

August 20, 2015

This is mostly a non-political day, but The Economist's obit for Robert Conquest should be noted.

*THE intellectual history of the West in the 20th century was dominated by arguments over totalitarianism: its causes, effects—and possible justification. Even after flag-waving supporters of the Soviet Union had dwindled to irrelevance, the conviction that communism was a good idea poorly executed persisted in certain quarters. Others still thought the communist threat overstated, or drew equivalences between crimes committed in the name of socialism and those of Western anti-communism. The position that communism was a monstrously evil system responsible for unprecedented atrocities was held by only a minority of scholars. Robert Conquest, who died on August 3rd, was one of the most eloquent and implacable members of that camp. To the chagrin of his opponents, he turned out to be right.*

*He did not start out as a scourge of the left. He emerged from a brainy ancient British school as an ardent socialist and a crack shot, and fought for the Republican side in the Spanish civil war (albeit for one day, firing a single round). While at Oxford he joined the Communist Party. But he soon left, disgusted by a party hack who claimed that Britain's bourgeois leaders could never declare war on Hitler.*

*Witnessing the lies and terror of the Soviet takeover in Bulgaria in 1947 showed him what Stalinism was like in practice.*

The New York Times reports wolves are making a resurgence in Sweden. Funny thing, the Swedes are not fighting their government as much as the European Union. *Electric fences surround his sheep, two large dogs stand guard and a neighbor monitors the adjacent forest from a security camera.*

*Sometimes, said Ulf Ekholm, the proximity of wolves leaves farmers in this region of Sweden, called Varmland, feeling as if they are under siege. He even has a nickname for this lush and seemingly idyllic corner of Scandinavian countryside: Predatorland.*

*Long after dying out here, the wolf is back — and its presence is provoking a bitter dispute, bringing with it the threat of legal action against Sweden from the European Union.*

*Mr. Ekholm's farmhouse, in the village of Olmhult, is on the front line of this battle, a conflict between tradition and conservation, and one that pits farmers and hunters against environmentalists and European officials.*

*Once hunted remorselessly, the wolf is now a protected species, and its return has provoked unease across Europe, from Finland to France.*

*In Sweden, the wolf population is still relatively small — about 415, according to the government, which compensates farmers for losses from wolf attacks and subsidizes protective fencing. But farmers argue that the compensation does not cover their full costs or make up for the anxiety and disruption to their lives. Hunters, meanwhile, say that wolves are killing the same kinds of animals that they like to pursue, harming hunting traditions while scaring people who live in the countryside. ...*

*... The issue is important enough to have featured in a TV debate among Swedish leadership contenders before last year's elections. When Sweden went ahead this year with its most recent cull, of 44 wolves, it received the latest in a series of warning letters from the European Commission, the executive body of the European Union. ...*

From Discovery we learn of a 7,000 year-old case of leukemia. What environmental hazard will the left say caused that?

*German researchers have discovered what might be the earliest case of leukemia in a 7,000-year-old skeleton, they announced at the first European conference on evolutionary medicine.*

*Belonging to a female individual who died at 30-40 years, the skeleton was excavated in 1982 among other 72 burials at an early Neolithic site near Stuttgart-Mühlhausen in south western Germany. ...*

*... According to the researchers, the resorption of central spongy bone is significantly higher compared to specimens of the same age group from the same site and to recent human samples of the adult age class.*

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Three years into its roving around Mars, Curiosity has sent some stunning pictures. They are big files so we only have one. Follow the link for more. Scientific American has the story.

*It's been three years since NASA's Curiosity rover, carrying the Mars Science Laboratory, made its bold skycrane-assisted landing on the surface of Mars.*

*Since then the rover has progressed across a wealth of varied and fascinating terrain. ...*

Just because we're trying to be non-political today doesn't mean we can't enjoy David Harsanyi's "Short History of Government's Terrible Dietary Advice." After all, stupidity in government is not a monopoly of the Dems. Bush the W is responsible for the idiot ethanol mandates. In the early '90's Pickerhead was in Moscow on a trade mission of sorts. Lynn Martin, who was Labor Sec for the older Bush was along and in one address was extolling the virtues of her efforts in the Labor Department. Half

the attending group, that would be the 100 Americans, laughed. But not as much as we laughed when some Russian said what his country needed was lots of MBA's. That had us in the aisles.

