy implies the principled consent to others ruling after one’s turn. On this basis, I then show that this rotation among rulers and ruled must also be understood to imply taking turns among generations.

For present purposes, my definition of “democracy” is meant to capture the actual institutional arrangements currently prevailing in many self-proclaimed forms of democratic government of which it has been claimed, with good reason, that they favour present generations and, partly thereby, face tremendous difficulties in responding effectively to environmental destabilization. (Yet, I want to leave it open at what level democracy applies; its reference need not be restricted to nation-states but could well extend to more local and more cosmopolitan institutions.) Thus, by “democracy,” I mean a set of institutional arrangements and constitutional devices that give form to the rule of the people (usually by electing representatives) while putting restraints (largely liberal rights) on the actions of the freely elected government. Modern democracies are the result of a historical and variable marriage between the liberalism of individual rights and popular sovereignty, where the latter usually entails majority consent. These institutional arrangements are meant to give expression to the equal liberty and dignity of citizens, who collectively decide their fate not only by holding regular elections but also by way of a public sphere in which democratic deliberation is fostered through the constitutional right to free speech and free assembly (Christiano & Bajaj, 2022; Crick, 2003; Habermas, 1994, 1996). The equality and the freedom required here may be more or less extensive, ranging from formal and legal to more substantive forms, for instance, tied to social and economic spheres.

[3] To clarify my use of “internal,” I do not mean that a descriptive definition of democracy already entails a commitment to taking turns with future generations. Rather, I mean that a normative definition of democracy entails this commitment, provided we agree that the normative definition includes commitment to equal liberty.

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Likewise, the engagement of individuals in the rule of the people may be more or less participatory. The "more or less" in these areas gives rise to different accounts of democracy, ranging from liberal and aggregative to republican, deliberative, and radical-agonistic interpretations of democracy (Celikates, 2021; Held, 2006). However, it is crucial for my argument that the core democratic commitment is to the equal liberty of citizens, what Étienne Balibar — in part to flag the tension between the two commitments — has called "equaliberty" (Balibar, 2014).[4]

Equal liberty, I suggest, is intimately related to rotation in power, which further implies a commitment to future generations having their turn with democratic rule. I present this commitment to turn-taking as the internal pro-futural motivation that democracies should recall and deepen. Against the notion that democracy needs supplementation by other normative sources — whether cultural, moral, or political — this pro-futural motivation comes from within the democratic idea itself. I begin by exploring the idea of taking turns in a general way.

2. Political Turn-Taking

Given the important role it plays in games and in socialization processes — from sharing the swing on the playground to board games and language learning — most human beings, the world over, are familiar with the idea of sharing an object or a game by taking turns. In this form of sharing, each participant is assigned a limited temporal duration with a role, the occupation of an office, or a thing. Despite this familiarity, when most people (including theorists of distributive justice) approach the task of allocation, they tend to think of sharing an object by division rather than by turns. We cut a cake into parts to be consumed by each individually. Sharing economic benefits of cooperation (income, consumption, and so on) follows this part-sharing model. But, in some cases, sharing by turns is more appropriate than sharing by parts, for instance, when one or more of the following conditions pertaining to item X are met:

(1) X cannot very well be shared by division, for dividing it into parts would destroy X as the thing it is (e.g., disassembling a bicycle renders it unusable);
(2) X's use(fulness) is temporary (no one needs a bike at all times); for generations, birth and death impose the temporary "use" of transgenerational items of sharing;
(3) X is "owned" in common but cannot be appropriated or consumed *in toto* at a given time, and this excess cannot but be passed on to the future; and
(4) X was received from others earlier in time (together with (3), this means X precedes and exceeds present users).

I have argued elsewhere that these conditions are met by quasi-holistic and co-constitutive, transgenerational items such as the environment or earth, tradition or lifeworld, language, infrastructure, and so on; I have also suggested that at least

[4] The famous slogan from the French revolution "égalité, liberté, fraternité," of course, includes a key third variable, which we should rephrase in less sexist terms as "solidarity" (see e.g., Dussel, 2007).

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some of these features apply to many political offices generally, not just to democratic institutions (Fritsch, 2018). However, here I would like to propose that the link between political institutions and turn-taking is even tighter in the case of democracies. These conditions are met by democratic political institutions from within, as it were. My general point is that it is essential to democracy to ask its members to accept that other members may or will rule after them; accordingly, democrats are committed to letting others have their turn at governing after them. I will first present five reasons that jointly and severally support this point, by outlining areas where I think turn-taking manifests in democratic institutions, and will then suggest that there is a single underlying reason for these manifestations: the close link between equal liberty and turn-taking.

