

Philosophical Thought Experiments Digitalized: a Review of the Digital Instruments for Constructing Moral-focused Discussions

Svitlana Balinchenko

Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University (Ukraine)

sp.balinchenko@gmail.com

Philosophy courses: moral-choice-focused objectives and activities

1. A “good citizen” idea discussing
2. Individual aspect of moral choice (simulations and discussions based on the actual moral doctrines)
3. Social aspect of moral choice (thought experiments and gamification based on a social space modelling)

A “good citizen” idea in models and simulations

Based on

Westheimer, Joel, and Kahne, Josef (2004)
Educating the ‘Good Citizen’: Political Choices and Pedagogical Goals.
Political Science and Politics
37: 241-247. doi:
10.1017/S1049096504004160

A *good citizen* model

- personally responsible
- participatory
- justice-oriented

“Imagine that you are a good citizen of an ideal state”

Activities:

Simulations of opinion surveys based on the questionnaires of the actual National surveys + comparing the imaginative and real results, and discussing the problems

Recommended digital instrument:

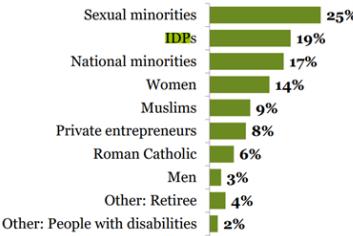
Mentimeter

For instance:

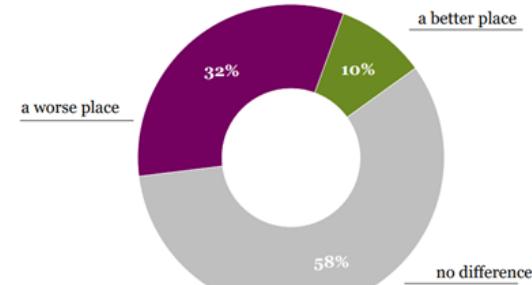
2019 Public Opinion Survey to Assess the Changes in Citizens' Awareness of Civil Society and Their Activities; USAID/Kyiv: Kyiv, Ukraine, 2019. Available online:
<https://dif.org.ua/uploads/pdf/1820094705d9ccb76b43dc5.92039369.pdf>

© Pact. Inc., 2015-2019 | Public opinion survey to assess the changes in citizen's awareness of civil society and their activities

**Q: Which groups in Ukraine, in your opinion, most experience violations and limitations of rights and freedoms or a prejudiced attitude on the basis of some social features?
PROVIDE up to 5 ANSWERS**



Q: An increasing number of people from different ethnicities, social groups and sexual identities make Ukraine to live?



© Pact. Inc., 2015-2019 | Public opinion survey to assess the changes in citizen's awareness of civil society and their activities



Individual aspect of moral choice
(simulations and discussions based on the actual moral doctrines)

- Doctrine of Double Effect
- Doctrine of Doing and Allowing Harm

Moral Machine simulation
(by Edmond Awad, Iyad Rahwan, Jean-Francois Bonnefon, Azim Shariff),
<https://www.moralmachine.net/>

Doctrine of Double Effect

Based on

Foot, Philippa (2002 [1967]) *Virtues and Vices: and other essays in moral philosophy*.
DOI:10.1093/0199252866.003.0001

Thought experiment (Trolley Bus versions):

“Imagine that your action has two outcomes, a bad and a good one”

Activities and questions:

- Could an action be morally indifferent in such a situation?
- What if the bad action is a means for something good?
- Should a good intention be taken to consideration?

Recommended digital instrument:

Moral Machine

Doctrine of Doing and Allowing Harm

Based on

Woppard, Fiona and Frances Howard-Snyder (2021) Doing vs. Allowing Harm. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/doing-allowing/>.

