Morality and Psychological Distance: A Construal Level Theory Perspective

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People often think in terms of moral principles, values, and ideologies. For example, a woman might characterize herself as someone who values loyalty, social power, or environmental issues. Another person might think of donating money to the poor in terms of promoting social justice or fighting inequality. Moral principles and values often guide people's actions, judgments and predictions. Once a moral rule is invoked, an action is likely to be judged positively when it follows a moral rule and negatively when it violates such a rule.

Clearly, however, moral principles and values are not always invoked, and they often fail to guide people's choices and judgments. Individuals often fail to see the relevance of values to a particular situation and hence act in ways that reflect situational constraints, local pressures, self interest, and other considerations that have nothing to do with moral value systems. In this chapter, we propose one answer to the question of when values and moral principles play a central role in people's judgments and plans. We explore the possibility that values and moral principles are more prominent in judgments and predictions regarding psychologically more distant events. This perspective is based on construal level theory

(CLT; Liberman & Trope, 2008; Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Trope & Liberman, in press), according to which the construal of psychologically more distant situations highlights more abstract, high-level features. Because values and moral rules tend to be abstract and general, people are more likely to use them in construing, judging, and planning with respect to psychologically more distant situations.

In what follows, we present the basic assumptions of CLT and explain how they apply to values and moral principles. We then discuss research examining how psychological distance affects (1) judgments of moral and immoral acts, (2) value-based plans, and (3) value-based persuasion. We also examine novel predictions of CLT with respect to the place of values and principles in people's lives.

Construal Level Theory

Construal level theory (CLT; Liberman et al., 2007; Liberman & Trope, 2008; Trope & Liberman, in press) rests on the notion, shared by many social psychological and cognitive theories, that any object can be mentally represented in different ways (e.g., Ross & Nisbett, 1991). CLT further distinguishes between high-level and low-level construals. Lower-level construals are concrete, contextualized representations that include subordinate and incidental features of events. Higher-level construals are abstract, schematic, and decontextualized representations that extract the gist from the available information. They emphasize superordinate, essential features of events and omit incidental features that may vary without significantly changing the meaning of events. Consider, for example, the behavior "taking notes in class." A low-level construal of that action might include details of the pen used for writing, the type of paper written on, and the speed of writing. A high-level construal of the same action, however, would omit these details and represent it as "summarizing the lecture" and even "being conscientious."

A central contention of CLT is that psychologically more distant objects are construed on a higher, more abstract level. An object is psychologically distant to the extent that it is remote from direct sensual experience in time (future or past) or in space, refers to experiences of other people (e.g., relatives, acquaintances, strangers), and is unlikely to occur. According to CLT, objects that are more distant on any dimension will be represented more abstractly because higher-level construals capture the features of objects that remain relatively invariant with increasing distance, and thus maintain consistency and enable prediction across distance. Well in advance, the person in our example might have intended to take notes in class, but she might not know which pen she would use. Similarly, high-level features tend to change less than low-level features across social distance: Many people take notes, but some use laptop computers or pencils rather than pens.

The effect of psychological distance on construal level has been demonstrated in many studies, with all four dimensions of psychological distance (for recent reviews see Liberman et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, in press). For example, Liberman and Trope (1998) used an adapted version of Vallacher and Wegner's (1989) Level of Personal Agency questionnaire (Liberman & Trope, 1998, Study 1, Part 2). The questionnaire lists 19 activities (e.g., "locking a door"), each followed by two restatements, one corresponding to the why (high–level) aspects of the activity (e.g., "securing the house") and the other corresponding to the how (low–level) aspects of the activity (e.g., 'putting a key in the lock"). As predicted, participants chose more high–level, why restatements when the activities were described as occurring in the distant future than when the same activities were described as occurring in the near future. Similar results emerged when spatial distance was manipulated (Fujita, Henderson, Eng, Trope, & Liberman, 2006) and when probability (Wakslak, Trope, Liberman, & Alony, 2006) or social distance (Liviatan, Trope, & Liberman, 2008; Stephan, Liberman, & Trope, 2010) was manipulated. Other aspects of construal level include using

broader, more abstract categories (Rosch & Lloyd, 1978) and using larger chunks to segment ongoing events (Newtson, 1976). Studies conducted within the CLT framework have shown that psychological distance affects these aspects of construal level (Liberman, Sagristano, & Trope, 2002; Wakslak et al., 2006).

