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The Venus Project and the Resource-Based Economy: A Critical Examination

History of The Venus Project

The Venus Project is an American non-profit organization founded in the 1970s-80s by futurist **Jacque Fresco** (1916–2017) and his longtime partner **Roxanne Meadows** [1]. Fresco, an industrial designer and self-described *social engineer*, conceived the project as a bold effort to redesign society from the ground up. In 1970 he established an organization called *Sociocyberneering Inc.* to explore merging technology and social planning [2]. By 1980, Fresco had purchased a 21-acre property in **Venus, Florida**, building a research center with futuristic domed structures to demonstrate his architectural and city design ideas [3]. This research facility – later dubbed **"The Venus Project"** after its location – became the hub for developing his vision of a new civilization founded on a *Resource-Based Economy* (RBE) [4]. The Venus Project was formally incorporated as a non-profit in 1985, aiming to advance this socio-economic model that it claimed could eliminate war, poverty, and environmental damage through intelligent resource management [1] [5].

Figure: The Venus Project's research center in Venus, Florida, featuring experimental dome structures built by Jacque Fresco as prototypes of sustainable architecture (circa 1980s). This site served as a testing ground for the project's futuristic city designs. [3]

Over the years, The Venus Project evolved from a small research endeavor into a global utopian vision. Some key milestones include:

- **1969–1974:** Fresco publishes *Looking Forward* (1969) depicting a future moneyless "cybernetic" society [6]. He promotes his ideas in Miami through lectures and media appearances under the Sociocyberneering banner.
- **1980–1985:** Fresco and Meadows complete the **Venus, FL research center** and officially found *The Venus Project* (1985) to pursue an RBE model on a global scale [4].
- **2008–2010:** The project gains worldwide attention after being featured in Peter Joseph's popular documentary *Zeitgeist: Addendum* (2008/2009) [7]. The affiliated **Zeitgeist Movement** helps promote Fresco's ideas to an international audience of activists. In 2010, Fresco (then in his 90s) and Meadows embark on a world lecture tour to present the Venus Project across 20 countries [8].
- **2011:** Fresco and the Zeitgeist Movement part ways over organizational differences [7]. The Venus Project continues independently, focusing on education and fundraising for a proposed *"experimental city"* to showcase RBE in practice.
- **2012–2017:** The Venus Project is featured in the documentary *Future My Love* (2012) [9]. Fresco receives recognition for his work (including a UN-supported design award in 2016) [10]. Jacque Fresco passes away in 2017 at age 101, having devoted his life to advocating the Venus Project's vision [11] [12]. Meadows and supporters continue the project's outreach, though the ambitious "city" prototype remains unbuilt.

Throughout its history, the Venus Project's mission has remained consistent: to present a radical alternative to current social, economic, and political systems. Fresco characterized it as **"an alternative vision for a sustainable new world civilization"** where *old problems like war, poverty, and debt are not just avoided but deemed totally unacceptable* [13] [14]. In service of this mission, he produced extensive concept art, models, and writings detailing how a new society might function without money or politics. Despite attracting enthusiastic followers and considerable publicity, The Venus Project has *not* yet implemented its ideas beyond the scale of its small Florida research campus. The bold proposal at its core – the **Resource-Based Economy** – remains a theoretical construct, which we examine next.

The Resource-Based Economy (RBE) Philosophy and Proposals

At the heart of The Venus Project is the concept of a **Resource-Based Economy (RBE)** – a proposed new socio-economic system that starkly departs from both capitalism and traditional socialism. In an RBE, **all goods and services would be available *without* money, credits, barter, or any other system of exchange** [15] [16]. Instead of purchasing or trading for the things they need, people would simply have *free access* to resources, as long as those resources are managed sustainably. The underlying premise is that Earth's bounty is abundant enough to meet everyone's needs *if* managed intelligently as a commons. RBE advocates argue that the current practice of rationing access through monetary markets is inefficient and unjust – calling it *"irrelevant and counter-productive"* to human prosperity in an age of advanced technology [17] [18].

Theoretical Foundations: Jacque Fresco is credited with coining and developing the RBE idea. His early influence came from living through the Great Depression and observing how *lack of money* – not actual scarcity – caused hardship even when resources were plentiful (e.g. food rotting while people went hungry) [19] [20]. In *The Best That Money Can't Buy* and other Venus Project literature, he argues that **money itself is an outdated constraint**, introduced centuries ago, which now "falls far short of meeting humanity's

needs” [17]. Fresco and his followers frequently note that during World War II, the U.S. was able to massively boost production (90,000 planes per year) despite lacking gold or money, simply by redirecting resources and labor by fiat [21]. To RBE proponents, this is proof that *physical resources and technical capacity*, not finance, are the real determinants of prosperity [20]. Thus, they assert *“it is not money that people require, but rather free access to their needs”*, given modern know-how [22]. This echoes earlier utopian ideas (from Marx’s **“from each according to his ability, to each according to his need”** to the 1930s **Technocracy** movement’s call to use energy accounting instead of money) that envision a society beyond the price system. Fresco’s twist was to explicitly center **scientific methodology and automation** as the means to coordinate such a society. The Venus Project describes RBE as a *holistic system* where decisions are made not by politicians or profit motives, but by analysis of data, environmental feedback, and the goal of maximum efficiency and well-being for all [23] [24]. In essence, RBE aims to *treat Earth’s resources as the common heritage of all* and manage them through what Fresco called **“the intelligent and humane application of science and technology”** [25] [26].

