

Differential Neural Responses During Moral and Economic Value-Based Decision-Making

Yu-Hsuan Kao¹, Chi-Chuan Chen¹, Yu-Shiang Su^{1,2}, Chien-Te Wu^{1,3,4,5}, Joshua Oon Soo Goh^{1,5,6,7}



¹ Graduate Institute of Brain and Mind Sciences, National Taiwan University. ² Taiwan International Graduate Program in Interdisciplinary Neuroscience, National Taiwan University and Academia Sinica. ³ School of Occupational Therapy, College of Medicine, National Taiwan University. ⁴ Department of Psychiatry, National Taiwan University Hospital, National Taiwan University. ⁵ Neurobiology and Cognitive Science Center, National Taiwan University. ⁶ Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University. ⁷ Center for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Robotics, National Taiwan University.

Introduction

- Evidence shows that valuation of moral situations involve similar neural processes as economic situations across different probabilities and magnitudes.¹
- However, a person's utilitarian or non-utilitarian decision preferences should involve differential neural circuits when arbitrating between monetary and human life forfeiture.
- We investigated these neurobehavioral processes underlying value-based decisions regarding variable amounts of money or human life tradeoffs. We hypothesized that decisions involving monetary and human life forfeiture would reflect utilitarian and non-utilitarian strategies involving different brain regional engagement.

Methods

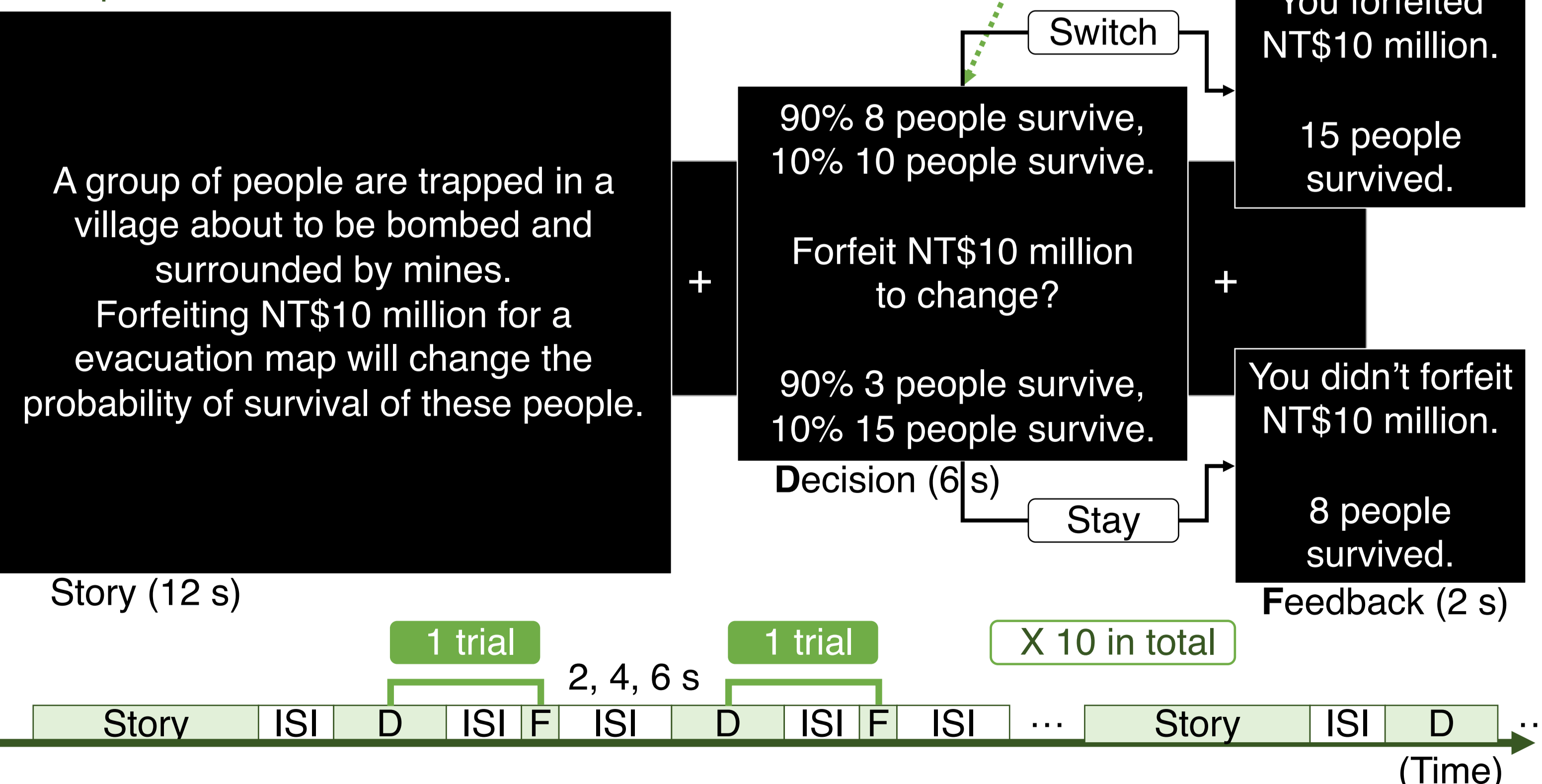
- Parameters of functional MRI:** 8 echo planner imaging runs, 169 volumes per run. TR = 2 s, TE = 24 ms, 38 axial slices, 3.4 x 3.4 x 4mm resolution, 64 x 64 matrix.
- Participants:** 36 healthy young adults, mean age (SD) = 23.5 (3.1) years, 21 females, 15 males.