CLT further proposes that evaluations and judgments reflect mental construal, such that psychological distancing increases the impact of abstract, superodinate aspects of the situation and reduces the impact of secondary, contextual aspects. As a result, psychological distance moves the evaluation of an event closer to the value reflected in its high-level construal than to the value reflected in its low-level construal. Liberman and Trope (1998) reasoned that desirability judgments involve the value of the action's end-state and therefore reflect a high-level construal of a decision situation, whereas feasibility concerns involve the means used to reach the end-state and therefore reflect a low-level construal of a situation. As predicted, they found that desirability issues receive greater weight over feasibility issues as psychological distance increased. For example, as temporal distance from an activity (e.g., attending a guest lecture) increased, the attractiveness of the activity depended more on its desirability (e.g., how interesting the lecture was) and less on its feasibility (e.g., how convenient the timing of the lecture was). Similar results emerged with probability as a psychological distance dimension (Todorov, Goren & Trope, 2007), with social distance (Liviatan et al., 2008), and with spatial distance (Henderson, Fujita, Trope, & Liberman, 2006). These findings suggest that psychological distance increases the attractiveness of alternatives that are desirable but difficult to obtain, but decreases the attractiveness of alternatives that are less desirable but easy to obtain.

Other research has demonstrated effects of psychological distance on predictions and plans. For example, Nussbaum, Trope, and Liberman (2003, Study 2) conceptualized personal dispositions as high-level construals and situational constrains as low-level construals and

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demonstrated that people expect others to express their personal dispositions and act consistently across different situations in the distant future more than in the near future. In the study, participants imagined an acquaintance's behavior in four different situations (e.g., a birthday party, waiting in line at the supermarket) in either the near future or the distant future and rated the extent to which the acquaintance would display 15 traits (e.g., behave in a friendly vs. an unfriendly manner) representative of the Big Five personality dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and intellect). Cross-situational consistency was assessed by computing, for each of the 15 traits, the variance in each predicted behavior across the four situations and the correlations among the predicted behaviors in the four situations. As predicted, participants expected others to behave more consistently across distant-future situations than across near-future situations. This finding was replicated with ratings of participants' own behavior in different situations: Participants anticipated exhibiting more consistent traits in the distant future than in the near future (Wakslak, Nussbaum, Liberman, & Trope, 2008, Study 5).

With this background established, we can consider how CLT may apply to moral judgments and value-based plans and decisions. We first examine various definitions of values and suggest that values, by their very definition, typically involve high-level construals. Based on that notion, we examine research on how psychological distance affects the tendency to construe situations in terms of values and to make judgments and decisions based on values. Finally, we consider how thinking in terms of values may affect one's psychological horizons (i.e., may affect one's perception of psychological distance) and whether values may in some cases, involve low-level construals.

Moral Principles and Values as High-Level Constructs

Personal values (e.g., social equality, respect for tradition, security) are commonly viewed as abstract, superordinate cognitive constructs that provide continuity and meaning

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under changing environmental circumstances and serve as trans-situational goals that guide action (Feather, 1995; Maio, Hahn, Frost, & Cheung, 2009; Rohan, 2000; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Tetlock, 1986; Verplanken & Holland, 2002). For example, valuing security implies diverse actions such as striving for safety and protection at home, being careful while driving, and caring about national security. Values concern what is important to people in their lives and as such they are central parts of each person's self-definition and identity (Kristiansen & Hotte, 1996; Rokeach, 1973).

Moreover, according to a rule-based (deontological) perspective on moral reasoning, global moral principles underlie moral decisions (Lammers & Stapel, 2009; Tanner, Medin, & Lliev, 2008). An act is judged to be right or wrong on the basis of the degree to which it complies with existing moral principles, laws, norms, and rules (e.g., the incest taboo, laws against stealing) irrespective of specific and changing circumstances.

