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Beyond privacy-versus-health: A justification analysis of contact-tracing apps debate in the Netherlands

Governments and health authorities across the globe have proposed the use of contact-tracing apps as a means of helping to contain the spread of the corona-virus and easing lockdown measures. Among scholars, experts and NGO's, there is ongoing discussion about the ethical aspects of this technology. In the Netherlands, as in many other nations, this discussion has mostly been framed in terms of a tradeoff between privacy and public health. In this paper I will use the framework of modes of justification developed by the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot to move beyond this dichotomy. I will conduct a justification analysis of the Dutch public debate on the use of contact-tracing apps. The analysis will show that next to the 'vitality' (greater health) and 'civic' (civil rights to privacy, doing good for society), many other kinds of common good are mobilized in this debate, namely 'market' (valuing economic growth), 'domestic' (valuing tradition and hierarchy), 'industrial' (increased efficiency and expertise) and finally 'project' (valuing innovation). The identification of which common goods are at stake will contribute to discussions about the use of this technology from a standpoint with a richer ethical perspective, from where we can think about the integration of these values in the design of such an app. By the same token, this analysis can inform policy on the application of this technology.