(i) My first reason stems from Aristotle and relates to the application of law to all equally, particularly in cases of conflict of interest. In a fascinating and convoluted passage on absolute monarchy (Aristotle, 1959, *Politics*, Book 3.16, 1287a), Aristotle suggests (on my reading of this passage) that applying the law equally already implies the idea of taking turns with law-executing offices. If the monarch applied the law to himself, then he would be above the law and would thereby violate the very idea of the law as applying to all equally. Seeing that the monarch is still human, and thus rational but also "beastly" and selfish, he needs to rotate out of office at least in cases involving himself. Today, many public offices have a substitute officer, for example, a vice-president — also, from the Latin *per vices* ("by turns") — not only as substitute in case of illness or other absence, but because officers may need to excuse themselves from decisions due to conflicts of interest, and then hand over their turns to vice-officers.

One may object that this reason is not specific to democratic decision-making, which is not principally about the application but the making of law, and in making law the point is precisely that the laws apply to those who make them. And yet, I think the close relation between law and taking turns is especially relevant to democracy, which — as defined above — treats all citizens equally and thus doesn't take anyone to be above the law. The institution of law of which Aristotle speaks here does not merely consist in legal relations — two parties and a judge — but in political ones. Otherwise the legal resolution of disputes would be merely private arbitration. These political relations are double: the equality between the two legal parties (one can be an equal of the other before the law only because one is an equal citizen) and the authority of the judge. What Aristotle stresses in this passage on my reading is that the authority of judges consists not in being above the law, but in being citizens themselves — only in this way can they speak in the name of the citizenry at large and its authority (see Menke, 2018, p. 13ff.). This means that political equality, as championed by democracy, manifests above all in the in-principle replaceability of the judge by other citizens. And this replaceability is marked by the turn-sharing of law-executing offices, especially in cases affecting judges as themselves parties to a matter calling for legal resolution. If a polity grants equality to its citizens and legally constitutes political power, as a democracy does, then it should institute office rotation in at least some legal roles. For turn-taking ties legal authority (just as political authority, as we will see in (v) below) back to political equality.

(ii) Another link between democracy and taking turns lies in protecting minorities. A democracy typically explains why a minority should consent to majority rule by

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suggesting that the minority may become the majority in turn (e.g., the next election). The people's right to change the majority through elections is a defining characteristic of democracy. In ruling, every democratic majority consents to possibly shifting majorities and minorities in the future. One way in which this consent is expressed is by committing to fair future elections and to granting pertinent rights to the minority, for otherwise the majority would make itself permanent and become a dictatorship. The minority retains the right and the opportunity to seek to become the majority, and therefore possesses all the rights necessary to compete fairly in elections, including rights to free speech, assembly, association, and petition. Perhaps this captures the discomfort many feel in the face of the recent authoritarian turn in some democracies, some dimensions of which we can see as violating the idea of taking turns. For example, if a governing party seeks to shore up its victory by gerrymandering, restricting or hampering voting access, and by stacking up courts, it is acting out of an undemocratic ethos that seeks to forestall the chances of the governed becoming the ruling majority in turn.

(iii) With this reference to free speech, we have moved to the next link between democracy and turn-taking. It belongs to the democratic ethos of both citizenry and political-legal organization to respect and institutionalize free speech, which entails that democrats must grant others (e.g., the minority, the official opposition in parliament, etc.) a chance, a turn, at speaking. Conversation and dialogue in general, as linguists know well (Hayashi, 2012), requires taking turns with speech, and so granting free speech in principle to all citizens (or all affected by democratic decisions) calls for the institutionalization of granting all a turn at being heard.

In democratic theory, this insight has above all been elaborated by deliberative or discursive theories that insist on the centrality of pre-voting, pre-aggregative deliberation (Fontana et al., 2004; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Habermas, 1996; Mackenzie & Sorial, 2011). That is one of the reasons, we might say, why dialogic search for the truth, for example, in universities (ideally independent from the state and from corporations) is so central to democracy, and why democratic education is of paramount significance. Such education should include, in practice and in theory, deliberation on the basis of good reasoning, and listening to others in the context of shared institutions (Morrell, 2018), however trite and uncomfortable that sounds in the age of recent trends towards populism, polarization, internet bubbles, deliberate sensationalist obfuscation, and so on.

