enjoy the swinging prose and pace. Others, accustomed to the depth of research typical of Pollan’s work, might feel slightly surprised at the speed with which they get through the book. It was smart of Pollan to put a book out while the shock waves sent by *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* were still reverberating, and he is easily forgiven for his haste: if this book is slightly anemic in comparison to his 2006 tour de force, what he has to say is nonetheless timely, pointed, and beautifully written. Pollan has a real gift for tying many strands of the zeitgeist into neat little knots.

Although this book feels short on the deep, original research that steams up from every page of Pollan’s other writings, as well as the characters and places that bring them to life, it does showcase Pollan’s strength as a rhetorician. His unmasking of nutritionism as a dualistic ideology (the foodie “truthiness”) is believable and solidly built. So is his pinpointing of marker moments in history that helped to crystallize nutritionism, such as the 1973 overturning of a 1938 rule requiring that the word imitation appear on any product that was one, opening the floodgates to tinkering with foods; or the 1977 Senate committee rewriting of “reduce consumption of meat” in *Dietary Goals for the United States* to “choose meats, poultry and fish that will reduce saturated fat intake.” These historical minutiae function at once as subtle testament to his skill as an investigative journalist and shrewdly chosen hooks on which to hang arguments. His critique of conventional farming, which equates nitrogen fertilizer with fast food and demonstrates the inferiority of the plants it generates, is clean, effortless, and convincing. In fact, the book’s whole thesis—trust common sense and tradition—is so bloody simple that one wonders why it seems novel at all until Pollan unmasks the unhealthy coziness among food scientists, the industry paying for most of their research, and journalism. Pollan is not anti-science, and in fact he quite frequently cites scientific research to make his points, but he comes down hard on the duplicity of statistics inadequately gathered, whether the fault lies in the method, the funding source, or—as he exposes repeatedly and wrathfully—a combination of the two.

One wonders why Pollan chooses to avoid discussing genetically modified or cloned foods, and why, despite his debunking of nutritionism, he nevertheless endorses Omega-3 with baffling passion—but these are just quibbles. Ultimately, his style—well-paced, with chatty, rollicking argumentation, rapier thrusts of metaphor, cliffhanging rejoinders, and a dash of sarcastic humor—is so winning that it bats down any question of quality. His extraordinary talent for distilling other people’s work, as well as his own, into cogent, catchy phrases makes him the perfect messiah for the “different kind of food” he trumpets. Pollan may think he’s just chronicling the “resurgence of farmers’ markets, the rise of the organic movement, and the renaissance of local agriculture now under way across the country” (p.14), but in a substantive way he’s the pied piper of that movement.

In our age of refrigerated glove compartments, *Diabetic Living* magazine, and an American national average of two hundred pounds of meat eaten per person per year, Pollan’s book is a clarion call. If devoted readers notice repetition, at least the message hasn’t lost any relevance. We may rejoice the day it does.

—Nathalie Jord, Shanagarry, Ireland

*The Seven Deadly Sins of Obesity: How the Modern World Is Making Us Fat*
Edited by Jane Dixon and Dorothy H. Broom
Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007
228 pp. AUD $39.95 (cloth)

Australians, along with a sizable chunk of the globe, are grappling with an ever more obese population and its attendant health issues. The questions considered by *The Seven Deadly Sins of Obesity* are universally applicable—why did any given population gain so much weight and how can the process be reversed? The answers regarding just whose responsibility it is to change the status quo vary depending upon which nation’s healthcare system is discussed. It’s not easy to write anything innovative, instructive, or inspirational about the obesity crisis; even the naysayer chorus has been largely silenced (except for that pesky responsibility issue). How, then, to grab the attention of readers whose eyes glaze over at the prospect of yet another treatise on the etiology of a crisis now so ubiquitous it is more akin to a chronic condition?

To Dixon and Broom’s credit, *The Seven Deadly Sins* offers an eminently readable series of essays in accessible, jargon-free language. Much of the focus is on overweight children. Each contributor examines a facet of Australia’s ailing health culture, leading the editors to collectively pass the parcel of responsibility from individuals to societal culprits, and in so doing, they avoid casting their readers as slothful, greedy, and gluttonous. It is not the sinners but the sins of modern society that have coalesced to form an obesogenic environment so lacking in the virtues necessary for a healthy population to thrive that nothing short of a
complete reformation will do. Thus, each essay, written by experts in the fields of sociology, epidemiology, and public health, goes in search of original sin and prescribes what is necessary to save a dangerously obese and unhealthy population. However, the authors are aware that a simple appeal to every soul’s heavenly virtues of faith, hope, and charity will not result in kilos shed.