Thought experiments (*Safety net, Poison, Spasm*, and their versions):

“Imagine the effects of your initiating, sustaining, enabling, and forbearing to prevent some harmful action” (after Foot, Quinn, and others)

Activities and questions:

- *Should active/passive role of the subject be considered in moral evaluation of a case?*
- *Would you prefer to own a Tesla Egoist or a Tesla Altruist, for instance?*

Recommended digital instrument:
Moral Machine



From self-driving cars on public roads to self-piloting reusable rockets landing on self-sailing ships, machine intelligence is supporting or entirely taking over ever more complex human activities at an ever increasing pace. The greater autonomy given machine intelligence in these roles can result in situations where they have to make autonomous choices involving human life and limb. This calls for not just a clearer understanding of how humans make such choices, but also a clearer understanding of how humans perceive machine intelligence making such choices.

Recent scientific studies on machine ethics have raised awareness about the topic in the media and public discourse. This website aims to take the discussion further, by providing a platform for 1) building a crowd-sourced picture of human opinion on how machines should make decisions when faced with moral dilemmas, and 2) crowdsourcing assembly and discussion of potential scenarios of moral consequence.

Let others know about Moral Machine



Concept

[Iyad Rahwan](#)

[Jean-Francois Bonnefon](#)

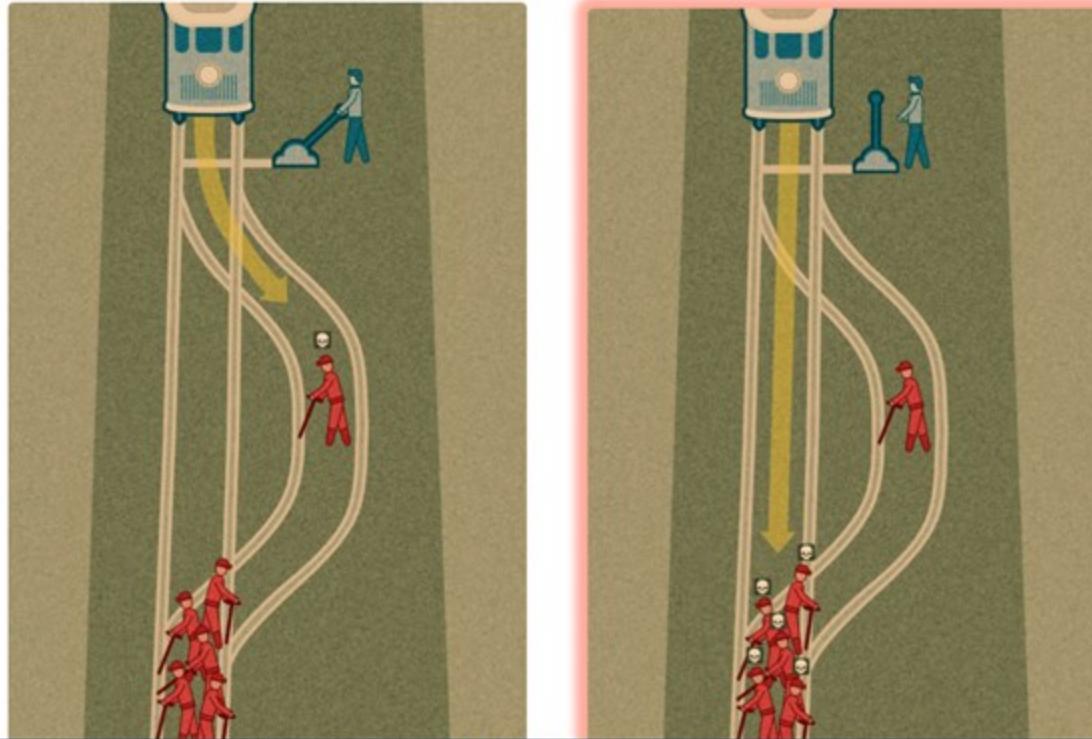
[Azim Shariff](#)

Lead Researcher

[Edmond Awad](#)

