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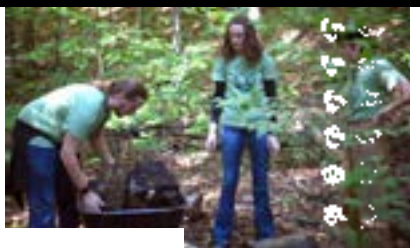

Climate change, environmental degradation, species extinction, human suffering—the uncertain future poses great challenges for those who want to live ethically. In this excerpt from a recent interview, philosophy and environmental studies professor William Edelglass determines that an increasing awareness of our personal responsibility for these crises can only help.

I am concerned about what it means to live in the **Anthropocene, the current epoch** during which human activity has become a dominant influence on climate and the environment. For me this concern is both existential and theoretical. We—my wife and twin daughters and I—live on an off-the-grid homestead in southern Vermont. We have vegetable gardens, and have planted berries, nuts, and fruit trees. I walk—or in the winter, ski—to school. Our house is heated only with wood from our land, which I cut and split. I realize that if everyone lived like this, there wouldn't be any open land left, and no habitat for our fellow creatures. And I know that people living in apartment buildings where they share walls (and therefore heat), and take public transportation, may have a smaller carbon footprint. But ours is one of the currently available options for living a less-unsustainable life.

Teaching environmental philosophy also feels like a kind of environmental practice, as a sustained focus on environmental questions can be transformative for many of us, and I do a certain amount of service that is related to the field. But no matter how much I try to be less dependent on fossil fuels, the goods I purchase and consume and that make my life possible contribute to the pain and suffering of many people, now and in the future, as well as to increased levels of species extinction.

This is the nature of life in the Anthropocene. And it is not just thousands who will die in the future; there are studies that suggest that the number of people dying each year as a consequence of climate change is already in the hundreds of thousands. And this does not include the many deaths from conflicts resulting from desertification and the competition for scarce resources. I do feel some responsibility for this pain and suffering, and I think this feeling is reasonable, but not everyone would agree.

clear connections between perpetrators and victims. In the standard account, because *ought* implies *can*, responsibility does not demand more than is reasonably possible for the agent. However, for Levinas, ethical consciousness is precisely the sense of responsibility for the Other, even when I myself have done nothing to harm her. And the more attentive I am the more I recognize my own responsibility.

In a brief autobiographical sketch titled "Signature," Levinas writes that his life and work were "dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror." Levinas himself entered the French military and was captured shortly after the start of the Second World War. He spent the next four years in a labor camp in Germany, hearing rumors of the murder of European Jews. His parents, grandparents, both his brothers, and many others close to him were killed by the Nazis; Levinas's wife and daughter spent the war years hiding in France. For Levinas, the Nazi horror and the goodness of some when confronted by overwhelming force, demanded a radical rethinking of ethics, which became the central philosophical project of his life. It is primarily