

Unlike the leaves on a tree, man merits life when winter comes

By STUART TONKINSON

Colorado Gov. Richard Lamm must love the Who.

After all, it was that rock group which sang "Hope I die before I get old" all those years ago.

And it is Lamm who told elderly people who are terminally ill to "die and get out of the way."

Lamm has what he considers a good reason. Allowing terminally ill elderly people to live through use of artificial means is ruining the economic health of the nation. And, for people like Lamm, that is the bottom line.

Lamm has a neat metaphor. Instead of prolonging life, elderly citizens should be like "leaves falling off a tree and forming humus for the other plants to grow up." Many people take umbrage when told their nature is essentially animalistic; Lamm goes one better, comparing people with plants.

"Let the other society, our kids, build a reasonable life," Lamm pleaded with the old folks. "You've got a duty to die and get out of the way."

It is true that people are living longer than ever. But Lamm seems anachronistic in his statements — those of a man who won't accept progress. Lamm said, "We are really approaching a time of almost technological immortality." Lamm expressed a fear that scientific discoveries would soon "literally force life on us."

And, like all fans of euthanasia, Lamm makes the point that science may allow us to "impose life on people who, in fact, are suffering beyond the ability for us to help." Why prolong a painful life, he argues.

One should avoid attaching much merit to Lamm's statements. Lamm is the same man who charged last month that one out of eight women in Las Vegas under 45 was a prostitute. He is a man groping for controversy.

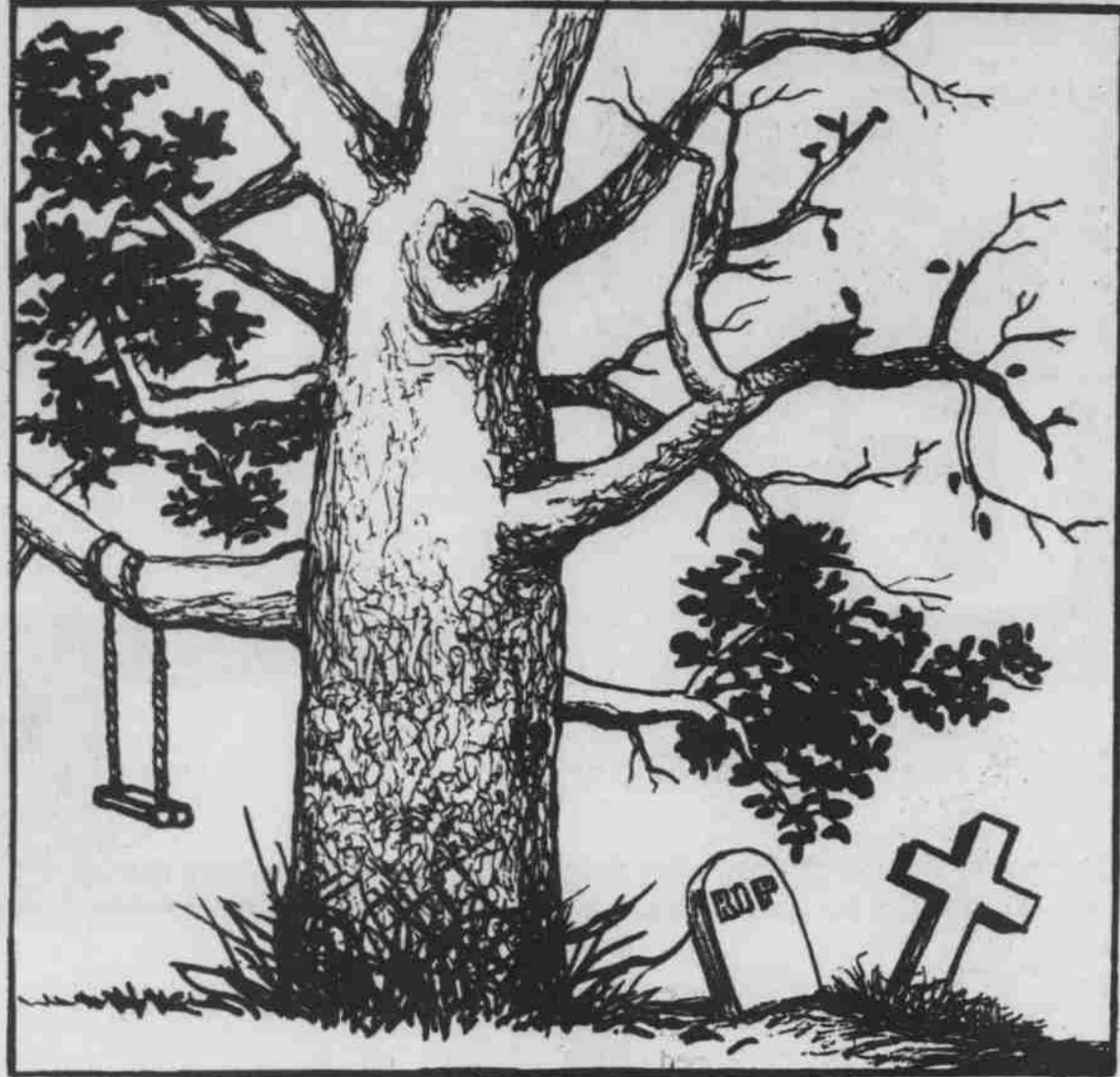
It is true that 10 percent of the gross national product is spent on health care, and it appears the demand will only increase. Technology for prolonging life is more expensive, and people live longer. Some operations, such as liver transplants, can cost tens of thousands of dollars. And someone has to pay.