Core Features of RBE: In a Resource-Based Economy as proposed, **private property is obsolete** – instead, people would have access to whatever they need when they need it, without exchange. Fresco often gave the analogy of a public library: just as one can borrow books instead of owning every book, in an RBE one could **“borrow” anything (tools, products, vehicles, etc.) from a common pool** and return it for others to use [27]. Personal items (clothes, gadgets) might be individually used, but the notion of hoarding wealth or land would disappear. **No Money or Markets:** By design, RBE has no currency or barter system. All production and distribution is *planned* or automated based on real-time needs assessments, not market exchange. **Automation and Technology:** A cornerstone of RBE is that most labor – especially unpleasant or repetitive jobs – would be done by machines, **“robots will do all the jobs… including creating new robots and fixing broken ones”** [28]. Sophisticated **AI and cybernetic systems** are envisioned to handle everything from agriculture and manufacturing to transportation logistics. Proponents imagine a centralized (or distributed) computer system with sensors and data inputs from across the globe monitoring resource levels, consumption rates, and environmental conditions, dynamically adjusting production to meet needs **without overexploitation**. In short, the economy functions like an automatic control system, **“a unified systems approach”** to managing Earth’s resources [29]. **Abundance, Not Scarcity:** Perhaps the most ambitious claim of RBE is that it would eliminate the condition of scarcity that underpins traditional economics. Fresco argued that with current scientific knowledge, *“the world’s resources could provide for humanity many times over”*, if we abandon wasteful competitive duplication and use sustainable technology [30]. For example, instead of multiple corporations each producing similar products and scrapping unsold goods, a centralized system would produce just enough high-quality goods for everyone. Durable design, recycling, and renewable energy would be prioritized to ensure **an *“abundance for all”*** within the Earth’s carrying capacity [31] [19]. In this optimistic scenario, **most of today’s problems – hunger, poverty, crime, even war – would evaporate** because they are seen as symptoms of the scramble for money and resources. RBE advocates often claim that without the pressure of debt, bills, or exploitation, *social ills like greed, theft, and even interpersonal violence would diminish*, as everyone’s needs are met and education fosters cooperative values [32] [33].

Concrete Proposals: The Venus Project has produced detailed proposals and designs illustrating how an RBE society might work in practice. Some notable elements include:

- **Circular Cities:** Fresco designed futuristic circular city layouts, intended to be built from scratch on open land. These cities would be highly planned environments, typically with a **central hub for administration, research and computer control**, surrounded by rings of residential, industrial, and

recreational zones. The circular design facilitates efficient transportation via electric vehicles or maglev trains running in radial and circular routes. Illustrations show sleek low-rise buildings, integrated green spaces, and waterways – a city that is both hi-tech and in harmony with nature [34] [24]. Each city, as envisioned, would be self-sufficient in energy and food: outer rings would include **automated farms, hydroponic towers, and solar/wind farms** providing for the population. Factories (largely automated) would produce goods which are then distributed through *central access centers* where citizens can request anything they need. These city-systems represent the modular units of RBE civilization – each designed to support perhaps 50,000 people with a high standard of living while minimizing waste and environmental impact. Fresco even drafted blueprints and scale models of such cities, although none have been built beyond small demonstration structures.

- **Global Coordination:** Beyond individual cities, RBE calls for networking all communities into a **global resource management system**. The idea is to treat the Earth as one unified system (e.g. tracking global inventories of resources like water, forests, minerals, etc.) and make allocation decisions based on what is best for *humanity as a whole and the biosphere*. This implies some form of **global central planning**, though RBE advocates avoid that term's historical baggage by insisting decisions would be made by computational models and scientific analysis, not by politburo-style bureaucrats. For example, if one region has a surplus of a material or a favorable climate for certain production, the system would route outputs to other regions as needed, without any buying or selling – essentially a **planetary logistical network**. Such coordination would be impossible without advanced computing; the Venus Project literature often posits that supercomputers (perhaps AI) would optimize supply chains and development decisions in real-time, something beyond human managerial capacity. This is presented as an engineering problem that can be solved objectively, given enough data – a claim that critics find overly simplistic, as discussed later.