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We already know government recommendations regarding health are often driven by a bunch Chicken Littles. The leading organ of American scaremongering, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, has gotten so much wrong over the years. There was the outrageous contention that 400,00 Americans were dropping dead from obesity every year (they weren't). And then there were all the over-the-top warnings about the alleged risks of second-hand smoke (they don't really exist).

Earlier this year, the bureaucrats behind the government dietary guidelines finally admitted there was "no appreciable relationship" between dietary cholesterol and blood cholesterol. After years of warning Americans that high-cholesterol foods would kill them—eggs, shrimp, and so on—the U.S. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee will no longer list cholesterol among its "nutrients of concern" for overconsumption. Now, some scientists argue that the state's obsession with scaring citizens about fat may actually have made our health worse. ...

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## The Economist

### [The man who told us so](#)

#### *What the West, and the Soviet Union's victims, owe to Robert Conquest*



THE intellectual history of the West in the 20th century was dominated by arguments over totalitarianism: its causes, effects—and possible justification. Even after flag-waving supporters of the Soviet Union had dwindled to irrelevance, the conviction that communism was a good idea poorly executed persisted in certain quarters. Others still thought the communist threat overstated, or drew equivalences between crimes committed in the name of socialism and those of Western anti-communism. The position that communism was a monstrously evil system responsible for unprecedented atrocities was held by only a minority of scholars. Robert

Conquest, who died on August 3rd, was one of the most eloquent and implacable members of that camp. To the chagrin of his opponents, he turned out to be right.

He did not start out as a scourge of the left. He emerged from a brainy ancient British school as an ardent socialist and a crack shot, and fought for the Republican side in the Spanish civil war (albeit for one day, firing a single round). While at Oxford he joined the Communist Party. But he soon left, disgusted by a party hack who claimed that Britain's bourgeois leaders could never declare war on Hitler.

Witnessing the lies and terror of the Soviet takeover in Bulgaria in 1947 showed him what Stalinism was like in practice. He helped his lover, the beautiful Tatiana Mihailova, escape the clutches of the secret police, blighting his diplomatic career. She became his second wife; his fourth and last marriage, to Elizabeth Neece Wingate, was the longest and happiest of his 98-year life.

For all his brains and later academic renown, he was no swot: he started cramming five days before finals, from an undemanding textbook nicknamed "Economics for the Half-witted Child". He was an accidental historian, too. He worked, like George Orwell, in a branch of the Foreign Office (now long-closed, sadly) which analysed the Kremlin's power and practice, sharing the results confidentially with journalists. Those papers turned into books—initially more solid than sizzling. When he later moved to an American university, it was not for prestige, but because he needed the money to support two families. He had won a PEN prize for the best long poem written during the second world war, but was not allowed to teach English literature because he lacked a degree in the subject.

His poems were by turns amusing, bawdy, lyrical, profound and satirical. He parodied others, and himself. But his greatest work was chronicling chapters of the Soviet nightmare, which had been cloaked first in secrecy and then in shame. First-hand accounts existed of the man-made famine in Ukraine, the great terror of the late 1930s, and the destruction of nations in the maw of Stalinism. What he did was to turn these fragments of available information into comprehensive histories.

He wrote more calmly about totalitarianism than about the accomplices and the deniers of its crimes. Stalin was a thug, Lenin a maniac. But why did so many sophisticated, educated Westerners ignore or excuse what was happening? He harried and skewered fellow-travellers and wishful thinkers, reserving particular scorn for apologist historians such as Eric Hobsbawm. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan admired him. Critics called him a rabid anti-communist. He enjoyed teasing them, coining "Conquest's Laws"—the first being that, generally speaking, everyone is "reactionary" on things he knows about.