(iv) Returning to Aristotle, in a passage we will discuss below, his *Politics* mentions term limits as following from democracy's fundamental commitment to taking turns with rule among free equals. In the same vein, he also suggests that democracies limit the duration of offices before the next turn as well as assign some offices by lot (Aristotle, 1959, *Politics*, 6.2, 1317b20ff.). To this day, many democratic constitutions and institutions impose term and office limits on elected officials, and, at least in democratic theory, sortition is making a comeback (Gastil & Wright, 2019; van Reybrouck, 2016). Michael K. MacKenzie, indeed, suggests that the second chamber that is part of many democracies be appointed by random selection so as to counterbalance some of the short-term tendencies associated with elected chambers (MacKenzie, 2016b). The reason that is often given for term and office limits (and for sortition) revolves around the attempt to prevent alienation from voters, increase

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in career politicians, and undue concentration of power. It seems to me that these attempts seek to minimize as far as is possible any gap between governed and governing citizens. Rulers and ruled should remain free equals determining their collective fate in an equitable manner, and to realize this we should ensure reasonably frequent rotation in offices: indeed a rotation that, as in the lottery, will also bring those into power who otherwise tend to remain disenfranchised. The next reason will expand on this link between equal freedom and turn-taking.

(v) This fifth and last reason is also the one that I think most copiously explains these several manifestations of turn-taking in democracy. But let us first present it as a separate reason, deriving it also from Aristotle's *Politics*. Several passages (I find six) argue that democracy is defined as rule among the free and equal and therefore entails office rotation. Given that all cannot govern at the same time (as there are limited offices, or for pragmatic reasons, or due to conflicts of interest indicated in (i) above), free and equal citizens take turns in governing. The rotation of governor and governed seeks to satisfy the dual requirement of freedom and equality (Aristotle, 1959, *Politics*, 1.12, 1259b; 2.2, 1261a; 3.6, 1279a; 3.16, 1287a; 4.14, 1298a; 6.2, 1317b). This basic idea is not specific to democracy, for the same problem of reconciling freedom and equality obtains among a ruling class in an aristocracy or an oligarchy. Aristotle suggests that wherever there is no "natural" hierarchy among human beings in their capacity for rule, as among "brothers," taking turns recommends itself (Aristotle, 1984, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8:11, 1161a25–30; cf. Miller, 2013). But this taking of turns is most widespread in democracy because it values freedom and equality above all, and does not tie these to property; thus, democracy extends equal political freedom to all citizens, and these are too numerous for all to hold political office at the same time. As Aristotle says, democracy champions freedom and equality, and thus taking turns, the most (Aristotle, 1959, *Politics*, 6.2, 1317a40ff.).

Given what I find to be the centrality of the reasoning in (v), some further comments are in order. This centrality accrues to (v) by way of the claim that these manifestations of turn-taking (i) to (iv) are not happenstance but stem from an underlying reason, and this reason is the central democratic commitment to equal liberty. To begin with, one might agree that there is commitment to turn-taking in Aristotle's understanding of democracy, but doubt that is the case for modern democracy, which would be more concerned with popular sovereignty and limits on majority rule by constitutionally enshrined negative liberties and judicial review. I think that would be a misreading of Aristotle as well as of modern democracy. To show this, as well as to better grasp the interlinkages among equal liberty, turn-taking, and some of the other indications listed above, allow me to cite a long passage from the *Politics*:

> Now a fundamental principle of the democratic form of constitution is liberty [*eleutheria*] — that is what is usually asserted, implying that only under this constitution do men [sic] participate in liberty, for they assert this as the aim of every democracy. But one factor of liberty is to govern and be governed in turn [*en merei*]; for the popular [or democratic] principle of justice [*to dikaion to demotikon*] is to have equality according to number, not worth, and if this is

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> the principle of justice prevailing, the multitude must of necessity be sovereign [*kurion*] and the decision of the majority must be final and must constitute justice, for they say that each of the citizens ought to have an equal share, so that it results that in democracies the poor are more powerful than the rich, because there are more of them ….
> This [to live as one likes, to be free] is the second principle [*horon*, limit, rule] of democracy, and from it has come the claim not to be governed, preferably not by anybody, or failing that, to govern and be governed in turns [*en merei*]; and this is the way in which the second principle contributes to equalitarian liberty. And these principles having been laid down and this being the nature of democratic government, the following institutions are democratic in character: election of officials by all from all; government of each by all, and of all by each in turn; election by lot either to all magistracies or to all that do not need experience and skill; no property qualification for office, or only a very low one; no office to be held twice, or more than a few times, by the same person, or few offices except the military ones; short tenure either of all offices or of as many as possible; judicial functions to be exercised by all citizens, that is by persons selected from all, and on all matters, or on most and the greatest and most important, for instance the audit of official accounts, constitutional questions, private contracts; the assembly to be sovereign over all matters, but no official over any or only over extremely few; or else a council to be sovereign over the most important matters. (Aristotle, 1959, *Politics*, 6.2, 1317a40–1317b30)