We propose that because of their superordinate and broadly applicable nature, values are high-level constructs. Based on CLT, we predict that values and moral principles will be more likely to be activated when a person considers more psychologically distant situations. This prediction was examined by Eyal, Liberman, and Trope (2008, Study 1). Participants imagined situations involving moral transgressions (using scenarios adapted from Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993) taking place either in the near future or in the distant future. One situation involved a woman who finds an old national flag and cuts it up to use as rags to clean her house; a second situation involved a family whose pet dog was hit by a car, after which they decided to cook it and eat it; and a third situation involved two siblings who engaged in sexual intercourse with no chance of reproduction (see Haidt, 2001). For each scenario (e.g., national flag), participants chose between two restatements of each action. One restatement referred to an abstract moral principle (high-level construal; e.g., desecrating a national symbol) and the other restatement referred to the means of carrying out the action

(low-level construal; e.g., cutting a flag to created rags). We found that distant-future transgressions were identified in moral terms more often than near-future transgressions.

These findings suggest that people are more likely to think of a temporally distant action, rather than one in the near term, as having moral implications. CLT predicts similar results for other forms of psychological distance: Situations should be more readily construed in terms of moral principles when they occurred further back in the past, when they apply to more socially or spatially distant individuals or groups, and when they are less likely actually to occur. When the same actions are proximal, they are more likely to be construed in terms that are devoid of moral implications. For example, accepting minority students with lower grades into one's university will be seen as "endorsing affirmative action" when it is unlikely to be implemented, but it will be seen in more concrete terms (e.g., as "making acceptance rules more complicated") when it becomes more likely. In the next section we discuss the implications of this tendency for judging the moral wrongness or rightness of near and distant acts.

Judgments of Moral and Immoral Acts

Most people would agree that it is wrong to make love with a sibling, eat the family's pet, or clean the house with one's national flag. Recent research on moral judgment has shown that even when information about the context indicates that such actions are harmless (e.g., the siblings used contraceptives, the family's pet was dead, the flag was old and worn out and had been used as a rag in private), people still feel that the actions are wrong (Haidt, 2001). It appears that people hold general moral rules and intuitions that, when violated, evoke a harsh moral judgment (Haidt, 2001; Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2008; Sunstein, 2005).

Indeed, research on morality suggests that people often base their judgments on simple, intuitive moral rules (e.g., it is wrong to lie) and tend to ignore moderating contextual

information (Haidt, 2001; Sunstein, 2005). These moral heuristics represent generalizations from a range of problems for which they are well-suited (see Baron, 1994). These generalizations, however, are often taken out of context and treated as universal principles that apply to situations to which they are not appropriate (e.g., when lying might save a human life). According to Haidt (2001), the application of moral rules is immediate and spontaneous, and only if a person subsequently engages in reflective reasoning are mitigating contextual factors taken into account.

In a similar vein, research on personal values has demonstrated that certain values, such as honor, love, justice, and life (labeled sacred values by Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000) or protected values (e.g., Baron & Spranca, 1997), are considered inviolate. That is, individuals tend to protect these values from trade-offs, no matter how small the sacrifice or how large the benefit might be. This is because thinking in terms of protected values involves an overgeneralization of the no-tradeoff principle (e.g., never trade life for money), which does not allow a person to think about specific situations that violate the rule (e.g., risking your life crossing a busy street to pick up a money bill that is lying on the street). However, as Baron and Leshner (2000) have argued, when people do think about concrete situations they may become less rigid in implementing protected values. Thus, people may compromise protected values (e.g., genetically engineered wheat is bad) when the probability or amount of harm is small relative to the probability or magnitude of benefit (see also Tetlock, 2005).

We propose, based on CLT, an important moderator of the choice between focusing on values versus focusing on mitigating circumstances. We propose, specifically, that the reliance on values and general moral rules and the relative neglect of context-specific considerations should increase with psychological distance. We therefore predict that more

distant misdeeds will seem more immoral, and more distant good deeds will seem more moral.