When the Soviet archives opened, his meticulous work was utterly vindicated. His books were published in Russia, and he brought out updated editions in English. Mulling a new title for "The Great Terror", his pal Kingsley Amis suggested "I told you so, you fucking fools". He preferred derision to self-righteousness, summarising Soviet Communism in a much-quoted limerick:

There was a great Marxist called Lenin  
Who did two or three million men in.  
That's a lot to have done in,  
But where he did one in  
That grand Marxist Stalin did ten in.

The kind of people who overlooked such trifles, he reckoned, were also willing to scrub their minds on other issues. He despised much modern literary criticism: it used “important” freely but shunned “beautiful”. For him, the great pursuit was the “deep blue clarities of a delighting mind”. He wrote: “Just as it is people who think they have discovered the laws of history who have, in our time, inflicted our major public catastrophes so—in a lesser field, or at least one in which the results are not so literally bloody—it is those who think they have discovered the laws of literature who have been the destroyers.”

Academic pettifoggery, conventionality and gullibility were favourite targets. He longed for “The Oxford Book of Untrendy Verse”, and published a bogus critical analysis of Christian imagery in Amis’s “Lucky Jim”, delighting in the fuss when literary types wrote solemn responses. Other pranks were nastier. He faked an official letter to his friend Philip Larkin (who had a rather greater interest than he did in erotica) warning him of prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act (Larkin hired a lawyer; a contrite Conquest paid the bill). In the days when gay men met in public toilets, Conquest (to amuse Amis) bellowed “All right, Sergeant, get your notebook at the ready,” sending the hapless denizens scurrying. But the cruel streak was atypical. Having seen where grand designs led, he cherished scepticism and moderation. A late poem, “Sooner or Later”, ends:

What’s helpful? Not much. Nothing?  
But to fill in the time  
There’s little harm in clothing  
Such nude truths with a rhyme.

## NY Times

### [Wolves, Resurgent and Protected, Vex Swedish Farmers](#)

by Stephen Castle



*Ulf Ekholm on his farm in Olmhult, in a region of Sweden called Varmland. He and other farmers fear for their sheep because of the increasing numbers of wolves.*

OLMHULT, Sweden — Electric fences surround his sheep, two large dogs stand guard and a neighbor monitors the adjacent forest from a security camera.

Sometimes, said Ulf Ekholm, the proximity of wolves leaves farmers in this region of [Sweden](#), called Varmland, feeling as if they are under siege. He even has a nickname for this lush and seemingly idyllic corner of Scandinavian countryside: Predatorland.

Long after dying out here, the wolf is back — and its presence is provoking a bitter dispute, bringing with it the threat of legal action against Sweden from the European Union.

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Once hunted remorselessly, the wolf is now a protected species, and its return has provoked unease across Europe, from Finland to France.

In Sweden, the wolf population is still relatively small — about 415, according to the government, which compensates farmers for losses from wolf attacks and subsidizes protective fencing. But farmers argue that the compensation does not cover their full costs or make up for the anxiety and disruption to their lives. Hunters, meanwhile, say that wolves are killing the same kinds of animals that they like to pursue, harming hunting traditions while scaring people who live in the countryside.



*Elsa Lund Magnussen installed electric fencing at her farm in Lindas.*

The issue is important enough to have featured in a TV debate among Swedish leadership contenders before last year's elections. When Sweden went ahead this year with its most recent cull, of 44 wolves, it received the latest in a series of warning letters from the [European Commission](#), the executive body of the European Union.

European officials say their job is to enforce laws that guarantee the survival of rare species — rules to which Sweden, like other countries, signed up.

They criticize the way Sweden has conducted recent, annual, wolf hunts. They say it has not satisfactorily considered alternatives and that it has failed to show that its culls do not pose a threat to the wolf population's long-term survival.