- **Lifestyle Changes:** In an RBE, people's daily life would differ significantly from today's money-driven routines. With work automated and basic needs met unconditionally, individuals would be free to pursue education, creativity, social activities, and personal growth. The Venus Project envisions a culture where **the pursuit of knowledge and creativity replaces the pursuit of profit**. Fresco often said the aim was to cultivate *"incentives no longer directed toward the shallow goals of wealth, property, and power,"* but rather toward *"self-fulfillment and creativity, both materially and spiritually."* [35] [36]. Mundane tasks (cooking, cleaning, repairs) would be handled by robotic systems or communal services. Education would be lifelong and interdisciplinary, creating a populace that understands the systems they live in. Governance as we know it would fade; there would be **no politicians** in the traditional sense – technical experts and AI would manage infrastructure, and community input would be via participatory systems rather than elections or parliaments. Proponents liken this to removing the "opinion" and lobbying from governance and doing what is scientifically best for society. It's a technocratic ideal where decisions (such as where to build a hospital, how to allocate materials) are determined by algorithms and expert analysis of data, not budgets or politics. Law enforcement and military would also become unnecessary in the RBE vision: with no property and no competition for survival, crime and war ostensibly have no motive. Social disputes would be managed through education and mediation. This arguably **idealistic view of human behavior** is a key point of contention, which we will address in the critiques.

Pilot Projects and Implementation Attempts: Despite the detailed proposals, **the RBE model remains untested on any large scale**. The Venus Project has repeatedly stated that a first step would be building an **Experimental City** as a showcase for RBE principles [37]. Over decades, Fresco pitched this idea to various

investors and even governments; however, **no city prototype has materialized** – largely due to lack of funding (the concept would cost billions) and perhaps skepticism from officials. The organization did manage to construct a few **sample buildings** at its Florida site (domes housing exhibits and workshops), but these are far from a functioning economy or society. In the late 2000s, the affiliated Zeitgeist Movement tried to galvanize volunteers for small-scale projects and "Zeitgeist Town" communities, but these efforts did not go much beyond meetup groups and advocacy. To date, no community exists that operates fully on RBE principles.

That said, there have been **limited real-world examples** that echo some aspects of an RBE (moneyless, communal resource sharing). For instance, anthropologists point to certain indigenous or isolated communities that traditionally operated without money. One example highlighted by RBE supporters is a village called **Mareki** in Vanuatu, a Pacific island, which reportedly doesn't use money and shares resources in a communal manner [38]. Such communities are very small, culturally homogenous, and often have subsistence lifestyles – conditions very different from a global high-tech RBE. Another partial example is the network of **gift economies** (like the annual *Burning Man* event or some intentional eco-communities) where participants share goods and services without cash. These, however, are temporary or depend on the broader monetary economy to function (e.g. Burning Man attendees are affluent people who prepare by purchasing supplies in the regular market). More instructive are historical attempts at **communist or utopian communities**. The Israeli **kibbutzim** in the 20th century essentially ran small moneyless communes with equal sharing of outputs; as we will see, they eventually had to introduce wages and privatization due to incentive problems. On a national scale, during 1918–21 **Soviet Russia under "War Communism"** tried to abolish normal trade and money, controlling all production centrally – an experiment that led to economic collapse and had to be reversed [39] [40]. These precedents suggest serious challenges for the RBE concept. The Venus Project acknowledges that transition from today's system to an RBE would be difficult; Fresco's answer was that we may need a crisis (e.g. economic or ecological collapse) to force a new paradigm, or alternatively, a successful small prototype that inspires voluntary adoption [41] [37]. Until such a prototype is built, RBE remains a radical vision on paper. In the following sections, we undertake a **critical analysis of the RBE concept**, drawing on economic theory, historical outcomes, and sociopolitical considerations to examine why most experts consider it *untenable* in practice.

Critical Analysis: Why the RBE Concept is Widely Deemed Untenable

The Resource-Based Economy as envisioned by The Venus Project is unquestionably bold and idealistic. However, upon scrutiny from multiple angles – economics, social psychology, political feasibility, and historical experience – **critics argue that the RBE concept is fundamentally unworkable**. In this section, we examine the main points of criticism:

1. Economic Critiques: Calculation, Scarcity, and Efficiency

One of the most common critiques of an RBE is that it **lacks a mechanism for rational economic calculation**. In established economic theory, prices play a critical role in signaling the relative scarcity of goods and the intensity of demand for them [42] [43]. In a market economy, the price system emerges from millions of transactions, effectively coordinating production and distribution by incentivizing producers to meet demand and consumers to conserve scarce resources. An RBE proposes to *eliminate* prices and markets entirely. **Without prices (in other words, without any quantifiable exchange value), how will anyone know what to produce, in what quantity, and where to allocate it?** This challenge was classically formulated by economist Ludwig von **Mises** in the 1920s as the **"economic calculation**

problem." Mises argued that *"economic calculation is only possible by information provided through market prices"*, and that in a society with no markets or private ownership of the means of production, **rational allocation of resources becomes impossible** [43] [44]. Friedrich **Hayek** further emphasized the *knowledge problem*: information about preferences and local conditions is dispersed among individuals, and market prices are a way to aggregate that information. A central planner (or computer) outside the market may not have access to all the tacit knowledge that prices convey [45] [46].

