

Foreword

By Stanley Hauerwas

WE LIVE IN A time in which many seem determined to use intellectual power to get out of life alive. Ironically, the fear of death creates a culture of death, in which those who have means are able to impose their fear of death onto those who do not have the means to cope with those fears. As a result, what has been called the technological imperative now seems to have become a permanent feature of modern life: what can be done should be done.

We are, therefore, extremely fortunate to have this book by Stephan Kampowski on the work of Hans Jonas and Jürgen Habermas. By drawing on the work of Jonas and Habermas, Kampowski helps us see that the technological imperative cannot help but corrupt our humanity because, with its utopian hopes, it inspires us to live as if we were our own creators. As a result, we live lives of loneliness.

With extraordinary erudition and philosophical acumen, Kampowski makes the work of Jonas and Habermas available to a wide range of readers. Given that he is such a faithful expositor of Jonas' and Habermas' work, some might be tempted to consider this a book primarily about these thinkers. It is certainly a wonderful introduction to their philosophy. But to interpret this volume primarily as an introduction to the work of Jonas and Habermas would do injustice to its significance. What Kampowski helps us see is that a philosophical case can be made against the technological imperative. This is a voice we desperately need.

One of this work's important contributions is Kampowski's explanation of how Jonas' account of the teleological character of the organism is interrelated with the ethic of responsibility. The argument that life is a determinative category by which we are able to understand the character

Foreword

of all existence is crucial if we are to recover the limits necessary for shaping our care of one another through the agency of science. Kampowski provides a wonderful account of Jonas' understanding of death and how death rightly should shape our living in order to reveal our perverse accounts of freedom.

One of the virtues of this book is Kampowski's ability to bring these thinkers into conversation with one another, but also to bring other voices into the conversation, the voice of Robert Spaemann in particular. Spaemann is a philosopher who has done fundamental work from which we, particularly in the English speaking world, need to learn. Kampowski's breadth of knowledge of contemporary European philosophical traditions means he is able to use Spaemann to bring light to both the strengths and limits of Jonas and Habermas. His suggestion, drawing on the work of Gerald McKenny, that Jonas' account of responsibility itself betrays some utopian desires is extremely important. As a result, Kampowski helps us see that the voice of theology has much to contribute if we are to have an alternative to the culture of death.

This is a book that hopefully will be widely read by Christians and non-Christians alike. Kampowski's philosophical analysis of Jonas is one that no Christian can afford to ignore if we are to speak truthfully to the world in which we find ourselves.