The government in Stockholm has until Wednesday to reply and, if it fails to convince officials in Brussels that its measures are justified, could be taken to court.

Few Swedes worried when, in the 1980s, the first pair of wolves arrived, apparently after making the long trek from Finland or Russia. Some years later they were joined by a third, and then, in around 2007 or 2008, two more, according to Magnus Bergstrom, deputy director of the national environment division at the Swedish ministry of the environment and energy.

But that means the population here is descended from just five animals, and is prone to genetic defects produced by inbreeding — a big concern to environmentalists.

Nevertheless, as the numbers grew, so did the complaints from farmers whose protests prompted the government to allow in 2010 the first cull of wolves in recent decades.

Mr. Bergstrom said that Sweden's wolf population was extremely well monitored, and that culls targeted animals with poor genes. "We have DNA from around 90 percent of the wolves," he said. "It is often said that this is the best-monitored wolf population in the Western world."

That does not reassure Per Dunberg, a spokesman for the Wolf Association Sweden, who says that to be sustainable the wolf population should number from 1,500 to 3,000.

"It is a top predator and many other species depend on the wolf, such as birds, and foxes," said Mr. Dunberg, who accused hunting associations of spreading alarm.

"The hunters are telling Little Red Riding Hood stories; in fact, it is more than 200 years since a human being was killed by a wolf in Sweden," he said.

Mr. Dunberg, who lives in Stockholm, says he has received threats via email and Facebook for his opposition to wolf hunts — though that does not appear to have deterred him.

"The hate against an animal, against a species such as the wolf, is like racism in people — it is absolutely the same process in the mind," he said.

Camilla Bjorkbom, president of Djurens Ratt (Animal Rights Sweden), also opposes the annual hunt of wolves, which she says has caused "immense" suffering. Ms. Bjorkbom said that in some cases it might be legitimate to kill specific wolves, and added, "We need to work more proactively with farmers and think of other ways to solve the conflict."

But in Varmland, there is growing frustration with the European Union. At her farm in the village of Lindas, Elsa Lund Magnussen, argued that the issue was partly about democracy.

"People who live here and have problems with wolves should be in the process of deciding how many wolves we can handle," she said.

Ms. Lund Magnussen said that the support farmers can claim from the government for wolf kills does not cover their full costs, because some animals survive, but are so traumatized that they never fully recover.

She recently installed new electric fencing, and said that while most of the cost was covered, the subsidy did not include the installation work done by her family.

Still, the investment is worthwhile. “If I get a wolf attack here I won’t have the meat for my customers, and it will destroy my company for five years. It would be a disaster,” she said.

Yet, while the dispute fits partly into a long history of antipathy between farmers and wolves, it is also about rural lifestyles. Ms. Bjorkbom argues that the main motive behind wolf culls is the “recreational interest” of hunters who are left with fewer moose to hunt because they are prey for wolves.

According to Gunnar Gloersen, game manager for the Swedish Hunters’ Association, Svenska Jagareförbundet, hunting — an old and important tradition in Varmland — is now under threat.

The return of the wolf has had “a huge impact” on the moose population, Mr. Gloersen said, adding that hunters shot 17,500 moose in Varmland in 1983, but only 4,200 last year — just a few more than around 4,000 that were killed by the predator, he said.

Wolves also attack dogs used by hunters to pursue both moose and smaller animals like roe deer and hares.

Drinking tea on the terrace of a neighbor’s house in the village of Nordmark, Claes Goran Lindberg recalls how he lost a dog while hunting in September 2008, and heard its last cries as it was attacked.

“That is something you never forget when you hear your own dog crying out like this,” Mr. Lindberg said. Two months later, the same thing happened to another dog that had strayed farther while on a moose hunt. “I only found the head and neck — the wolf had eaten the rest,” he added.

According to Mr. Lindberg, concerns about wolves have spread. “If you have seen some tracks in the snow, it is not fun to let your children go out,” he said.