- Moral Choice Task:** Participants first read a story indicating a hypothetical scenario, and then saw an initial life/cash expected value (EV) and an alternative EV described by varying probabilities and amounts under the scenario. Participants either accepted the initial EV (Stay) or forfeited life/cash in exchange for the alternative EV (Switch).

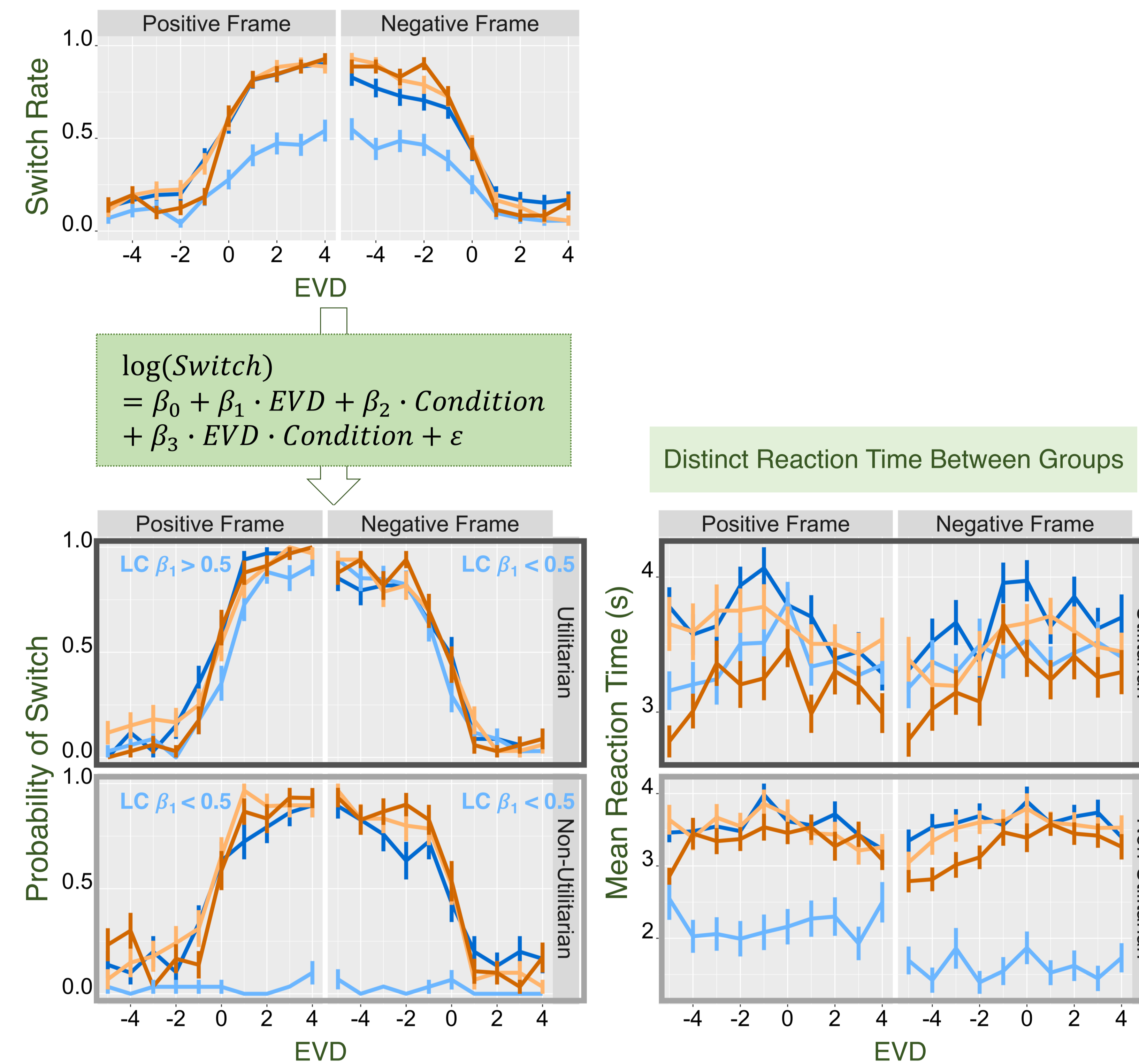
| | | Price | |
|---------|------|----------------|----------------|
| | | Life | Cash |
| Outcome | Life | Life-Life (LL) | Cash-Life (CL) |
| | Cash | Life-Cash (LC) | Cash-Cash (CC) |

Initial EV = 0.9 x 8 + 0.1 x 10
Alter EV = 0.9 x 3 + 0.1 x 15
EVD = initial EV - alter EV