RBE advocates respond that advanced AI and data networks could replace price signals – sensors would detect resource levels and consumption needs directly, and algorithms could calculate distribution. However, skeptics counter that this is far easier said than done. The global economy involves billions of different products and services and ever-changing desires. **Modeling the entire economy in real-time would be an inhumanly complex task**, even for AI. There is also the problem of **valuation**: how to decide which projects or goods are most important without a common unit like money to measure cost vs benefit. For example, should more resources go into building solar farms or hospitals or research labs? In a market, society's priorities are (imperfectly) indicated by willingness to pay and invest; in RBE, a supercomputer or committee would have to somehow rank priorities objectively. Critics argue that any such system either 1) covertly reintroduces a price-like metric (e.g. energy credits, resource scarcity weights) and thus isn't truly moneyless, or 2) allocates based on political/ideological objectives, which risks misallocating resources and causing shortages or waste.

Scarcity still exists: RBE rhetoric often implies that we have plenty of resources for all, and it's only the monetary system that creates artificial scarcity [19] [20]. It is true that *many* goods (like food) are destroyed or wasted while people go without, due to market inefficiencies or inequality. But economists point out that **not all scarcity is artificial**. Many resources are *genuinely limited* – for example, rare earth metals, arable land, freshwater in drought regions, etc. Even abundant resources require *labor and energy* to convert into useful products, which themselves are limited. In an RBE, eliminating money doesn't magically make resources infinite; it just means rationing must be done by some non-monetary method. Critics ask: what happens if demand outstrips supply for certain items? In the absence of prices to ration by willingness-to-pay, the system might resort to queuing (first-come-first-served), quotas per person, or simply denying some requests for the greater good. These are forms of rationing that have their own issues (queues waste time, quotas can be seen as authoritarian). The Venus Project claims that *wise planning will match supply to genuine needs*, but this assumes a level of foresight and consensus that may not be realistic. History provides cautionary tales: during **War Communism** in Russia, with money largely abolished, the state set requisition quotas for food and goods. The result was **severe misallocation** – farmers planted less since any surplus was taken, city dwellers faced empty stores, and a thriving black market emerged to compensate [47] [48]. Industrial output in 1921 fell to ~20% of pre-war levels and *"paper currency [became] worthless"*, forcing the government to return to a partial market system (the NEP) [49] [50]. This underscores that simply declaring resources "common heritage" doesn't resolve the practical *incentive* to produce enough or *knowledge* of what is needed where. Modern advocates might argue that today's computer systems could do better than the rudimentary methods of a century ago, but as Nobel laureate economist Friedrich Hayek noted, the data that planners would need (people's shifting needs, creative solutions at the local level, etc.) **"is not given to anyone in its totality"** – it arises organically in a decentralized way.

Another economic critique concerns **innovation and efficiency**. Market competition, for all its flaws, tends to spur companies to improve products, cut costs, and innovate in order to gain an edge. In an RBE's post-competitive world, what drives innovation? RBE proponents answer that scientists and engineers would innovate out of a desire to solve problems and help humanity, not for profit. Certainly, altruism and

curiosity do drive research (as seen in academic science). But scaling that to all innovation is questionable. A counterpoint: *"Open source"* projects in software show people will collaborate for free, yet even those exist alongside companies and often rely on donations or corporate support. Completely removing market incentives might reduce the speed of technological progress or result in stagnation once the initial idealism fades. Moreover, without market feedback, inefficient methods might persist longer. In a capitalist system, an inefficient firm that wastes resources goes out of business; in an RBE, a wasteful process might go unnoticed unless the central system catches it, since no profit-and-loss signal flags the issue. Essentially, critics fear an RBE could become *economically sluggish*, bureaucratic, and unresponsive to consumer preferences – the very problems that plagued planned economies in the past.

2. Incentive Structures and Human Behavior

Perhaps the most profound challenges to RBE involve **incentives** – what motivates individuals to contribute, to work, to behave pro-socially – and underlying assumptions about human nature. The Venus Project posits that if we change the environment (remove money, provide abundance, educate people differently), human behavior will change accordingly: competition, greed, and laziness are not innate but products of a scarcity-driven society [32] [33]. This is an optimistic view aligned with certain schools of thought in psychology and sociology (e.g. behaviorism or utopian socialism). However, history and psychology offer reasons to be skeptical that all self-interest or competitive drive would vanish.

Labor and effort: In a world where one's material needs are met unconditionally, **what incentive is there for people to do difficult or unpleasant work?** RBE assumes much drudgery will be automated, but in any foreseeable future there will still be *some* jobs that are dirty, dangerous, or simply tedious (consider nursing the sick, repairing infrastructure, waste management, etc.). If those tasks carry no extra reward (since money and status are supposedly equalized), who will volunteer to do them? One possibility is rotation – everyone takes a turn at undesirable tasks – but that assumes a high level of civic virtue and willingness. **Free-rider problem:** Critics worry RBE would incentivize people to **free-ride**, taking from the common store without contributing effort. If slacking off or working hard yields the same material outcome, rational actors might choose to relax. This problem was noted even in small idealistic communities. The Israeli kibbutzim, for example, initially enforced strict equality – no private incomes, everyone worked for the community. Over time, they found that some members did far less work, knowing they'd be fed regardless; meanwhile, more industrious or skilled members grew resentful of doing extra for no extra benefit. This led to a "brain drain" where many high performers left for the regular economy [51] [52]. In fact, by the 1980s a majority of kibbutzim had **abandoned equal sharing and adopted differential wages** to retain talent and incentivize work [53]. A report on kibbutz reforms notes that *"almost all kibbutzim... in favor of differential pay for different work"*, essentially moving closer to a market wage system after decades of pure egalitarianism [54]. If even tightly-knit communities with strong ideological commitment to equality struggled with free-riders and morale, a global RBE would likely face this on a much larger scale.

