

A COGNITIVE ACCOUNT OF DROP-IN-THE-BUCKET THINKING
IN POLICY PREFERENCE AND MORAL JUDGMENT

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Abstract

Consider choosing between a program that saves 60 of 240 lives at risk and one that saves 50 of 100. The first option maximizes absolute number saved; the second, proportion saved. Such decisions are often influenced by proportional reasoning, an effect called proportion dominance (PD). Results support the hypothesis that (a) decision makers form mental representations which vary in the degree to which resources at risk are construed as groups versus individuals and (b) construal of resources as groups promotes PD-consistent preferences and moral judgments. Construal was manipulated by animated displays in which resources at risk moved either independently (promoting individual construal) or jointly (promoting group construal).