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
Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World: A Concise History with 174 Recipes
Lilia Zaouali
Translated by M.B. DeBevoise; Foreword by Charles Perry
266 pp. Illustrations. $24.95 (cloth)

This book draws on the sources of medieval Arab cookery with which we have become acquainted through the work of modern scholars who translated and edited the manuscripts, most of them compiled in Charles Perry’s Medieval Arab Cookery and various other writings. However, author Lilia Zaouali draws directly on editions in the original Arabic, ranging in history from tenth-century Abbasid Baghdad to thirteenth-century Aleppo, Baghdad, and Murcia in Arab Spain. All were written by or for courtiers and aristocrats and reflect the opulence of their milieus, containing, apart from recipes and kitchen procedures, literary anecdotes, poetry, descriptions of notable banquets, and discourses on health and hygiene. In this engaging and informative book Zaouali weaves historical narratives to provide a context for these culinary writings and presents complementary material from medical texts and belles lettres. She also includes a number of attractive pictures on food-relevant themes.

The historical and cultural background to the recipes is set in a wide-ranging first chapter on the sources for culinary history, the authors of the main books of recipes and their milieus, and rules and influences from the religious sources. We then read about culinary influences from the various historical backgrounds: antiquity, Arabs of the desert and the oases, Persian courtly cuisine, the Turkish invasions, and the cultural character of the various conquered lands, including Spain. Poets, doctors, and geographers embroider the picture. There then follows a section on materials, techniques, and terminology. The main part of the book consists of the recipes, which are classified by genre: appetizers, breads, roasts, stews, fish, dairy, pasta, couscous, sauces, pastries, and fermented condiments and wine. The last chapter contains recipes from contemporary North African cuisines, which the author believes to have some continuity with the medieval traditions. The medieval recipes are presented to the reader with short prefaces, many of which suggest that they are possible to prepare in the modern kitchen and will be pleasing to a modern diner.

The search for continuity and the project of re-creating these historic recipes is part of a romance of the past, which seems to be pervasive. The author is clearly aware of the discontinuities: the ingredients, methods, the prevalence of New World products in modern cookery, the forgetting and abandonment of many ingredients basic to medieval cookery (notably murri, a condiment made of rotted grains, apparently resembling soy sauce), and the diminution of strong tastes of spices, vinegar, and sugar. Yet, the author has a desire to find continuities, and she finds them primarily in North African cuisines, not so much in the Middle East. For the most part, however, modern palates would deem the medieval tastes too harsh, with their indiscriminate use of spices, vinegar, sugar and honey, fats and oils. These features were common both to the Muslim world and to their European counterparts. These similarities are usually explained in terms of diffusions and imitations by the Europeans of the Muslim civilizations in diet, ingredients, and medical ideas. This is doubtless true, to an extent. Another factor, however, is that the recipes that come down to us from both sides are those of the aristocrats and of the rich. The main concern was to display opulence and luxury, which were embodied in the use of expensive ingredients: spices, sugar, honey, different meats, nuts, pickles, and cheeses, all in the same pot. Do we really want to eat all that?

We can postulate a kind of civilizing process that included the table, and that affected both Europe and the Middle East. In eighteenth-century France this process was ideologically explicit, with the rejection of heavy spicing and complex foods in favor of purity of ingredients. In many other places, including the Ottoman Middle East, the process was implicit: Ottoman courtly food, for instance, was largely domestic and simple, the greatest extravagance being in pastries and sweets. So many of the foods we associate with the Middle East, such as stuffed vegetables and various salads and dips, as well as the diverse rice dishes, date back to those later centuries rather than to medieval times. It has been said that the regions like North Africa and Iran that maintained continuities from the distant past were only