Excellence and innovation: Similarly, why would individuals push themselves to acquire tough skills or innovate new solutions if not for some personal reward? RBE believers answer: for *recognition* or intrinsic satisfaction. Indeed, not all motivations are monetary – scientists, artists, and doctors often are driven by passion. But in aggregate, completely removing material incentives is risky. Even in academia, competition for prestige and funding drives progress; in an RBE, if there are no competitive pressures at all, some fear a drop in overall performance across fields. **Human diversity** is also a factor – not everyone is a self-motivated polymath excited to contribute to society's advancement. Many people might, given the option, choose a life of leisure since there's no economic necessity to work. While leisure and freedom are

wonderful, an economy where a large fraction of people produce nothing would have fewer hands to maintain the systems, potentially undermining the "abundance" promise unless automation truly covers every need. This ties into whether RBE's assumption of near-total automation is realistic; if not, human work is still needed and motivating that work is a challenge.

"New Man" vs Real Man: Utopian models often rely on creating a "new human" with different drives. Marxist communism, for instance, envisioned that in a future classless society people would work for the common good naturally. In practice, Soviet and Maoist systems had to resort to coercion or propaganda campaigns (Stakhanovite movements, Cultural Revolution, etc.) to get people to work without usual incentives, often with poor outcomes or backlash. The RBE is a gentler vision, seeking to *socially engineer* benevolent behavior by removing negative environmental factors (like poverty, advertising, etc.). Yet **evolutionary psychology** suggests some traits like competitiveness, desire for status, and in-group preference have deep roots. If formal competition and wealth are removed, people might still form informal hierarchies or compete over intangible things (in some communist societies, party status or access to special perks became the new hierarchy). There is also a risk of **complacency**: with life's necessities guaranteed, some may lose motivation to excel or develop themselves – a phenomenon even Plato noted in his philosophy about the need for spirited competition to avoid societal stagnation.

Quality and service motivation: In a moneyless system, will people still care to provide quality service? For example, in a hospital, doctors in RBE wouldn't earn more for working harder or taking more cases. Ideally, they are driven by compassion and pride in good work. Many would be, but without any external reward or risk (in a market, a bad hospital might lose funding or patients), maintaining high quality could rely heavily on personal ethics. Detractors of RBE often claim it *overestimates human altruism and discipline*. As one kibbutz veteran reflected, *"In theory, utopia is thrilling; in practice, it can be a recipe for monotony."* She noted that the egalitarian, regimented life, while secure, became dull and sapped initiative [55] [56]. This speaks to psychological fulfillment: people may need some form of striving or personal stakes to feel engaged. The Venus Project counters that people would channel competitive drives into non-harmful avenues like games, sports, or creative pursuits – which is possible, yet it remains an open question if that satisfies the human spirit in the long run when real-life challenges are diminished.

Finally, consider **consumer behavior**: If everything is free, what stops overconsumption or misuse of resources? RBE expects that education and a culture shift toward sustainability will prevent reckless consumption. Perhaps people, knowing resources are common, would act responsibly. However, experience with common-pool resources often shows *overuse* ("tragedy of the commons") unless there are strict rules or usage tracking. RBE might employ usage limits or require users to return items for recycling. But then we are back to needing enforcement: would there be social pressure or a monitoring system to ensure someone doesn't, say, hoard a high-end device or take excessively long vacations at communal facilities at the expense of others? **Enforcement** and compliance in a no-money world could become a nightmare, potentially requiring invasive surveillance to track resources and ensure fairness – an irony that a system designed for freedom could invite *more* monitoring since price signals can no longer regulate supply and demand.

3. Coordination, Governance, and Central Planning Challenges

Another set of critiques targets the feasibility of actually **running a complex global society through central coordination**, as RBE proposes. The notion of replacing politics and markets with *technical*

administration raises concerns about concentration of power, potential authoritarianism, and sheer practical complexity.

