

Bibliographic Resources for Enhancing Life Studies

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1. Hans Jonas, "Technology and Responsibility: Reflections on the New Tasks of Ethics" in *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the New Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3-20.

This classic essay by German philosopher Hans Jonas provides a philosophical context for understanding the novel ethical issues posed by modern technologies such as genetic engineering, psychopharmacology, and the quest to extend the human lifespan. Jonas's core argument, that "modern technology has introduced actions of such novel scale, objects, and consequences that the framework of former ethics can no longer contain them," remains a central challenge that is as true of contemporary developments like climate change and synthetic biology as it was of the biomedical technologies that were emerging at the time Jonas was writing. Jonas's contention that a new ethics of responsibility is needed that is commensurate with the changed nature of human action through technology continues to echo in the work of diverse contemporary ethicists such as William Schweiker, Leon Kass, and many others.

2. Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Rose is a prominent British social theorist and sociologist and a leading interpreter of the work of Michel Foucault. This book provides an insightful analysis of how recent developments in human genomics, neuroscience, pharmacology, and psychopharmacology are transforming our social landscapes, identities, and political formations. Rather than taking sides in the familiar debate between so-called bioconservatives and their opponents, Rose analyzes the debate itself—its visions of the future, its evaluations and judgments—as indicative of what he calls "an emergent form of life." Those seeking a road map through the complex social and political ramifications of our current biotech century will find Rose's book a useful guide. The book's overarching thesis is that the "vital politics" of the 21st century is concerned not so much with matters of health and illness, but with "our growing capacities to control, manage, engineer, reshape, and modulate the very vital capacities of human beings as living creatures." Hence the title of this book, the "politics of life itself."

3. William Schweiker, "Should We Reverence Life? Reflection at the Intersection of Ecology, Religion, and Ethics" in *Without Nature? A New Condition for Theology*, eds. David Albertson and Cabell King (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 323-341.

This essay offers an insightful intervention into current debates in bioethics and environmental ethics over the basic value or worth of life. After distinguishing the conceptual meanings of phrases such as "respect for life," "dignity of life," "sanctity of life," and "reverence for life," Schweiker focuses on the idea of reverence for life as a way to illuminate the contested terrain of post-theistic ethics. This terrain, he argues, is characterized by three broad questions: 1) What is or should be the scope of value or moral concern? Should it encompass both human and non-human life? 2) What is the status of normative human self-understanding? Are mortality and biological lineage still constitutive of human identity in an age of biotechnological power? 3) What is the value of life itself? Should life evoke reverence, and if so, how should we think about human responsibility? Schweiker argues that the discourse of reverence for life signals that a yearning for the inviolable, which was previously directed toward God or a *summum bonum* beyond the finite world, has now migrated to the realm of finite life and become incarnated there. At the same time, Schweiker notes the limits of the idea of reverence. His constructive thesis is that the discourse of the *integrity of life*, rather than reverence for life, offers a more appropriate norm for the exercise of technological power in our time.

4. Dale Wright, *The Six Perfections: Buddhism and the Cultivation of Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

This book is one of those rare works of scholarship that will grip the specialist and the lay reader alike from its opening sentence. It offers a compelling account of the six perfections of Buddhist thought and practice (generosity, morality, tolerance, energy, mediation, and wisdom), which are ideals of human character that define the very meaning of human enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition. What makes Wright's book distinctive (and attractive to anyone interested in "enhancing life") is that his aim is nothing less than to develop a philosophy of self-cultivation drawn from Buddhist sources that will appeal to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Wright interprets self-cultivation as a *human* aspiration and ideal, not just a Buddhist one. As he puts it, "There is an important sense in which almost everyone has a 'thought of enlightenment'—some 'idea of the good.' We all imagine better lives than what we have managed so far...For most people, though, this idea or thought is underdeveloped and immature." Wright makes a detailed and persuasive case for how a religious tradition such as Buddhism contains enormous resources for guiding human beings in the ongoing task of self-development and responsible freedom in pursuit of an ideal of the good life.

5. Joanna Zylińska, *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities, Press 2014).

Inspired by Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, this book offers a multimedia reflection on "what it means to live a good life at a time when the very notion of life is undergoing a radical reformulation, both on a philosophical and a biotechnological level." Constructed as ten short essays (interspersed with the author's own artwork) on topics such as Scale, Process, Evolution, Humanity, Ethics, and Ontology, the aim of the book is "to outline a viable position on ethics as a way of living a good life when life itself is declared to be under a unique threat...[I]t is a story about how we can live a good life at this precarious geo-historical moment." The book makes use of a model of "post-masculinist rationality" that is embodied and immersed, as well as a view of life as both a becoming and a fracturing process, which Zylińska describes as "critical vitalism." Although the book is strongly influenced by recent scholarship on the Anthropocene, feminist philosophy, vitalism, and the new materialism, it is intended for philosophers and non-philosophers alike, and embodies a Socratic spirit of "the examined life" as the only one worth living.