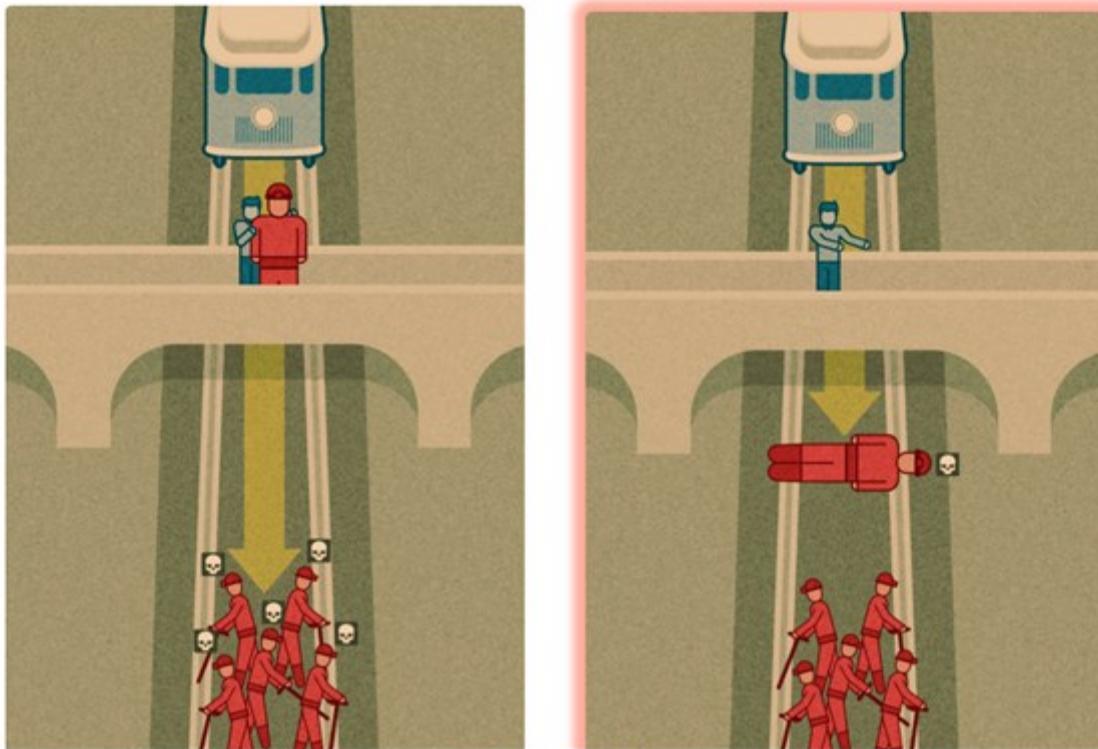
What should the man in blue do?

2 / 3



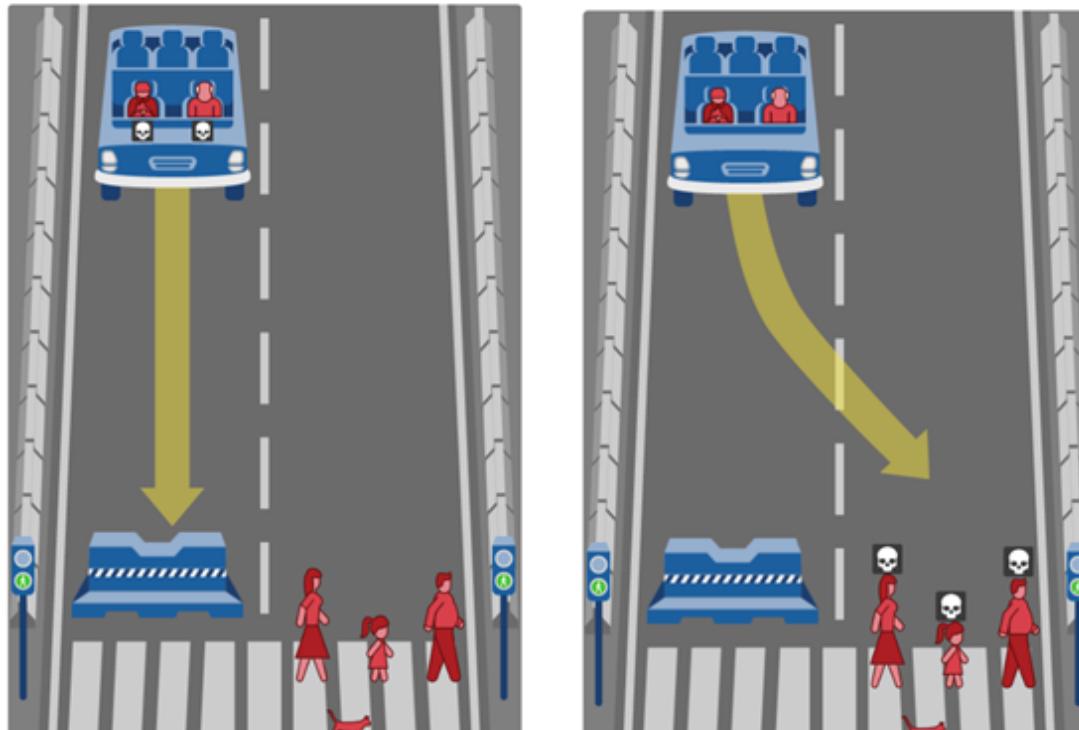
What should the man in blue do?