A series of studies tested this prediction (Eyal et al., 2008). For example, in one of the studies, participants read vignettes adapted from Haidt et al. (1993) describing moral transgressions (e.g., two siblings who engaged in sexual intercourse) against widely accepted moral rules (high-level values, such as the incest taboo). The vignettes also included situational details that rendered the transgressions harmless (low-level information; e.g., the siblings used contraceptives, they had sex just once, they kept it a secret). Participants were instructed to imagine that the transgressions would occur tomorrow (the near-future condition) or next year (the distant-future condition) and judged the extent of its wrongness. We found that moral transgressions were judged more severely when imagined in the distant future compared to the near future. The same pattern occurred with social distance (Eyal et al., 2008, Study 3), which was manipulated by asking participants to focus either on the feelings and thoughts they experienced while reading about the events (low social distance) or to think about another person they knew, such as a colleague, a friend, or a neighbor, and focus on the feelings and thoughts that this person would experience while reading about the events (high social distance). Notice that the social distance manipulation did not involve judging one's own versus another person's actions, but only one's imagined perspective. Notably, this manipulation does not support interpreting the results in terms of moral hypocrisy, according to which people judge their own moral transgressions less harshly than another person's transgressions because they wish to appear better than others. As predicted, moral transgressions were judged more harshly when imagined from a third person perspective (high social distance) compared to one's own perspective (low social distance).

Another study (Eyal et al., 2008, Study 4) examined temporal distance effects on judgments of moral acts. Participants read vignettes that described virtuous acts related to

widely accepted moral principles (high-level information; e.g., a couple adopting a disabled child) as well as low-level, situational details that rendered the acts less noble (e.g., the government offering large adoption payments). It was found that these behaviors were judged to be more virtuous when they were described as happening in the distant future rather than the near future.

Temporal distance from moral transgressions was also found to affect people's emotional responses. Agerstrom and Bjorklund (2009, Studies 1 and 2) asked Swedish participants to imagine situations that involved a threat to human welfare taking place in the near future (today) or in the distant future (in 30 years). For example, one scenario, set in Darfur, Africa, described a woman who was raped and beaten by the Janjaweed militia. Each scenario was followed by a description of a prosocial action that, if taken, could improve the situation (e.g., donate money). Participants rated how wrong it would be for another Swedish citizen not to take the proposed prosocial action given that they had the means to do so. They also rated how angry they would feel if the target person failed to take the prosocial action. It was found that distant-future moral failures were judged more harshly and invoked more anger than near-future moral failures.

In another study, Agerstrom and Bjorklund (2009) examined whether the greater reliance on moral principles in judgments of distant-future compared to near-future transgressions would generalize to individuals' self-perceptions. Participants rated the likelihood of engaging in prosocial actions in reaction to other people's moral transgressions. For example, participants indicated how much money they were willing to donate to help improve the situation in Darfur. As predicted, participants were more likely to express prosocial behavioral intentions when imagining the act occurring in the more distant future.

Taken together, these findings suggest that moral rules are more likely to guide people's judgments of distant rather than proximal behaviors. We think this is the case

because moral principles, being general and uncontextualized, involve high-level construals. It would be interesting to examine the implications of this reasoning for the legal system. For example, do judges evaluate transgressions perpetrated by members of remote social groups in more moral terms than transgressions perpetrated by members of proximal social groups? Do local courts tend to be more sensitive to mitigating circumstances than general (e.g., federal) courts? Future research should address these questions.

Values-Based Behavioral Plans

People often try to live up to their values. For instance, an individual who values preserving the environment may be quite receptive to the idea of cleaning up a highway or donating money to restore the Everglades wilderness in Florida. Indeed, the value literature suggests that people are very likely to use their values as behavioral guides (e.g., Feather, 1995; Maio & Olson, 1998; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992; Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Yet the associations reported in the literature between values and behaviors, and between values and behavioral intentions, have varied greatly in magnitude. Whereas some research finds high correlations between values and intentional behaviors (e.g., Bardi & Schwartz, 2003), other research has found values to be poor predictors of behavior and intentions (e.g., Kristiansen & Hotte, 1996). These findings parallel the large body of research showing that, like values, people's attitudes and personality traits sometimes fail to predict behavior.