It should be clear, then, that already in Aristotle, the commitment to turn-taking (as well as to majority rule) follows from or belongs to a more fundamental commitment to equal liberty; this is confirmed by all of the six passages from the *Politics* referenced above. It would be hard to deny that, despite many other differences, this commitment is still also that of modern democrats. As my definition of democracy at the outset suggested, democracy, for us, is still understood above all as equal liberty in political decision-making, as opposed to the distribution of power and rights according to blood and heritage, power, merit and virtue, or wealth and property (that is, as opposed to monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy, and oligarchy).

It is noteworthy that Aristotle understands liberty in a dual way that is similar to modern conceptions, namely as both non-interference (to do as one pleases without interference) and self-determination (to co-determine common affairs in the polis).[5] Seeing this liberty as equal among a number of people (in democracy, all citizens) connects it with turn-taking in an intrinsic way. To be free means not to be ruled by others; but if this freedom applies to others as equals and we need some rule to govern our common affairs, then we must rule by turns. Office rotation fundamentally expresses equal liberty. To see another as equally free is to accept that they have an equal title to rule, to make decisions that affect them and all of us, and therefore to accept that they will or may come to have decision-making power over me

[5] In Greek, this contrast is often marked by reference to *exousia* as "licence" and *eleutheria* as "self-determination." See, for instance, Plato (1991, *Republic*, 557b). See also Peter Stemmer (2023) and Fred D. Miller (1997, especially Chapter 4).

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when their turn comes. If I am holding office at a given time, as a democrat, I must therefore see free equals in general as ruling after me (with specific others ruling potentially after me). To see you as a free equal is to grant you a turn with governing.

Majority rule is not a fundamentally different principle from turn-taking, but also follows from equal liberty, and is therefore inflected by taking turns (as (ii) above asserts). Because rule among free equals entails distributing the right to participation in political decision-making according to number (not according to wealth or worth), all have an equal vote: votes that then must be aggregated according to number alone. (As Aristotle stresses, this means above all not to be ruled by the rich.) But the result of these elections remains subject to the principle of equal liberty, and so (as the passage from Book 6.2 has it) to the idea of "election of officials by all from all; government of each by all, and of all by each in turn." Hence, the ruling majority cannot stay in power forever but remains subject to rotation, hence to a redistribution of offices (by election or sortition) in which a ruling majority must remain committed to others ruling after them (whether or not majorities actually shift substantially at the next turn).

That fundamental commitment to equal liberty and thus to turn-taking is then also, and consequently, manifested in term limits and the limited duration of elected officials in office — hence, Aristotle's mention of strict term limits (one person can only occupy an office once) and strict limits on office periods. As the passage also makes clear, equal liberty further manifests in sortition, the assignment of offices by lot.

This commitment to rotation without criteria other than free and equal citizenship, as Jacques Derrida's (2005) reading of Aristotle reminds us, also carries political risks: risks that may in part explain Plato's and Aristotle's reservations about democracy. In our time, the so-called "authoritarian turn," already mentioned, reminds us that democratic turn-taking carries the risk that democratic alternation results in an anti-democratic turn, which itself can be presented as another democratic turn. Of course the threat of changeover to another form besets every form of government, but it is especially pronounced in democracy. By opening itself to turn-taking, democracy risks the turn to the other than democracy, and this precisely to be what it is. Modern democracies seek to reduce the risk by constitutional guarantees that even majorities cannot change easily, but this is unlikely to eliminate the risk altogether (Fritsch, 2013; Häberle, 2006). Despite this risk, the internal link between democracy and turn-taking suggests that it would be undemocratic to use one's turn to forestall the possibility of an alternation, a turn, in governing.

3. Generational Turn-Taking

In this section, I argue that the democratic assent to others having a turn at governing entails a commitment to share one's turn with future generations, both overlapping and more distant — those who we should reasonably expect to have a turn with the institutions we are already in the process of leaving to them.[6] The conclusion of the argument in the preceding section forms the first premise: to understand oneself as a democrat, that is, to affirm democracy, is to affirm letting others have a turn

[6] For a more detailed discussion of my definition of "future generations," see Fritsch 2018, p. 19ff.