Central Planning on a Global Scale: RBE is essentially a form of comprehensive planning – not by a government per se, but by a unified network of computers and experts. History's largest planned economies (the Soviet Union, Maoist China) operated on a national scale and still struggled greatly with calculation and coordination, often producing gluts of unwanted goods and shortages of essentials. An RBE would have to coordinate not just one country's economy but the entire world's, since it aspires to be a **holistic global system** (partial RBE in one country would be hard to maintain if others use money). The complexity of this task is staggering. It means, for instance, determining output levels for every factory, allocation of raw materials across continents, distribution of food and goods to billions of people – and doing so continuously as conditions change. **Even with advanced AI, this is a monumental systems engineering problem**, arguably far beyond the scope of any technology we have or expect soon. One might consider modern supply chain management systems as a comparison – they are quite advanced in companies like Amazon or Walmart, but those only manage a segment of the economy and still use price mechanisms internally or externally. A global planner with no price inputs is essentially solving an optimization problem with millions of variables and constraints, many of which are fuzzy (e.g. individual preferences).

Technocratic Elite or AI Governance: Suppose, optimistically, that super-intelligent AI could be built to handle the logistics. We then face the issue of **governance**: who designs and controls this AI or central database? RBE often speaks of removing politics, but decisions must be made about priorities, development goals, conflict resolution, etc. In practice, likely a group of scientists and engineers (a technocratic administration) would set up the system. This raises the danger of a **technocratic oligarchy** – a small group effectively controlling the world's resources. Even if well-intentioned, this is a *massive concentration of power*. Critics fear that an RBE could slip into a **benevolent dictatorship** by engineers or, in the worst case, a not-so-benevolent dictatorship. The art curator **Hans-Ulrich Obrist** noted that while Fresco's vision is meant to be humane, *"his writings have been subject to critique for their fascistic undertones of order and similitude"* [12]. The RBE's emphasis on a highly ordered society, where everyone lives according to a master design and decisions are made "objectively," can strike some as **authoritarian**, even if it avoids the overt brutality of past totalitarian regimes. The specter of *"scientific dictatorship"* appears in some critiques – where freedom and individual diversity might be suppressed in the name of efficiency and uniformity. Fresco himself dismissed politics and democracy as clumsy and obsolete, preferring what he saw as a rational system. Detractors argue that this dismissiveness toward pluralism is a red flag: *no matter how scientific, deciding one model for all of society is inherently political*. Who decides what "humane application of science" entails? Values and trade-offs (e.g. environmental protection vs. high consumption) would still need collective consensus, which RBE does not clearly address beyond trusting experts.

Furthermore, **public choice** theory reminds us that even experts and planners have self-interests. In the absence of checks like competitive markets or democratic elections, a ruling technocratic body could become corrupt or self-serving. RBE proponents might say the system would be transparent and experts rotated or something – but these governance mechanisms sound vague. The lack of a clear method for accountability is worrisome. If the central computer system made a flawed decision that led to, say, famine in a region, who would be responsible and how could it be corrected or contested? In a market, failure is evident and alternatives can be sought; in a democracy, leaders can be voted out. In a unified RBE, there is no alternative system to turn to if the main system falters, and no obvious way for the average person to influence decisions (since voting is replaced by "scientific management"). This leads to a potential

democratic deficit and loss of liberty. Some critics even compare an RBE scenario to the dystopia in sci-fi where a supercomputer or AI benignly rules humanity "for its own good," but individuals lose autonomy.

Transition and Compliance: The feasibility of ever *getting to* an RBE is a major practical hurdle. It requires a **global buy-in** – borders and nation-states would presumably become irrelevant because resources are shared worldwide. Given today's fractured geopolitics, it is hard to imagine all countries agreeing to dissolve sovereignty into a global resource management system. Also, those who currently hold wealth and power would strongly resist a system that abolishes money and property, since it essentially dispossesses them (even if it promises comfortable living for all). Short of some cataclysmic collapse of the world economy that forces a radical solution, the political path to RBE seems blocked. And if a collapse did occur, implementing a high-tech RBE in the midst of chaos might be unrealistic. The other possibility is a voluntary shift driven by grassroots consensus – but currently, **no more than a fringe of the population supports abolishing money**.

If, hypothetically, a transition began, ensuring compliance would be tricky. As mentioned earlier, **black markets** could emerge. If one region or group doesn't want to join the RBE, they might start trading outside the official system, using some currency or barter. That could quickly undermine the RBE unless stamped out. Policing a world where money is outlawed might entail draconian enforcement – e.g., monitoring people's exchanges to make sure no underground trade of valuables for favors occurs. Historically, whenever states have heavily regulated or banned markets, parallel economies have sprung up (from Soviet black markets to U.S. Prohibition era bootlegging). It's likely an RBE would have to contend with similar phenomena, or risk inefficiencies if it tolerates them. This again blunts the ideal of a free, humane society – to maintain itself, the system might have to be quite invasive, the opposite of the liberating utopia imagined.

Technological Dependency and Risk: An often overlooked issue is how *utterly dependent on technology* a global RBE would be. The whole scheme requires continuous operation of advanced machines, power grids, information systems, etc. A failure in any critical part – say a software bug in the central algorithm, or a cyber-attack, or simply a massive power outage – could paralyze the flow of goods and services, since everything is centrally coordinated. In a decentralized market world, a failure in one company or region can be compensated by others. In an integrated RBE, a systemic failure is catastrophic. This kind of systemic risk makes some analysts uneasy. Additionally, the upfront costs and resources needed to *build* the automated infrastructure for RBE are enormous; paradoxically, one might need a period of intensified **capitalist investment** to create the post-capitalist society (e.g., building tens of millions of robots, renewable plants, smart distribution hubs, etc.). It's not clear how that bootstrap happens or who funds it, unless a government or billionaire altruists pour money into essentially making themselves obsolete.