At his farm in Olmhult, some miles away, Mr. Ekholm said that had he known then what he knows now, he would not have bought in this location when he moved here 15 years ago.

About 50 animals were killed in attacks on two nearby farms last year, he said, and, in a recent week, his neighbor had spotted a female wolf and two cubs on his security camera.

“We are waiting for an attack,” Mr. Ekholm added. “It will happen.”

## **Discovery Magazine**

### **[Oldest Case of Leukemia Found on 7,000-Year-Old Skeleton](#)**

by Rossella Lorenzi

German researchers have discovered what might be the earliest case of leukemia in a 7,000-year-old skeleton, they announced at the first European conference on evolutionary medicine.



Belonging to a female individual who died at 30-40 years, the skeleton was excavated in 1982 among other 72 burials at an early Neolithic site near Stuttgart-Mühlhausen in south western Germany.

Beside the individual stood a round-bottomed jar. The site was linked with the Linear Pottery culture, an early farming culture which flourished in western and central Europe between 5500–4800 BC and produced pottery with distinctive linear decorations.

“So far only a severe case of dental caries with alveolar inflammation was reported for this individual,” team leader Heike Scherf, from the Senckenberg Center for Human Evolution and Paleoenvironment at the University of Tübingen in Germany, said.

Using high resolution CT scans, Scherf and colleagues found a pattern of deep loss of spongy bone in both the bone tissue of the humerus (the long bone that runs from the shoulder to the elbow) and the sternum, or breastbone.

According to the researchers, the resorption of central spongy bone is significantly higher compared to specimens of the same age group from the same site and to recent human samples of the adult age class.

“Our results strongly suggests leukemia in its initial stages, affecting the hematopoietic stem cells in bone marrow,” Scherf said.

The locally restricted destruction of the sternum and humerus’s bone tissue ruled out other diseases such as osteoporosis, hyperparathyroidism and bone tumor.

“A virus associated with a special type of leukemia (T-cell leukemia) was previously found in Andean mummies. But this case is probably the earliest known appearance of leukemia in an archeological case,” Scherf told Discovery News.

The researchers admitted it’s impossible to make any more detailed assumptions, such as establishing the type of leukemia that affected the Neolithic woman.

Frank Rühli, director of the Institute of Evolutionary Medicine at the University of Zurich, where the conference took place, found the study interesting.

“Based even on such state-of-the-art imaging, one can never be 100 percent sure about such a paleopathological finding,” Rühli told Discovery News.

“That said, to have an indication for the oldest paleopathological record of a modern, frequent disease with a major impact such as leukemia is very important from the perspective of the evolution of the disease,” he added.