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at governing — others after oneself. The second premise consists in the simple fact that democrats are mortals, so that "others after oneself" include future generations, both overlapping and more distant, and especially the most proximate generation as the next turn-taker. A turn would be owed even if those currently governing were immortal, but mortality makes of turn-taking a specifically intergenerational matter, with some (eventually, and typically with overlap) stepping off the historical-political stage while others step on. These premises yield the conclusion that democrats are committed to letting future generations after them have a turn at governing. In other words, democrats affirm future people as inherently co-occupying and co-owning the democratic institutions with which they are enjoying a turn now (however minimal that enjoyment may seem in times of voter apathy and elite rule).

This affirmation, I would submit, is the reason current democrats should be concerned to represent future generations better in political institutions now. As I indicated at the outset, there is no shortage of proposals in this area, ranging from schemes that seek to increase the future-oriented nature of inherited, existing political institutions to new and specialized institutions meant to promote pro-futural policies (Gonzalez-Ricoy & Gosseries, 2016; Kates, 2015; see also Gardiner's proposal for a "global constitutional convention," Gardiner 2014, 2019, and Forthcoming). Such reform proposals for the sake of future generations take place under the threat of increasing pressures towards what has come to be called "eco-authoritarianism": the recommendation or the prediction that climate change should or will force a (temporary or long-term) abandonment of democratic principles and institutions. Given this threat, it is important to understand democracy as being committed to its own flourishing in the future for the sake of descendants. That is what, on the argument presented here, the turn-taking view accomplishes, for it makes future generations virtually present in the democratic institutions of today.

There are various ways in which we can understand the spectral presence of future generations in the present (for more on these ways, see Fritsch, 2018, 52ff.). Here, the emphasis is on the fact that the next turn-taker is affirmed as spectrally present in the political system of today. This affirmation recognizes future generations first of all as moral-political claimants, that is, most generally as those who have a *prima facie* claim to have their equal liberty recognized and represented by current decisions. Even if we are thinking of non-overlapping and thus not yet existing generations, some moral-political standing in the present cannot be denied to them. Drawing on the model of taking turns, we should then ask: What is it to let future others have a turn with the democratic institutions with which one is having a turn now? Since turn-takers own only their turn, but not the thing with which they take turns, their first duty to future turn-takers is to pass these institutions on in a well-preserved, well-functioning, or even flourishing state. In the final section, allow me to elaborate on this issue of taking a fair turn.

4. Taking Fair Turns

What, then, is it to take "a fair turn" with something? I can think of three possible ways of answering this question, focusing respectively on previous sharer, future turn-taker, and object of sharing.

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First, we might say that we owe democratic institutions (and defining what belongs to this might be our first task) to future people in *at least as good* a condition as we received them. It wouldn't be fair to pass them on from one generation to the next in a state worse than we ourselves inherited them. We would be letting our forbearers down, some of whom fought hard for the equal liberty we at least nominally enjoy today. We owe them some gratitude or debt that we can pay forward in a form of reciprocity that is often called "indirect," and that I have elaborated as asymmetrical (Fritsch, 2017, 2020). The proviso "at least as good" is a standard way of filling reciprocity requirements with normative content. As Marcel Mauss put it in his classic ethnographical study regarding Indigenous gift-giving practices, what is owed in return is "something of equal or higher value" (Mauss, 2002, p. 15; see also Kolm, 2006; Gosseries, 2009, speaks of "strict equivalence"). It may be a basic idea of natural justice that also seems to transfer to turn-taking. It commits turn-takers to at least some duties of upkeep and maintenance in the face of possible disintegration or natural wear and tear. In the context of climate change, such duties of reciprocity have been argued to stem, among other "gifts," from previous efforts to lower GHG emissions and prevent environmental devastation (Page, 2007).

Second, rather than looking backward to the previous generation, as the first response does, we could look forward to the next generation by saying that, to take a fair turn, democratic institutions must above all *function well* for the next turn-takers. If, for instance, critical institutions are disintegrating or destabilized, we should stabilize them for the sake of those coming after us — even if we inherited some of the disintegration. This would call on us to determine, among other things, what future citizens will need from their democratic institutions, what good functioning means under conditions of climate change — i.e., in new terrestrial and socio-economic as well as political conditions — and how many citizens there will be (population numbers, of course, being somewhat under our control). In looking forward in this way, our turn-taking responsibilities should be understood to be transitive: they transfer from us (T1) via the turn-taker after us (T2) to the one after that (T3). For, good functioning for T2 would presumably include T2's ability to deal reasonably well with its turn-taking responsibilities to T3, and T3's to T4, and so on, even if T1's obligations remain focused on T2. Thus, for example, generation T1 should not be able to excuse its inaction by reference to the prediction that, say, climate destabilization will not yet be a significant problem for T2, but only for T4 or T5.

