

BOOK REVIEW

PLANET OBESITY

by Garry Egger and Boyd Swinburne

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Reviewed by Di Mace

This is a highly unusual and original angle on the much discussed obesity epidemic sweeping the world, especially in developed Western nations. Unusually, (given the subject and the heritage of the authors) rather than being an academic treatise on the subject, the book is a stimulating alternative view on the possible real root causes of this growing worldwide problem.

Body fat seems to the authors to be a symptom of the wider, economic and social problems facing us today and future generations. The authors argue that our growth obsessed economy has created an obese population. In short, obesity is good for the economy.

Blame is laid at the feet of economies obsessed with constant growth and the forever increasing consumption required to support that growth. High food consumption and subsequent poor health can be considered good for economic growth. Drug, cigarette and alcohol contributions to the economy are all vital for sustainable economic growth. This means that eating more food is seen as positive (for the economy) as is using more labour saving devices (and working harder/longer with little exercise), to provide the time to fulfil the consuming/working cycle. As a result, more calories are consumed and less expended in day-to-day activities.

The most obscure tangent of the argument is perhaps that the economic stimulus (and unnecessary overconsumption) is linked to increasing greenhouse gases. This rather long bow is drawn by the increased food demands placing pressures on the environment, through the rising needs for increased production in manufacturing and farming practices to satisfy the demands of this 'economically obese' society.

As an industry focussed on helping people to change their lives and overcome their weight/health issues, it is a responsibility for us all to read this book. If we are being constantly stimulated to consume in all manners possible, then each of us in our own small way can take action within our sphere of influence. If this line of thought has any ring of authenticity for us, then we should as an industry take a more holistic approach to the problem and share our own personal burden of blame for this insidiously self-perpetuating cycle.