This century alone has seen a dramatic rise in the number of elderly citizens. And the same generation that is asking when life begins is faced with the question of how to value a life not immediately distinguishable from death.

There are countless examples of the costs of health care for the elderly. College tuition may go instead to help pay for a cancer-afflicted parent's medical costs. Money intended for a new home may have to go to a comatose in-law on intravenous feeding. A middle-aged man, no better than a vegetable, may be able to be kept alive until old age. And the costs mount.

What is our responsibility to the elderly? Lamm would say that is the wrong question. It looks too much to the past. Lamm prefers to reverse the question to ask what the responsibilities of the old are to us. It looks to the future, to "New Ideas," as one of Colorado's favorite sons would put it.

And it is self-centered.



Older civilizations required their elderly to wander into the wilderness and die quietly. After all, if they remained, they would be a burden to society.

Many people can be classified as such burdens. Inmates on death row awaiting execution are a burden. Unwed mothers on welfare are a burden. Starving children in the middle of Africa are a burden. People with homes destroyed by natural disasters are a burden. Drought-stricken farmers are a burden. Should these be abandoned, too?

Lamm has a neat metaphor. Instead of prolonging life, elderly citizens should be like "leaves falling off a tree and forming humus for the other plants to grow up."

Older citizens are targeted because they have already had a chance at life. And, some ask, how enjoyable can life be if you're strapped to some tubes and if no thought is possible?

This leads to the basic presupposition of those who advocate euthanasia: Life is valuable only if the quality of life is good, and the quality of life is not good for those terminally ill. This is false.

It assumes that one can determine a cutoff point when life is no longer worth living. As economic hardships mount, that cutoff point, which must be chosen arbitrarily, may become more and more flexible. Mercy killings will be easier to accept.

Some may remember a pretty bad science fiction movie called *Logan's Run*, about a society in which overpopulation required the killing of everyone over 30. With euthanasia considered morally acceptable, that type of society is not

theoretically impossible. But that is not a society many would desire.

This brings up the central question of the debate, an old one. Which is greater — the society or the individual? The United States was founded on the principle that, with the exception of defense from a foreign aggressor, the rights of the individual are to be esteemed. Nations like the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany talk about the survival of a society and the relative unimportance of the individual.

One who refused to lay down his burden, who recognized the worth of one person's life, however devoid of what we call activity, is 16-year-old Matthew Brown, of Aberdeen. Brown was injured in an automobile accident and declared dead. But Brown had agreed to put an 'x' in the box that marked him as an organ donor on his driver's license, and his heart was transplanted into the body of Dale Jarman, 50.

Lamm is like those who argue that nuclear power should be abolished because of the chance for nuclear war, or those who oppose chemical discoveries because of the increase in global pollution. His is an argument against progress, and, like all such arguments, it will fail. That science can prolong life beyond what was once achievable is a fact of present day society. It cannot be conjured away or forgotten, but it must be dealt with, and dealt with humanely and with respect for life. Lamm's argument takes the same form as the absurdity that if man were meant to fly, he would have been given wings.

But man's reason has shown him how to successfully duplicate flight, and man's reason will suffice to provide a solution to the growing number of incapacitated elderly citizens. There is no need to force him to "go gently into that good night." People are not sheep; they are free men.

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Other opinion

Behind Olympic scenes

By TIM CROTHERS

"What's wrong with the hockey team?" Yes, I heard that question a few times while I worked on ABC television's Olympic hockey coverage in Yugoslavia. Was it the pressure of trying to duplicate the gold medal exploits of the 1980 hockey team? Was it an ill-timed slump? Or was it that some members of the American hockey team could be found in the casinos and discos of Sarajevo until the wee hours on nights before games? Probably a combination of these factors. But what were these young guys doing gambling until 3 a.m.? No curfew on the eve of the game? Come on, coach.

If you have ever wondered whether Jim McKay is telling you the whole truth on "The Games," don't worry. He is, but he is leaving a few things out, too. I remember watching McKay on television, bundled in his parka, eloquently recount the pomp and pageantry of the opening ceremonies from his perch on the rim of the Olympic stadium, the Olympic flame burning behind him. He was actually doing his reminiscing from the comfort of the ABC control room miles away from the stadium and the flame. Great trick, but the poor guy must have been hot in that coat.

And then there were the voices of my producer and director bickering into my headphones over the videotaping of a hockey game that was to be aired back to the United States six hours later. One said to the other, "We'll say it's live, they (meaning the naive American public) will never know the difference." So much for integrity.

