

What's wrong with tombstoning and what does this tell us about responsibility for health.

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What's Wrong with Tombstoning and What Does This Tell Us About Responsibility for Health?

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Abstract

Using tombstoning (jumping from a height into water) as an example, this

article claims that public health policies and health promotion tend to assess the moral status of activities following a version of health maximizing rule utilitarianism, but this does not represent common moral experience, not least because it fails to take into account the enjoyment that various health effecting habits brings and the contribution that this makes to a good life, variously defined. It is proposed that the moral status of health threatening activities should instead be defined by a version of act utilitarianism where both maximizing value and method of calculation are decided by individuals. In this account personal responsibility for health is reduced to the obligation to undertake calculations effectively, comprising of two duties; epistemic and reflective. If there is an individual epistemic duty, it is plausible to suggest that health promotion should present information in a way which facilitates it, but despite the prevalent language of autonomous choice, discussion of health promotion messages, for example, related to drinking and smoking demonstrates that this currently does not happen. Health promotion strategies should seek to encourage reflection about the harm our health effecting behaviour causes others.

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