## Scientific American

### [Three Years into its Mission, Curiosity's Stunning Martian Panorama](#)

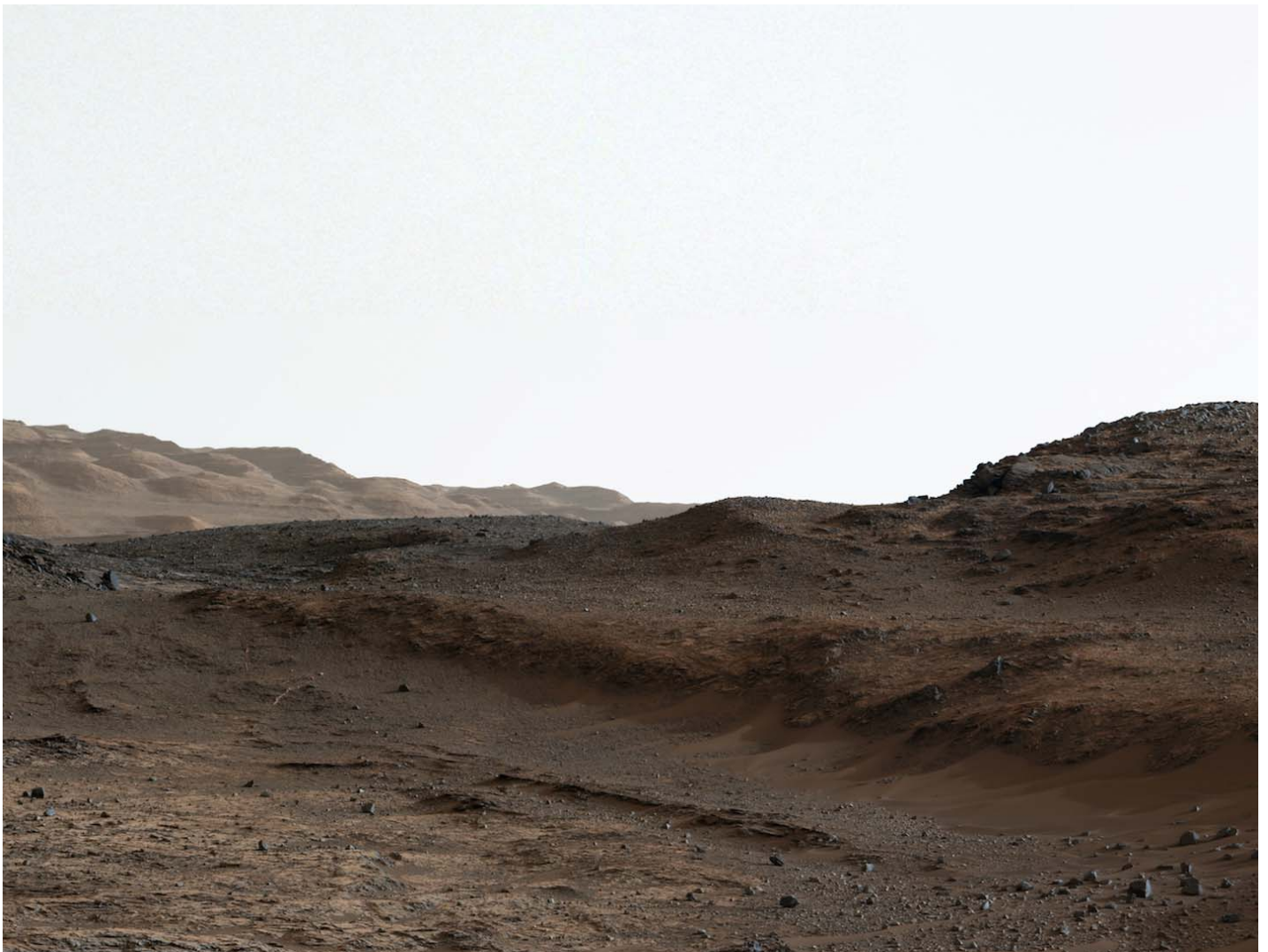
by Caleb A. Scharf

It's been three years since NASA's Curiosity rover, carrying the Mars Science Laboratory, made its bold [skycrane-assisted landing](#) on the surface of Mars.

Since then the rover [has progressed](#) across a wealth of varied and fascinating terrain. The southward looking panorama here has been stitched together from images taken back in April 2015 with the rover cameras - on Martian days (or sols) 952 and 953 after landing (a solar day on Mars is 24 hours and 39 minutes).

It's a marvelous view: from outcroppings and smooth bedrock, to rounded buttes still in the distance. But to fully appreciate the details and the extraordinary 'presence' of Mars you have to poke around this [70-plus MB pixel file](#).

Here are a few closeups, and you can explore the whole image directly [online here](#).



## The Federalist

### [A Short History Of Government's Terrible Dietary Advice](#)

*The next time the state gives you nutritional suggestions, you should probably just do the opposite*

by [David Harsanyi](#)

In [Sleeper](#), Woody Allen plays the cryogenically frozen owner of a Greenwich Village health food store who, when defrosted in the year 2173, finds himself in an authoritarian state filled with giant vegetables, android butlers, and Diane Keaton. When an unnerved Allen is first unfrozen, space-age doctors try to calm him down:

Doctor: "He's ranting. We'd better tranquilize him."