So it is all not as sacred and "Greek" as it could be, but who really thought it was? Still, among all this modern technical chicanery that we call progress, there are some genuine "Olympic" moments that only surface every four years and are so special, even Jim McKay can't do justice to them. For instance, there's the Finnish skier, unknown (except in Finland), who outjumps the field by an incredible ten meters in his first attempt off the 90-meter jump. His final, almost anti-climatic, jump is cheered not only by the frenzied Finns waving their huge blue flags, but also by the balance of the 70,000 spectators who respect excellence.

At the foot of the hill, the Finn, in elated disbelief, is carried off on the shoulders of his proud countrymen like the winning coach after the Super Bowl. For the Finns, this is their Super Bowl.

That night, in a local bar, I traded pins and stories with a young Yugoslav student. He wasn't at all overwhelmed by

the Olympics and grudgingly told me all about Yugoslavia, constantly interrupting himself to curiously interrogate me about my homeland, which he humbly called "the land of dreams." Over a few "pivos" (beers), I got an education from somebody I could barely understand.

Then there was the night I briefly shared the men's figure skating final with a friendly female Russian figure skater. I say briefly because we were quickly separated by a slightly paranoid Russian coach. Minutes later an American, Scott Hamilton, stepped onto the victory stand. With the gold medal draped around his neck and a tear in his eye, he turned toward the American flag being raised in his honor. It was a truly spine-tingling moment. With the Russian coach standing beside me, I sang the national anthem, with extra feeling, that night.

Finally, there's an old story I was delighted to find true. It's the classic Olympic story about the athlete who doesn't finish first or even in the first ten, about the one who finishes at the bottom of his event. When asked by a reporter if he's disappointed, he smiles and replies in his native tongue, "Heck no, I'm just glad to be here."

That's what the Greeks had in mind.

Tim Crothers, a junior English major from New Canaan, Conn., is studying this year in Montpellier, France.

A system promoting starvation

By BEVERLY LEARY

Do you know what the leading cause of death in the world is? Common answers to this question are heart disease, cancer, car accidents and Tar Heel losses to Indiana. Such answers reveal the American tendency to be steeped in our own culture and oblivious to any larger environment. The leading cause of death is diarrhea. Most of the people who die in the world are babies born to women of the Third World who do not have access to safe drinking water or sufficient food. Why, in a world controlled by affluent bankers and businessmen, should the beautiful yellow, brown and black women of this world be unable to find safe drinking water?

For those of us force-fed the merits of free enterprise, American-style democracy, the free market system, the joy of competition and the omnipotence of the United States, the causes of hunger may be difficult to understand. In my four years at this university, I, along with other "seemingly well-intentioned people," have unceasingly amazed folks like Robert B. Green ("But will socialism feed the starving?", *DTH*, April 3), by attending lectures and classes, reading books and articles — all for the sake of learning about the causes of and potential solutions for the "massive hunger problem to be faced."

My studies have led me to accept the

basic tenet expressed in Frances Moore-Lappe's lecture. In order to understand the causes of hunger, we must recognize that it is not in the economic interest of multi-national corporations or the political interest of Reagan types to change the political situations throughout the world that rely on the poverty and oppression of the majority of the underdeveloped world. For example, it was not profitable for the Nestle corporation to explain to the women of the Third World that breast-feeding would be safer, less expensive, and more nutritious for their babies than bottle-feeding with Nestle formula. Similarly International Business Machines, General Motors and our own NCNB are not interested in majority rule (and majority freedom from hunger, poverty, oppression, injustice) in South Africa because the corporations (and thus our own university) benefit from the brutal, repressive apartheid system.

I am saddened that the color televisions, the canned soft drinks, the great variety of watery beer — all the pride of the capitalist system — has deadened the intellect of so many Americans. Over and over again the media, professors, economists and other experts (posing as, and many even believing themselves to be, voices of neutrality) tell us that all the joys of life — cars, televisions, free speech — are possible only in a world of free enterprise. And, in our comfortable university environments, we become more and more blind to the flip-side of the benefits of capitalism: hunger. Or, as

Moore-Lappe defined it, watching people you love die.

Hunger is an emotional issue. It is also a political issue. There is more than enough food produced to feed the world's population. But those who control access to the necessities of life — safe air, water, shelter, clothing and food — would not profit from an equitable distribution of the necessities.

As Moore-Lappe said, we must first change ourselves and then change the world. We must have the courage to question the assumptions held by the proponents of the free market system. If the right to be free from starvation and constant economic insecurity is not included in the world system, we should not stand covering behind the myth of Adam Smith's divine guiding hand. No, I'm not able to tell Green "how to get food to starving people for the present." Many governmental, religious and private agencies are involved in emergency relief programs. The causes of hunger, poverty and oppression are too complex to fully discuss in a 90-minute lecture or a letter to the *DTH*. And I don't think that Green wishes to understand them. But those who do will take the time to read books and articles on the subject, to reject the old red-baiting tactics of people like Green, to open their minds to alternatives to the obviously failing system of international capitalism.

Beverly Leary is a senior English major from Greensboro.

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