THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE TAXED: HOW TAXES SHAPE MORALS IN MARKETS


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This study addresses the effects of the new tax on sweetened beverages, which has been gaining currency across the United States and beyond. I use evidence from a factorial survey to show how taxing a morally debated commodity influences people's moral evaluations of consumption. I also experimentally manipulate the race and the class of the imagined soda consumer to test how social status matters for evaluations of morally contested consumption. To investigate moral variability based on the taxes on goods, and the social markers of the buyer, I test how people evaluate soda consumers in reference to the US healthcare market. Participants consider buying soda as less wrong, and less relevant for health care, when the soda is taxed. This study shows significant variation in moral judgements based on the respondents’ own social positions, namely their political views, income, and race. Furthermore, I find evidence suggesting that lower status groups may be held to lower standards of moral conduct in comparison to members of higher status groups, even when they engage in identical consumption practices.

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