Third, to address the question of fair turns, we could say that democracy must be *flourishing* as the kind of thing it is, however that thing is defined (see Habib, 2013, arguing for this criterion in the case of sharing the earth). Here, the focus is not on the turn-takers, but on the object of sharing. In turn-taking, this object has a special status, for it is neither fully owned nor appropriated by the present generation, but rather continues to link turn-takers in a community of sharing for an indefinite time (especially if above conditions (3) and (4) apply). Obviously, the way in which democracy and its flourishing are defined will be key, and while we have made some conceptual points centring on equal liberty, more would have to be said. In fact, much of this definition should involve citizens themselves, so here substantive justice (the definition of a flourishing democracy owed forward) meets procedural justice (the procedure of definition and decision-making, e.g., democratic).

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This raises the vexed question of governance over time, in particular the inclusion of democracy's not yet existing future heirs.

I believe all three of these answers to the fair-turn question are operative in the practice of turn-taking because they focus on three different but baseline features of all forms of turn-taking (previous and future turn-takers as well as the object of turn-taking).[7] In conclusion, I want to raise the question of how fair turn-taking might address the (quite probable) situation in which democracy has been received in a damaged state, an issue in which resorting to one of the three answers can seem to nullify the others. As we will see, this case also illustrates the way the three answers tend to intermingle in real life.

Suppose democratic institutions have been inherited by T2 at a time the institutions are already in disarray due to widespread erosion of trust in democratic governments overtaxed by climate change, for instance, by climate-induced poverty and refugees, agricultural devastation and food insecurities, as well as by heat waves and flooding due to worsening climate destabilization to which emissions of these democratic institutions have themselves contributed. It is clear that the second and third answers to the fair-turn question could very well respond that T2 should fix the damage, so that the democratic polity remains flourishing and works well for its future citizens (T3+). But can the first answer, which recurs to the "at least as good as inherited" proviso, be played off against the other two to evade this responsibility, thereby permitting the degradation to become iterated? Can a generation T2 excuse its inaction for the sake of T3+ by claiming that it merely inherited these problems from T1 and is therefore under no obligation to fix them? Needless to say, this is a realistic temptation, given the likelihood of both deteriorating climate destabilization and the "doom loop" scenarios in which democracies increasingly both inherit and pass on failures to address the causes and effects of environmental destabilization.[8] Iterated intergenerational buck-passing is, of course, a particularly pernicious problem that gets exorbitantly worse over time (Gardiner, 2011, pp. 153, 201ff.).

I think here is a good place to combine the first answer with what we might call an "argument from liability for compensation." For if the deteriorating democratic polity and climate was achieved by T1 in a way that produced other goods and benefits (e.g., wealth, capital, technological advances, etc.), and some of those were also passed on to T2 (even if in *intra*generationally unequal ways), then T2 should use these (if possible) to fix the damage. With respect to climate change, I would argue that, *grosso modo*, this is the situation in which the current generation in the industrialized democracies in the Global North finds itself: having inherited the benefits of industrialization, it should now pay for the associated climate damages (Baer, 2010). This, of course, raises once more the question of when a democracy is "damaged." While I would not rule out in principle the possibility of identifying an object's *status quo ante*, prior to its being damaged by a turn-taker, this is rather difficult for a democracy that has been massively shaped by fossil-fuel driven industrialization, by market

[7] In case condition (4) is not met, the first answer to the question of fair turns would not apply. When two people decide to share a bicycle from now on and for that purpose build or buy one, there would be no previous turn-taker. That, however, is not the case in most existing democracies.

[8] On "climate doom loop," see The Progressive Policy Think Tank (2023).

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capitalism and its ties to what Karl Marx called "primitive accumulation" (Marx, 1992, Part 8). Hence, it is unavoidable for the combined argument from reciprocity (the first answer) and liability for compensation to refer to the second and/or third answer to the fair-turn question, that is, to what a healthy democracy might be, or what would be needed by its future inhabitants facing an increasingly volatile climate condition.

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