

POLS/ECON 409 · *Solutions to 21st Century Problems (1)*

1. What are Frase's Four Futures, and what conditions might lead to each? On what dimensions do these futures vary? Pay close attention to Frase's 2×2 table. Do you have any questions or critiques about the variables or types in the table?
2. Can we learn from Frase's futures even if they are "ideal types" and not literal states of the world? Are some of Frase's futures too "extreme" to consider? Too "utopian"?
3. How does Piketty's theory fit into Frase's *Four Futures*? Can you link g and s to Frase's two dimensions of scarcity–abundance and equality–hierarchy? What insights can you draw from each author with respect to the other?
4. Frase writes from a certain point of view (the socialist left) and with certain technological assumptions about the future (a maximalist version of technological possibility involving labor-free production of all goods). Does his book have anything to contribute to reader who disagree with Frase's political values or technological assumptions? What would a liberal or conservative version of this book look like? (Implicitly, this question asks what "liberalism" or "conservatives" mean in a future with labor-free production.) Could you sketch a techno-skeptical version?
5. Frase says he seeks to re-insert politics into debates about technological utopia (or dystopia). Does he succeed? What political forces or individual motivations does he neglect? How would correcting these omissions change the implications of the work?
6. What role do political institutions play in Frase's speculation? What additional roles could they play? For example, what might central banks do in a Frasian future?
7. Does Frase overlook or understate the international dimension in his work? What if the costs of various transitions – to automation and/or global climate change – are concentrated in the developing world? Where are the refugee crises in Frase's *Four Futures*?

8. Can all of Frase's futures be reached "in one country" or do some of them require international cooperation? Can some combinations of futures coexist?
9. Frase says social esteem may replace money in one possible future. Instead of competing for cash, people might compete for respect, fame, or social sanction for their identity or values. Can scarcity in such "markets" ever be eliminated? Would material abundance really end class conflict? Political conflict? Could post-scarcity conflicts over non-material goods affect the material world?
10. To what extent does the path to the future depend on the the political alignment of the working class? Can a working class fractured by race, nationality, and nostalgia unite around a utopian plan for broad redistribution? Can parties incorporate people who define themselves by work into an economy that might not need so many workers? Or can technology alone produce utopia without broad-based political support?
11. Populism has riven asunder party systems across much of the democratic world – a short list includes the UK, France, Italy, Hungary, and even arguably the US. Pairing you own knowledge of politics with Frase's economic speculation, what sort of party cleavages are likely to emerge to debate the future of the economy?
12. Which of Frase's future(s) seems most likely to you? Least likely? Who or what chooses among these futures? What does Frase say about the stability of these futures?

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17 MAY 2017