

Bird and Gendron rightly and repeatedly stress that VATs differ quite fundamentally. This makes statements about the merits or otherwise of “the VAT” relative to other taxes (which of course show similar variety) dangerous: a bad VAT may be worse than a good tariff, and a bad tariff worse than a good VAT. While broad comparisons across tax instruments can thus be an overly simplistic guide to policy making—no tax is perfect—thinking them through can help understand the instruments’ intrinsic strengths and limitations.