



Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis

Michel Grignon¹

Received: 8 July 2022 / Accepted: 7 September 2022 / Published online: 23 September 2022
© The Author(s) under exclusive license to The Canadian Public Health Association 2022

Dear Editor:

In their letter to the editor, Veugelers et al. (2022) state that we disagree because we have different perspectives. They call mine individualistic and theirs altruistic, and they claim that I cannot see any purpose to taxes but raising revenues (which is not the case, my editorial was clear enough on this point). I agree we certainly have different perspectives, but my editorial was not really about that: even within their perspective (which I would call paternalistic), a universal tax on sugar may not be the most appropriate thing to do. The main reason is that there exists a level of consumption of sugar that is not detrimental to health and a tax cannot really be justified on individuals who keep their consumption at that low level. I restate here that taxing those who consume moderate amounts of free sugar cannot really be justified: contrary to what Veugelers et al. write in their letter, the Global Burden of Disease does not measure risk at low levels of consumption and the gradual increase in the Global Burden of Disease publication is a pragmatic specification assumption. Veugelers et al.'s justification for taxing sugar is the social

cost imposed on taxpayers by consumers; my point was that a tax cannot as a result be levied on those who don't impose any cost on taxpayers, because their level of consumption is innocuous. Unless, that is, and this is where perspectives enter the stage, if we believe that any consumption of sugar is sinful and should be taxed, because it sends the right signal or information to consumers who lack the ability to behave sovereignly. This is the paternalistic part, and I agree I don't fully embrace it.

Reference

Veugelers, P. T., Taylor, J. P., Ohinmaa, A., Liu, S., Munasinghe, L. L., & Maximova, K. (2022). To tax or not to tax? That's the sugar-coated question. *Can J Public Health*, 113(5), 786–787. <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-022-00668-y>

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

✉ Michel Grignon
grignon@mcmaster.ca

¹ Department of Economics, KTH, McMaster University, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, ON L8S 4M4, Canada