Allen: "I knew it was too good to be true. I parked right near the hospital."

Doctor: "Here. You smoke this, and be sure to get the smoke deep down into your lungs."

Allen: "I don't smoke. It's tobacco."

Doctor: "It's one of the healthiest things for your body. Now go ahead. You need all the strength you can get."

Pointing out the always changing guidelines of salubrious living is a long-running joke in America. It's worth remembering, though, that any self-corrections we make, and we make them all the time in real life using common sense, are far more difficult when government puts its imprimatur on pseudoscience—which it also does all the time.

[In the Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), the federal government's advice manual for citizens, we are warned that "not eating breakfast has been associated with excess body weight." But when researchers from Columbia University decided to test this notion, they found [nothing of the sort](#): "In overweight individuals, skipping breakfast daily for 4 weeks leads to a reduction in body weight," [the study's authors note](#). Other researchers did the same and came to similar conclusions. How many parents and overweight Americans took this advice as gospel when they could have been losing weight by skipping buttermilk pancake breakfasts?

We already know government recommendations regarding health are often driven by a bunch Chicken Littles. The leading organ of American scaremongering, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, has gotten so much wrong over the years. There was the outrageous contention that 400,00 Americans [were dropping dead from obesity every year](#) (they weren't). And then there were all the over-the-top warnings about the alleged risks of second-hand smoke (they don't really exist).

Earlier this year, the bureaucrats behind the government dietary guidelines finally admitted there was "no appreciable relationship" between dietary cholesterol and blood cholesterol. After years of warning Americans that high-cholesterol foods would kill them—eggs, shrimp, and so on—the U.S. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee will no longer list cholesterol among its "nutrients of concern" for overconsumption. Now, some scientists argue that the state's obsession with scaring citizens about fat may actually have [made our health worse](#).

The popularity of partially-hydrogenated vegetable oils—which government [absurdly banned](#) earlier this year—was driven in large part by government scaremongering about the evils of cooking with lard. But when contemporary researchers looked at the 1970's-era data underlying the dietary fat guidelines, they came to the conclusion [that the data did not support the idea that eating less fat would translate to fewer cases of heart disease](#), or that it would save lives. And studies show it hasn't.

Nina Teicholz, author of *The Big Fat Surprise*, [wrote this in \*The New York Times\* earlier this year](#):

How did experts get it so wrong? Certainly, the food industry has muddied the waters through its lobbying. But the primary problem is that nutrition policy has long relied on a very weak kind of science: epidemiological, or “observational,” studies in which researchers follow large groups of people over many years. But even the most rigorous epidemiological studies suffer from a fundamental limitation. At best they can show only association, not causation. Epidemiological data can be used to suggest hypotheses but not to prove them.

For instance, the government has been telling us we've been eating [too much salt](#) for years. The Food and Drug Administration claimed that lowering salt intake would save tens of thousands of us every year. Overbearing nanny state groups lobbied the government [to regulate salt](#) like they now do trans fats, and Americans turned to low sodium diets in huge numbers.

One of America's leading advocates of spurious science, Michael Bloomberg, [convinced more than 20 companies to do drop salt levels voluntarily](#). And yet, according to studies published in recent years, our salt intake wasn't dangerous at all. [Even the CDC has been forced to admit it was wrong](#). And not only were the low levels of salt recommended by the government unnecessary, they [might also have been dangerous for our health](#).

“There is no longer any valid basis for the current salt guidelines,” said Andrew Mente, one of the authors of the study published in *New England Journal of Medicine*. “So why are we still scaring people about salt?”

Well, because that's what government does best.



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# PAYDAY LOANS

WE'D LIKE TO PAY SOME SCIENTISTS TO SING,  
IN PERFECT HARMONY,  
AND HELP US DUPE THE WORLD THAT COKE  
DOESN'T CAUSE O-BE-SIT-EE!