1 / 3



What should the self-driving car do?

1 / 13





MORAL
MACHINE

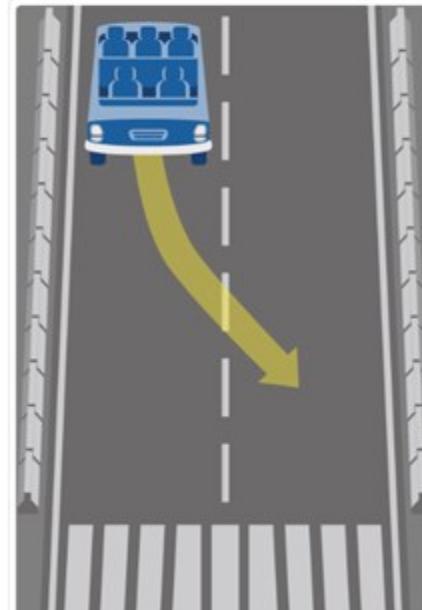
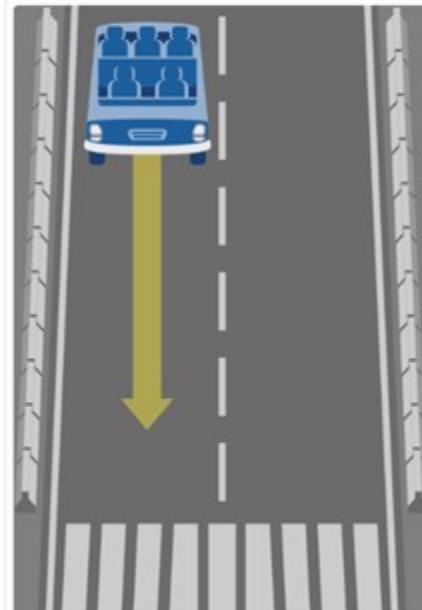
[Home](#) [Judge](#) [Classic](#) [Design](#) [Browse](#) [About](#) [Feedback](#)

En

Start Over

Give your scenario a title

Submit Scenario





Home

Judge

Classic

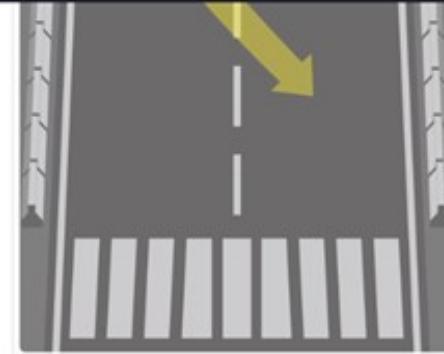
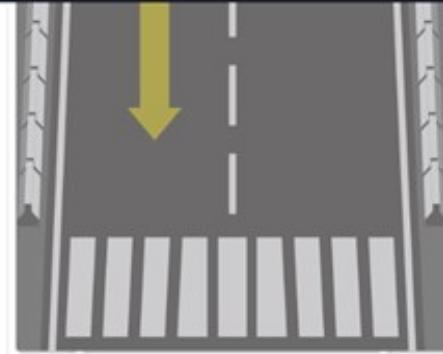
Design

Browse

About

Feedback

En



Between whom is the self-driving car deciding?