The value literature has identified several factors that affect the correspondence between values and behavior, such as the valence of actions and their possible outcomes (Feather, 1995), level of moral reasoning (Kristiansen & Hotte, 1996), centrality to the self (Verplanken & Holland, 2002), and the level at which the predicted action is construed (Maio et al., 2009; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987)

Based on CLT, we propose that because of their high-level nature, values are more likely to be activated when considering more psychologically distant situations. For example,

getting a medical check-up in the relatively distant future is more likely to be represented as an opportunity to improve one's health, whereas arranging for a medical check-up in the immediate future is more likely to be represented in terms of the discomfort it involves or the time it takes. Thus, the value that individuals attach to health is more likely to guide their decision to sign up for a medical check-up in the distant rather than in the near future. The same should hold for any value, not only those that are socially desirable or that involve an immediate sacrifice. For example, individuals' hedonic values are more likely to be expressed in the leisure activities they plan for a distant- more than a near-future weekend. In general, we expect values to predict intentions better for distant than for immediate behaviors.

This prediction is consistent with Ajzen and Fishbein's (1977) compatibility principle, which states that attitudes predict behavior to the extent that the two are at comparable levels of specificity. Fishbein and Ajzen (1974) proposed that behaviors could be made more comparable to general attitudes by presenting behaviors more abstractly. Consistent with this notion, their research has shown that general attitudes better predict behavioral measures that match the attitude in level of abstraction. For example, an attitude toward religion predicts an aggregate measure of attending church better than it predicts attending service on a particular day. Eliminating low-level incidental features and retaining central, essential features of the behavior, both of which are achieved by aggregating across multiple instances of the behavior, make it possible to predict behavior from general attitudes.

An important difference between Ajzen and Fishbein's (1977) compatibility principle and CLT should be noted, however. The compatibility principle assumes that the objective properties of the behavior determine its level of specificity – general behaviors are objectively different from specific behaviors. In contrast, CLT proposes that the same behavior may be construed abstractly or concretely, which in turn determines whether the intention to engage in that behavior will be predicted by one's general attitudes and values or not.

Evidence for CLT's view of the value-behavior relation has recently been obtained by Eyal, Sagristano, Trope, Liberman, and Chaiken (2009). One study used Schwartz's (1992) value questionnaire to assess the importance participants assigned to each of the ten values identified by Schwartz (power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security), and then asked participants to imagine 30 behaviors, with three behaviors corresponding to each of the ten values (e.g., "rest as much as I can" corresponded with hedonism, "use environmentally friendly products" corresponded with universalism, "examine the ideas behind rules and regulations before obeying them" corresponded with self-direction; see Bardi & Schwartz, 2003). Participants indicated the likelihood of performing each behavior either in the near future or in the distant future. Eyal et al. (2009) correlated the rated importance of each value and the mean likelihood of performing the behaviors corresponding to that value. As expected, these correlations were higher when the behaviors were planned for the distant rather than the near future, suggesting that people's values are better reflected in their intentions for the more distant future.

Another study by Eyal et al. (2009, Study 3) examined the determinants of people's behavioral intentions for psychologically near situations. It was predicted that behavioral intentions for the near future would be influenced by low-level aspects of the event, such as feasibility aspects, rather than by a person's values. Participants first completed a paid experiment, in which they also reported the importance they assign to different values as guiding principles in their lives (Schwartz, 1992). They were then asked to volunteer for another experiment, which offered neither payment nor course credit and was to take place in either the near or the distant future. Participants read that the experiment was to take place early in the morning, an inconvenient time for most students (low feasibility condition) or in the afternoon, a convenient time for most students (high feasibility condition). It was found

that whereas benevolence values better predicted the number of hours participants volunteered for a distant-future experiment compared to a near future experiment, feasibility concerns better predicted volunteering for a near-future experiment than to a distant future experiment.