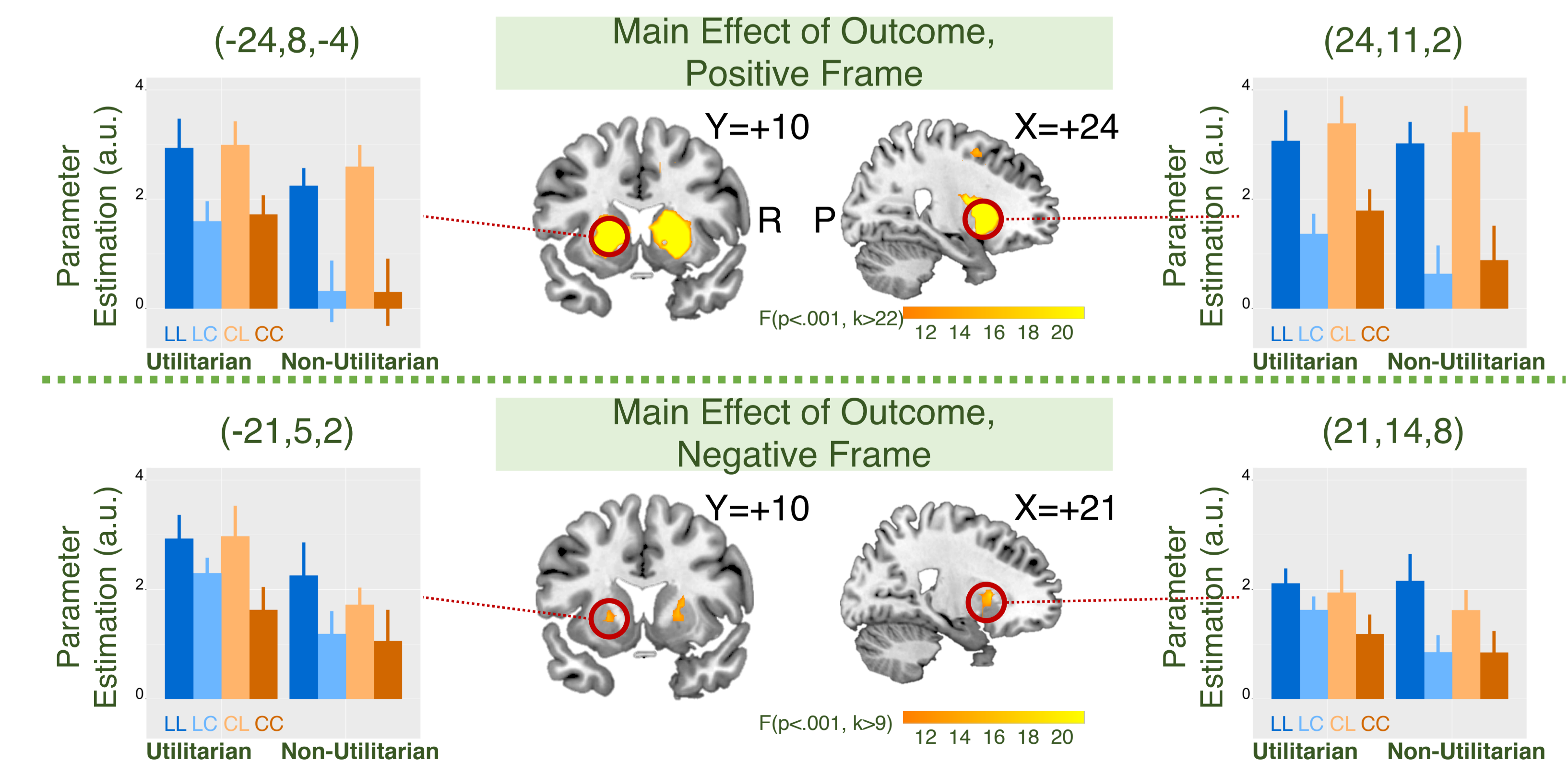
Example of CL condition:



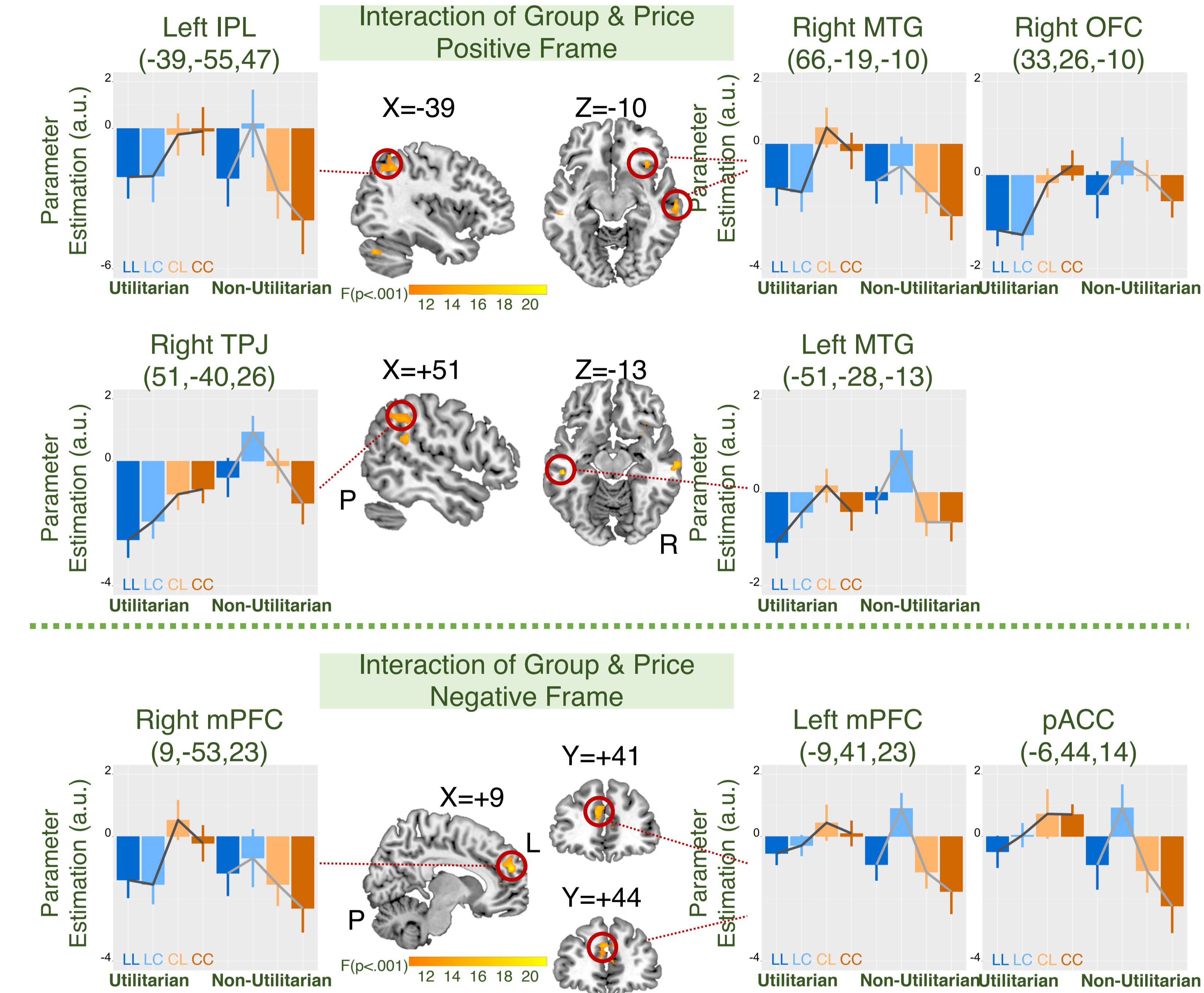
Distinct Utilitarian and Non-Utilitarian Behaviors



Common Striatal Responses across Conditions



Whole Brain Differential Response Patterns



Conclusions

- Neurobehavioral responses to arbitrate life and monetary value reflect **utilitarian** and **non-utilitarian** decision strategies.
- Utilitarian decisions monotonically track expected value for life and monetary outcomes whereas non-utilitarian decisions maintain status quo for life-for-cash options regardless of expected value.
- Cortical processing distinguished these two strategies in bilateral temporoparietal, middle temporal, and right orbitofrontal areas in positive framed trials, and medial prefrontal areas in negative framed trials.
- Striatal responses dissociated life from monetary outcomes regardless of forfeit price.
- Differential engagement of the above neural loci might influence the degree of utilitarian use of stimuli vs. endogenous conceptual ideals.

Reference

¹ Shenhav, A., & Greene, J. D. (2010). Moral judgments recruit domain-general valuation mechanisms to integrate representations of probability and magnitude. *Neuron*, 67(4), 667-677.

Correspondence

Yu-Hsuan Kao, ireneyhkao@gmail.com
Chien-Te Wu, chientevincewu@gmail.com
Joshua Goh, joshgoh@gmail.com
Brain and Mind Laboratory
15 F, No. 1, Sec. 1, Ren-Ai Road, Taipei City, 10051, Taiwan.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by Taiwan Ministry Science and Technology (MOST) grants 105-2410-H-002-055-MY3 and 107-2410-H-002-124-MY3. We also thank Taiwan Mind & Brain Imaging Center (TMBIC) and National Chengchi University (UCCU) for consultation and instrumental availability. TMBIC is supported by MOST, Taiwan (R.O.C).