Pedestrians vs
Pedestrians



Pedestrians Ahead
vs Passengers



Passengers vs
Pedestrians on
Other Lane

Social aspect of moral choice (thought experiments and gamification based on a social space modelling)

- Huis Clos
(after J.-P. Sartre)
- Resources distribution
(after E. Ostrom)
- Justice as a component of moral choice

Opinion-questions and modelling instruments:
Jamboard, Mentimeter

Huis Clos

Based on

Sartre, J.-P. No Exit
(Huis Clos)

Thought experiment:

“Imagine that you are to stay together in a hotel room forever. Make up at least three moral rules that might ensure your stay there not becoming a hell”

Activities and questions:

- *Is the task possible in terms of eternity?*
- *What controlling measures can you imagine?*
- *Is the cooperation possible without any moral rules?*

Recommended digital instrument:

Jamboard, Mentimeter (voting for the rules)

The Drama of the Commons

Based on

Ostrom, E. (1996) "Covenants, Collective Action, and Common-Pool Resources", in *The Constitution of Good Societies*, ed. Karol Edward Soltan and Stephen L. Elkin, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Thought experiment:

"Imagine that your community owns some valuable resources. What should be done to prevent their exhaustion?"

Activities and questions:

- *What are the rules, restrictions and metarules to be set?*
- *Is the task possible if the resource is finite?*
- *Is the cooperation possible without any moral rules?*

Recommended digital instruments:

Jamboard, Mentimeter (voting for the rules, restrictions, metarules)