Recent research by Ledgerwood, Trope, and Chaiken (in press) examined how high-level ideological considerations versus low-level incidental social influence predicted near- versus distant-future voting intentions. The researchers used an anticipated interaction paradigm, in which participants expected to discuss a proposed social policy with another person (Chen, Shechter, & Chaiken, 1996). For example, in one study, participants read about a policy that would increase the deportation of illegal immigrants starting next week (near future) or next year (distant future), and learned that their discussion partner was either in favor of or against deporting illegal immigrants. They then reported how likely they were to vote in favor of the policy. It was found that participants' voting intentions were guided by their ideological values to a greater extent when the policy was to be implemented in the distant (vs. near) future. However, voting intentions reflected the discussion partner's attitude (low-level consideration) to a greater extent when the policy was set to be implemented in the near (vs. distant) future.

The findings reviewed here suggest that adopting a distal versus a proximal perspective changes the way people make behavioral plans. Values, a core feature of people's self-concept, guides people's plans for psychologically distant situations. However, as people get psychologically closer to the situation, their values and principles are only weak determinants of their intentions. Instead, people's immediate plans are increasingly influenced by incidental aspects of the situation. A person who values adventures and risk-taking may constantly plan activities that express this value (e.g., bungee jump) in the future, but rarely actually engage in those activities, due to incidental constraints. This implies that people with different and even opposing values may differ in the behaviors they plan for the distant future

and in how they construe the distal situation much more than in the behaviors they actually engage in and in their views of proximal events.

It would be interesting to determine whether temporal distance effects on the use of values as guides for behavioral intentions generalize to other distance dimensions. For example, we would predict that a person's cherished values and principles would be more readily applied when giving advice to others than when making personal decisions. Individuals may reason that whereas they, personally, would be willing to compromise their values in specific situations (e.g., choose the lowest price option over the environmentally friendly option), others would not. Personal values may also guide decisions about unlikely situations more than decisions about likely situations. For example, people who score high on measures of prosocial values may be more willing to donate to charity a share of the money they might win in a lottery when the chances of winning are relatively small.

Persuasiveness of Value-Based Messages

Building on the notion that values and principles are high-level constructs, Fujita, Eyal, Trope, Liberman, and Chaiken (2007) reasoned that a message including values would be more persuasive when it concerns more distant future issues. To test this idea, participants imagined finding a sale on the Internet for DVD players either that week (near future condition) or in three months (distant future condition). They then viewed a number of arguments endorsing the purchase of a particular DVD player. Six of these arguments were the same in both conditions (e.g., high-quality digital sound system, two-year warranty, special student discounts,). Participants in the high-level appeal condition were presented with a seventh argument that stressed an additional positive value-based feature (the DVD player is made of environmentally-friendly materials), whereas participants in the control condition were presented with a seventh argument that stressed an additional value-neutral feature (the manual is easy to use). As expected, in the distant future condition, but not in the near future

condition, evaluations were more positive when the message included a value-related argument than when it consisted only of value-neutral arguments. Thus, persuasive arguments appealing to idealistic values appear to be more persuasive for temporally distant as opposed to near attitude objects.

These results suggest that consumer evaluations may be based upon values and ideals when they are made from a distant perspective. However, when the same evaluations are made from a proximal perspective, values may be less influential. When applied to other psychological distances, the same notion could give rise to a number of interesting predictions. For example, we would predict that messages that invoke values would be more influential for products from distant locations (e.g., foreign countries) than for local products, for other people more than for oneself, and for members of distant social groups more than for members of one's in-group.

The Effect of Values on Perception of Distance

According to CLT, the relation between psychological distance and level of construal is bi-directional – not only does distance affect level of construal but level of construal affects distance. This is because construing an object at a higher conceptual level connects it to other objects that span wider ranges of time, space, social perspectives, and hypothetical situations, which brings to mind more distal times, places, people, and alternatives. In that sense, high-level construals widen a person's psychological horizon. For example, "being conscientious" relative to "taking notes in class" would bring to mind experiences that span greater ranges of time and space, pertain to more diverse individuals, and apply to as-yet unexperienced, merely hypothetical events. Research conducted in the framework of CLT supported this prediction. For example, Liberman, Macrae, Trope, and Sherman (2007) found that thinking about an activity in-high level "why" terms rather than low-level "how" terms led participants to think of the activity as taking place at a more distant point in time (see also Macrae,

Liberman, Trope, & Sherman, 2009). Smith, Wigboldus, and Dijksterhuis (2008) extended this finding to social distance. They found that thinking about an activity in "why" terms rather than "how" terms led participants to experience greater social power. Social power, according to CLT, is related to social distance because more powerful people typically feel more remote from others (Smith & Trope, 2006).

