



painfully and carefully selected and condensed by the author. How does one avoid an obvious case of plagiarism? Gruman himself coined the term *prolongevity* and defined it as "the significant extension of the length of life by human action." Since "the problem of death is a central part of the dilemma of modern man" whose world is characterized by marked decline of the faith in supernatural salvation, man's response is frequently to ignore the issue of death and even place a taboo on its discussion. For political reasons, therefore, it is expedient to adopt the "meliorist" approach to this problem. Meliorism includes the public health and research approach to the cure of specific diseases. Meliorism has increased length-of-life but has not really affected life-span. Indeed, life-expectancy at birth has increased from about 20 years in Roman times to about 70 years today. But life-expectancy at age 40 has, in fact, *declined* recently due primarily to the rising rate of accidental death. Statisticians have determined that man's "natural" life-span is about 110 years. Even this is subject to argument. The replacement of the present cardiovascular definition of death by another involving brain function could alter that figure significantly. The mounting economic and social strain which every family is feeling today is

the inevitable consequence of the meliorist "victory."

A growing population of aged in a comatose or senile condition makes this scholarly work extremely relevant to every citizen. A popularized version would be well received. Any scientist should welcome this monograph priced absurdly low by the venerable American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia. It is significant that the APS Librarian is Dr. Richard Shryock, "Dean" of American medical historians, who is quoted by Gruman. Rather prophetically he said in 1956, "Franklin and others envisaged the indefinite prolongation of life as a goal of science; recent achievements have not extended life-span. If the day ever comes when it is attained, the most momentous results would follow. The future of society will depend upon developments in medicine much as the outcome in medicine has always depended upon trends within society."

I personally resent the idea of accidental or sudden cardiac death, fear the real possibility of senile decline and consequent dependence and effective denial of my freedom. Don't you? Gruman has shown that from the earliest times leading scientists and thinkers have felt the same. We should thank him for this reminder lest we lose courage in our eternal battle with death.

1. Garfield, E. Why medical research? *Current Contents/Life Sciences* 13(3):M1-2, January 20, 1970.
2. Shneidman, E.S. You and death. *Psychology Today* 5(1):43-45, 74-80.
3. Garfield, E. "The Long Cold Sleep", book review of *The Immortalist* was reprinted in the editorial cited in reference #1 above.