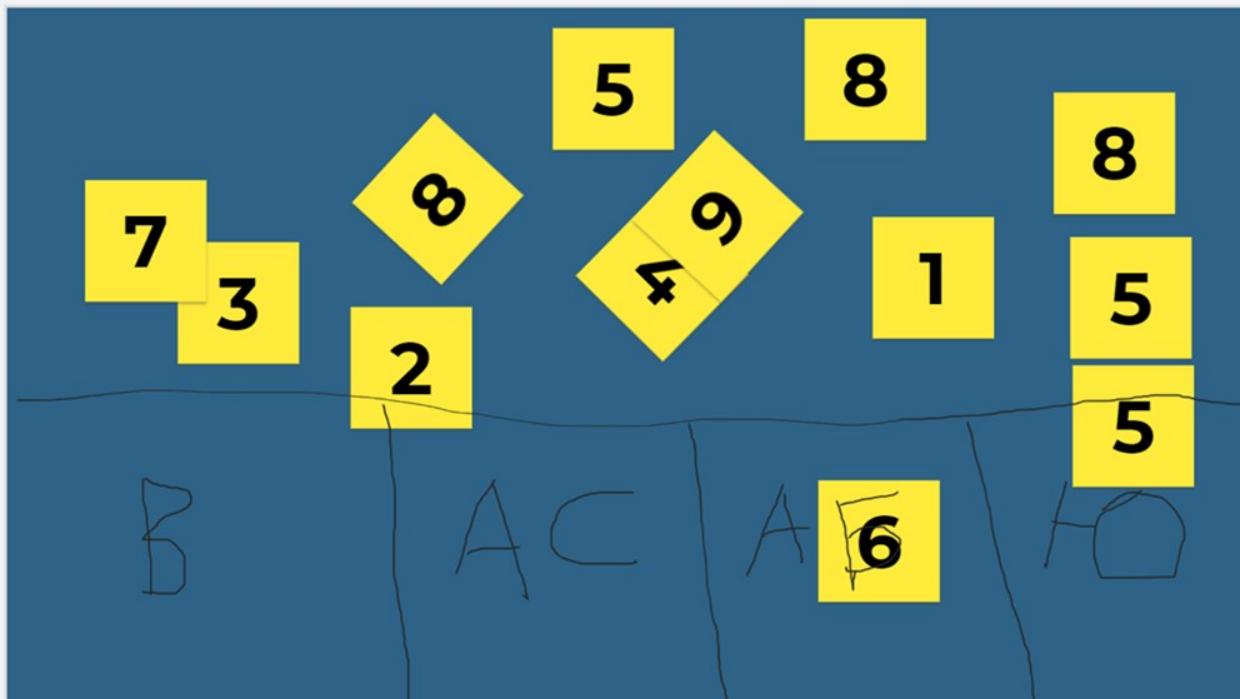


Вибрати тло

Очистити фрейм



Відкрити на пристрії Jamboard





Вибрати тло

Очистити фрейм



Відкрити на пристрій Jamboard



Justice Thought Experiments (moral choice)

Thought experiment (Robin Hood):

“Imagine that you are to make a moral decision on Robin Hood’s case. Is he a hero or a criminal?”

Thought experiment

(Transplantologist, a version of Tamar Gendler’s case):

“Imagine that you are a talented transplantologist. One person is a perfect donor to five patients. Is it morally acceptable to suggest the donor to save those patients at the cost of his or her life?”

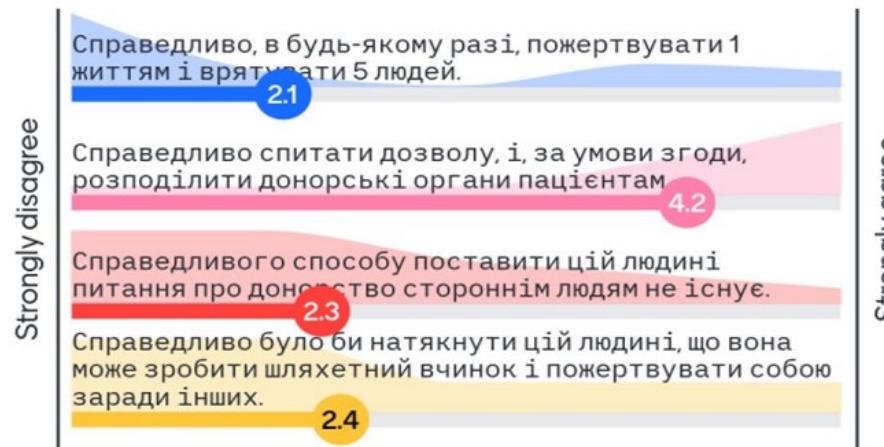
Thought experiment (Imaginary state choice):

“Imagine that you should choose between a fair or a free state”

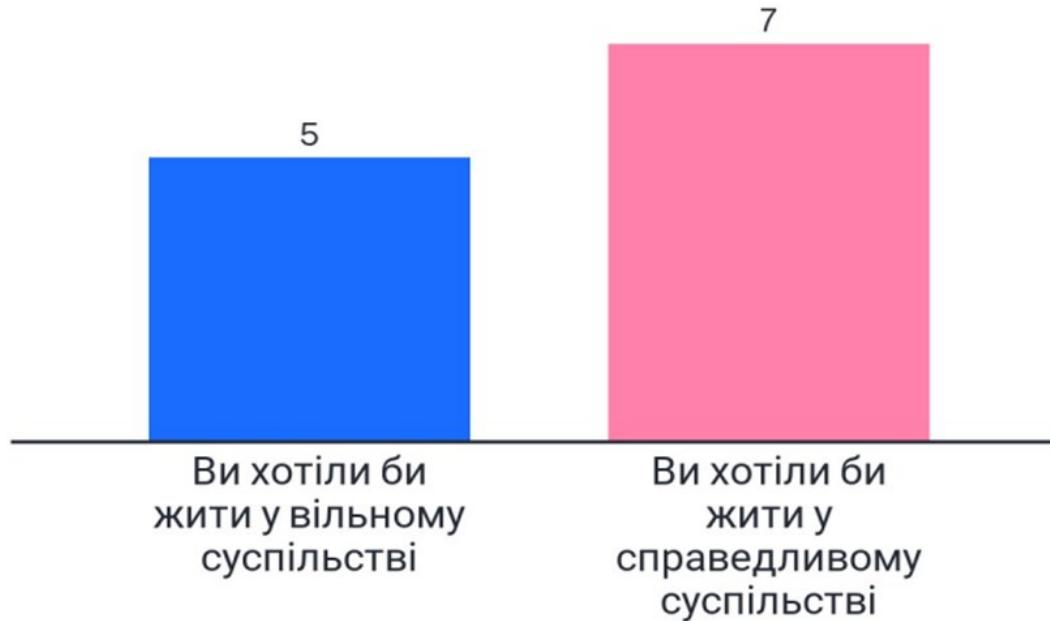
Recommended digital instrument:

Mentimeter (voting for the scenarios)

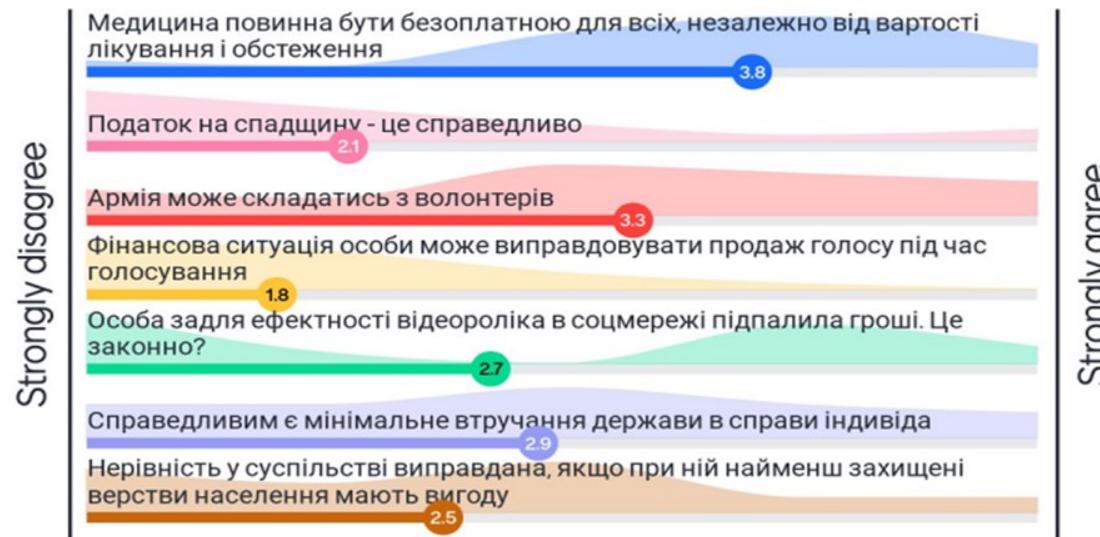
Ви - геніальний трансплантолог, усі операції вдалі. Сьогодні у Вас 5 пацієнтів, яким потрібні різні органи. Родич 1 з них підходить усім як донор.



Ви хотіли би жити у свободному суспільстві чи справедливому?



Визначте власну позицію щодо наступних тверджень



Conclusions

- The opinion-question tools, modelling and simulation applications promote active and interactive involvement of the students during the case studies
- The digital instruments make it possible to shift the moral-choice studies from analysis to design of students' own thought experiments

Further considerations and research questions

- *What are the best digital solutions for moral dilemmas simulation?*

(For instance, *Moral Closure Argument*, *Agency Dilemma*, *Future Studies moral dilemmas*, etc.)

- *What are the evaluation criteria of the moral thought experiments consistency ?*

(Some general criteria for thought experiments can be found in Swartwood, J. (2017). Fanciful Examples. *Metaphilosophy*. doi: 10.1111/meta.12234)