

## Nutritionism: The Science and Politics of Dietary Advice

Gyorgy Scrinis  
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Gyorgy Scrinis is a lecturer in food politics at The University of Melbourne, Australia. He has written several book chapters, journal articles, selected magazines and newspaper op-ed articles over the past decade concerned with food production, food systems and nutrition.

Scrinis's book, *Nutritionism: The Science and Politics of Dietary Advice*, provides an in-depth guide to food nutrients and how they were discovered, explored, dissected, vilified, glorified and exploited by scientists, government, food authorities and businesses. Scrinis critically examines the history of nutritional science by categorising it into the eras of: (1) quantifying nutritionism – the discovery and quantification of nutrients in the 19th and 20th centuries; (2) good and bad nutritionism – the division of nutrients into 'good' and 'bad' c. 1960s; and (3) functional nutritionism – the targeting of nutrients as 'functional' from the 1990s to the present. Scrinis carefully unpicks the nutritionism paradigm that reduces food to its nutritional composition (which, in turn, forms the basis of health claims and dietary guidelines regarding fat, sugar, salt, vitamins and minerals). Throughout, Scrinis weaves into his picture the underlying issue of food processing and its implications for health. He uses some very compelling examples, including one that so permeates our dinner plates today – margarine.

Scrinis comprehensively reviews the scientific literature, examines the various diet and health movements, health claims, nutrition and food labelling and the new science of nutrigenomics. His concern is that the current dietary guidelines are not born out of clear, unrefuted scientific endeavour, but are the result of the reductive interpretation of nutrients based on confounding epidemiological research, political objectives and market imperatives. Scrinis' view is that a lot more research

needs to be undertaken based on a new nutrition paradigm – the *food quality paradigm*. Scrinis developed this paradigm to contextualise scientific knowledge about nutrients, food and dietary patterns and it is based on food production and processing quality, the utilisation of cultural knowledge, practical experience and scientific analysis. Scrinis states that there has been very little research on highly processed food and what food nutrition research is available today is still framed within the reductionist paradigm, such as Michael Pollan's *In Defence of Food* (2008, Penguin, Australia).

A negative feature of this book is that Scrinis only very briefly touches on calorie restriction and its impact on health. It might be that over nutrition interacts with highly processed food in linking to chronic disease. I would have liked him to tease this out more fully.

Overall a very interesting and engaging book applicable to anyone interested in food nutrition and the politics of food. The food industry is forever expanding and devising new ways for us to spend our money and unfortunately the simplest message – eat good quality unprocessed food – is not the message they want us to hear. The hope is that Scrinis's book will garner research interest in this crucially important area resulting in greater debate among stakeholders and ultimately consumer pressure on regulators and the food industry.

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