An interesting prediction is that thinking in terms of values and ideals will expand one's psychological horizons. For example, does thinking of a decision situation in terms of values rather than in terms of concrete situational constraints make people consider more far-reaching consequences of the decision? Does thinking in terms of values makes a person experience more power? Do people perceive others who are thinking in terms of values as more socially powerful? These predictions await empirical tests.

Do All Values Involve High-Level Construals?

Although values, in general, tend to involve a higher level of construal than specific situational circumstances, values also may differ in level of construal, with some values being higher-level than others. Of particular interest is the CLT notion that central features are higher in level than secondary features, because representing an object more abstractly involves retaining central features and omitting secondary features (see Liberman et al., 2007, for a discussion of the relation between abstraction and centrality). Possibly, then, central values could be conceptualized as higher-level constructs than less central values.

In many situations, different values apply to the same behavioral choice (Feather, 1995; Tetlock, 1986). For example, deciding whether to help a fellow student or work on one's own assignment may pit altruism and achievement values against one another. Past research has shown that individuals resolve conflicts between values in favor of the value that is deemed more central to the behavior. For example, Tetlock (1986) found that the greater

the centrality participants assigned to personal prosperity relative to social equality, the more they opposed higher taxes to assist the poor.

If, as proposed by CLT, central values constitute a higher-level construal of situations than more secondary values, then central values should guide choices when considering psychologically distant situations. As one gets closer to a situation, choices should become increasingly more likely to be based on secondary, subordinate values. Initial support for this idea comes from research by Eyal, Liberman, Sagristano, and Trope (2008). They found that when a situation is related to different values, the individual's central values are more likely to guide choice from a psychologically distant than from a proximal perspective, as compared with individuals' secondary values. For example, individuals for whom altruism was subordinate in importance to achievement were more likely to refuse to help a fellow student in the distant future than in the near future, whereas individuals for whom achievement was subordinate to altruism were more likely to help a fellow student in the distant future than in the near future. These findings show that secondary values, which are nonetheless part of an individual's self-identity, may mask the influence of central values on near future intentions.

Centrality of values may be defined not only within an individual but also within a situation. For example, when medically treating a person from a rival group in a war, the competition is central and mercy is secondary, whereas in a hospital, the reverse is true. An interesting prediction that follows from CLT is that the secondary value will guide behavioral intentions in the near future more than in the distant future. Thus, in a war, benevolence will come into play in near-future plans more than in distant-future plans, leading people to be more merciful than would otherwise be expected. In his poem "After the Battle," Victor Hugo tells about his father ("that hero with the sweetest smile"), an officer in the war against Spain, who encounters a Spaniard soldier asking for something to drink. Although on the battlefield,

and although the Spaniard tries to kill him, the officer orders: "All the same, give him something to drink."

Conclusion

Construal level theory proposes that psychological distance changes people's moral judgments and value-laden plans by changing the way they mentally represent situations in terms of moral rules and values. The research reviewed here shows that moral principles and values guide judgments and plans for psychologically distant situations more than for psychologically near situations. These results reveal an intriguing phenomenon: Highly cherished concerns in one's self-concept may influence judgments and plans regarding distant situations (e.g., distant future, distant others, distant places, unlikely events) but then fail to be enacted when the time and place of implementation approaches. A true believer in altruism, for example, would plan to perform altruistic behaviors in the distant future, or would think that other people should perform altruistic behaviors, but unless pre-committed, the person him– or herself may fail to act on these beliefs when the actual opportunity presents itself.

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