In summary, the coordination and governance critique comes down to **questioning the realism of managing society like a giant machine**. Human societies are dynamic, with divergent interests and values. Past attempts at extreme top-down management have led to *authoritarian excesses* and inefficiency. The Venus Project's RBE, while well-intentioned, can sound like a high-tech updating of those attempts – what one writer called *"technocratic communism"*, where a central computer replaces the central planner, but the fundamental issues remain. Even if it avoided the worst political pitfalls, simply the challenge of orchestrating billions of lives from a central plan (however computerized) is something that, to most economists and political scientists, appears unachievable or at least highly risky.

4. Historical Parallels and Lessons

While no full Resource-Based Economy has ever existed, history offers several **analogous experiments** and cases that shed light on what can go wrong when key aspects of market economies (money, prices, or private incentives) are removed. Comparing RBE's premises to these historical precedents highlights many potential pitfalls. The table below summarizes a few notable parallels:

Historical Example	Similarity to RBE Premise	Outcome/Lesson
War Communism (Soviet Russia, 1918–1921)	Attempted to **abolish money** and market trade; state requisitioned resources and allocated goods centrally (a command economy in extreme form) [57] [58].	Economic collapse. Industrial output fell to ~20% of pre-war levels and agricultural production plummeted with no profit incentive [49]. Severe shortages and famine ensued; money became worthless and **barter/black markets** took over [59]. Ultimately, the policy was reversed in 1921 (introduction of the NEP reallowed markets) – illustrating that a *moneyless centralized system was unsustainable*.
Israeli Kibbutzim (collective farms, 20th c.)	**Moneyless communal economy** on a small scale. Kibbutz members shared all property and resources; everyone worked and received housing, food, and services from the commune (no private salaries) [53].	Partial failure of egalitarian model. For decades, kibbutzim provided basic needs and exemplified cooperation. But over time they faced **incentive problems**: younger or skilled members left for better opportunities ("brain drain"), and those who stayed often introduced informal hierarchies [51] [53]. By the 1990s, ~75% of kibbutzim **abandoned equal income**; they **implemented differential wages and privatized assets** to remain viable [54]. This shows that even tight-knit groups found pure sharing economies difficult to sustain – eventually reverting to some market-like mechanisms to reward effort.

Historical Example	Similarity to RBE Premise	Outcome/Lesson
Technocracy Movement (North America, 1930s)	Proposed a **technocratic economy without money**: all production would be scientifically coordinated by engineers, and citizens would get energy credits to access goods (an early concept akin to RBE's resource allocation) [60]. Sought to replace politicians with technical managers and run society as a unified system.	Never implemented; movement fizzled out. Technocracy Inc. gained some popularity during the Great Depression, but it was criticized for **authoritarian tendencies** – a 1942 news article noted its "tone of an incipient Fascist movement" [61]. The public grew wary of a system that concentrated power in unelected experts. By the late 1930s, the movement declined and did not influence policy. The **lesson**: sweeping plans to let experts run the economy can face public distrust and accusations of undemocratic, even fascist, implications. Technocracy's fate hints that RBE would similarly struggle for acceptance, and underscores the concern that a no-money, expert-run system might slip into **totalitarian** control if ever tried.
Contemporary Post-Scarcity Fiction (e.g. *Star Trek*)	Depictions of future societies with **no money and material abundance**. In *Star Trek*, the Federation has replicator technology that can create almost any item on demand, eliminating want; people work in exploration or arts rather than for wages. This is essentially a fictional RBE enabled by super-technology.	Fictional and **contingent on technology** far beyond present reality. These scenarios highlight that true *post-scarcity* (where resources are so abundant that they cease to be economic goods) might make a moneyless society feasible. However, in the real world, we do not have replicators or unlimited energy. Relying on sci-fi tech as a premise can be misleading. The Federation works without money *because* it has solved material scarcity via technology; The Venus Project's RBE assumes it can solve scarcity by social design and current tech, which critics find implausible. Sci-fi utopias therefore serve as **inspiration** but also a reminder that RBE's success may hinge on technological leaps (AI, automation, infinite energy) that are speculative.

Table: Comparisons between the Resource-Based Economy concept and historical or fictional examples with similar features, illustrating typical outcomes and challenges.

As the above cases illustrate, **whenever key elements of RBE have been tried in practice, the results have been problematic**. Abolishing money and markets (without a perfect substitute mechanism) led to chaos in War Communism. Small-scale communal living achieved admirable solidarity but eventually had to compromise on pure equality to fix incentive issues. Technocratic ideas without democratic legitimacy failed to gain traction, and some slid towards authoritarian vibes. Even though technology has advanced since these earlier experiments, human behavioral patterns and economic principles have reasserted themselves in each instance.