The familiar culprits, such as too much advertising for junk food, are thoroughly discussed, but there are some surprises, too. One essay literally starts at the beginning by excoriating baby formula as “a mass mammary malfunction.” The shift to “artificial infant feeding” resulted from infant-formula companies working in tandem with doctors, who sought to create a “science” of early feeding. Instead, they created a risk factor for obesity (p. 102). Despite a societal shift that encourages mothers to feed their infants from the breast, marketing still trumps maternal instincts; now the focus is on toddlers and young children, for whom highly processed foods are explicitly marketed.

Pressured parenting is also partly to blame. The “French paradox” takes on new meaning as French parents are both heralded for careful monitoring of their children’s consumption while simultaneously scolded for over-coddling. Australian parents are told not to self-flagellate over their children’s sedentary ways, since encouraging kids to play in the current environment of overly competitive and commercialized sports isn’t entirely healthy, either.

Jane Fonda takes a drubbing for creating a fitness-industry model that co-opted her anti-authority message into the promotion of bodily self-perfection. Thus, Fonda, “one of the earliest icons of the commercialized alternative lifestyle movement” with her phenomenally popular aerobics tapes, made women believe that some science mixed with self-determination would render them fit, if not exactly thin (p. 135). The result is an army of personal trainers and fitness, the largest sport and physical recreation category in Australia (p. 135).

While some issues raised in the book are unique to Australia, most are distressingly familiar. The editors conclude that “environmental solutions will require a constructive convergence between a mobilized civil society, an enabling state and socially responsible commercial corporations” (p. 174). Perhaps the imminent demise of the gas-guzzling and multi-sinful SUV is a first step on the long road to cultural transformation.

—Ellen Fried, New York University

Geoffrey P. Webb
London: Hodder Arnold, 2008
xii + 504 pp. Illustrations. £29.99 (paper)

Nutrition: a Health Promotion Approach, recently released in its third edition, is an introductory nutrition textbook that covers a broad scope of nutrition and dietetics topics. The book, published by United Kingdom publisher Hodder Arnold, serves as a solid reference on nutrition issues from the British perspective, including sections on dietary requirements, food safety, nutrition research, and epidemiology.

Author Geoffrey Webb highlights the changing priorities and contemporary controversies in the field of nutrition. For example, he describes the paradigm shift from a more simplistic view of nutrients as an answer to deficiency diseases such as rickets and niacin deficiency (pellagra) to a more holistic and interdisciplinary field, which now incorporates nutrition science, epidemiology, behavioral science, food studies, and culinary arts in order to address modern health issues. The book’s subtitle, “A Health Promotion Approach,” reflects the importance of incorporating a population-health perspective into modern introductory nutrition courses.

The book is divided into five sections: 1) Concepts and Principles; 2) Energy, Energy Balance and Obesity; 3) The Nutrients; 4) Variations in Nutritional Requirements and Priorities; and 5) the Safety and Quality of Food. One of the book’s strengths lies in its comparison of British versus American nutrition standards, which provides an interesting examination of how the translation of nutritional science into policy differs between countries.

This text provides some strong resources, such as an extensive glossary of terms and a “key points” section aimed at summarizing sections. Unfortunately, attempts to provide an easy-to-follow organizational style are not always consistent. For example, some chapters provide a clear introduction, conclusion, and sections on the chapter’s aims, but most do not. A reference section is provided at the back of the book, but citations are sparse within the text and do not always reflect the recent 2008 publication date.

While the book is not readily available in the United States, this paper edition is affordable compared to many other introductory nutrition textbooks. However, it is printed only in black and green ink and thus lacks the colorful schematics and illustrations that are especially helpful for teaching complex pathways of digestion and absorption of nutrients to an introductory audience.

A shortcoming of this work, especially given its focus on health promotion, is its lack of any discussion of the dietetics