'Let people do the right thing themselves'

People should be given as much chance as possible to stick to the coronavirus measures of their own free will, says WUR PhD student of Philosophy Steven Kraaijeveld. He argues for an approach that appeals to altruism, rather than a strict lockdown.

Why do you argue for that?

'By forcing people to stay at home, you take away a lot of their freedom, and that has serious consequences in the long term. Restricting free-doms can be justified morally, but the means should be in proportion. A lockdown, with its serious impact, is morally hard to defend. Also, a lock-down can be unfair when it doesn't have the same sort of impact on everyone. One person lives in a big house with its own office and gar-den, while another is in a flat on the fifth floor. A lockdown affects people differently. Not enough attention has been paid to that.'

But that altruistic approach didn't seem to work here.

'I think it's good that the Nether-lands gives people a chance to take responsibility for themselves. You do need measures and the govern-ment should also actively stim-ulate people to stick to them, but in so doing you can leave people free to decide wheth-er to stay at home or not, as long as they follow the general rules. That way you respect people's autonomy, and they get the chance to do "the right thing". That often gives people a strong-er motive than making something compulsory. And people usually keep it up for longer too.'

Is enough attention being paid to these ethical considerations?

'I don't think so. It may be that a temporary lockdown is justifiable, but then you shouldn't lose sight of the ethical implications. A lockdown demands a lot of people. The more people see its importance and opt in themselves, the better they will stick to the measures. Then you achieve the same goal as with a strict lock-down, but people do keep some of their freedom.' TL

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