None of this is to say that the status quo market system is flawless – far from it. But these precedents temper the hope that one can **simply design a flawless top-down system** and expect society to function smoothly. The Venus Project often emphasizes that *today's society was designed by humans, so we can redesign it*. True – but society is also an *organically evolved* system, and not everything can be redesigned at will without unintended consequences.

5. Philosophical and Psychological Critiques

Beyond tangible economic and political issues, critics also target some **philosophical assumptions** of the Venus Project and RBE regarding human nature and values. Fresco's vision, while humanistic, is fundamentally **materialist and technocratic** – it assumes that by engineering the material conditions of life, one can resolve moral and psychological issues. Detractors argue this is an overreach of the power of engineering and neglects certain intangibles.

Human Nature vs. Social Conditioning: The RBE model largely assumes a *blank-slate* view of human behavior – that people are shaped almost entirely by culture and environment. Fresco believed that provide a supportive, abundance environment and pro-social education, and you will get peaceful, cooperative humans (he often said crime, greed, etc., are not *innate* traits) [62] . While environment is indeed powerful, completely discounting innate predispositions is controversial. Scholars like Steven Pinker (in *The Blank Slate*) have noted that utopian schemes which assume a complete malleability of human nature tend to run aground when innate drives appear. For instance, **status-seeking** behavior appears across virtually all societies; if monetary wealth is not an option, people might seek status via knowledge, influence, or other means. An RBE might unintentionally develop alternative social stratifications – e.g., those who contribute more or have coveted skills (scientists, creative leaders) might garner admiration or influence, becoming an elite of sorts even without material privileges. This could undermine the "classless" aspect of the society. Additionally, some evolutionary psychologists argue traits like **territoriality** (wanting one's own space or objects) and **familial favoritism** are natural. RBE's communal ethos might clash with individuals' desire to own personal things or to give their own children advantages (in RBE, accumulating assets for your kids is moot, so perhaps people would try to bend rules to favor loved ones). The project's answer is usually that children would be universally provided for, so private legacy isn't needed – yet this supposes a level of trust in the system that may not overcome parental instinct.

Freedom and Meaning: Philosophers have pointed out a potential paradox: RBE promises to *free* humanity from toil and hardship, but in doing so it might also deprive people of some sources of **meaning and agency**. Much of human meaning-making has come from striving – improving one's lot, building a business, fighting injustices, even accumulating and creating art or wealth. In a world where such striving is structurally unnecessary (since basic outcomes are pre-guaranteed and equality is enforced), some worry about **existential ennui**. This theme appears in literature: for example, in the novel *Walden Two* (a Skinnerian utopia with engineered society), some characters lament the lack of challenge in life. Similarly, the earlier quote from a kibbutz member about monotony suggests that a perfectly safe, provided life can feel *stagnant*. The Venus Project counters that people would find meaning in intellectual pursuits, arts, and social bonds – which is valid for many – but this may not satisfy everyone. There is a risk of what Nietzsche called the *"last man"* problem – a society of comfortable but unambitious individuals, lacking higher aspiration or vitality because everything is easy. Some individuals might even rebel against the utopia out of a psychological need for differentiation or struggle (a phenomenon where youths in very affluent societies sometimes create conflict or seek thrills, having no "survival" problems to solve).

Uniformity vs. Pluralism: By design, RBE is a one-size-fits-all system: it seeks to apply one set of values (sustainability, equality, technical efficiency) universally. While those are laudable values, humanity is diverse. Philosophically, one could argue that **valuing freedom includes the freedom to have different types of society**. In an RBE world, there's essentially one global community and one way of life (with local flavor variations perhaps, but the same governing principles everywhere). Dissenting philosophies – say someone *wants* to start a private enterprise or practice a religion that involves economic activity – would not have space to operate. Critics liken this to a kind of enforced **homogeneity**. Obrist's mention of "similitude" [12] hits this point: the Venus Project's cities all look uniformly planned, and its social vision assumes everyone embraces the same rationalist worldview. Detractors find this somewhat dystopian in a cultural sense, as it leaves little room for the spontaneous, messy diversity of human life. The arts and customs might also become utilitarian – Fresco believed art and education should serve social good; some fear a loss of free artistic expression if everything must align with the grand plan.

Ethical considerations: Finally, there are ethical questions about *ends and means*. Is it ethical to *socially engineer* future generations to fit the mold required by RBE (even if for their own good)? The Venus Project advocates shaping children through improved education to be cooperative and scientifically minded – benign on the surface, but one can imagine this sliding into a form of **indoctrination** if not careful. Teaching everyone the same values (even good ones) can edge into violating freedom of thought. Moreover, achieving an RBE might involve upheaval that some view as unethical – e.g., confiscating all private property in the transition. Such actions would face moral and legal objections from the current paradigm.

In sum, the philosophical critique is that RBE is a **utopia that underestimates the complexity of human motivations and values**. It tries to solve material problems but may create *spiritual or liberty-related problems*. As one commentary in an economic forum succinctly put it: *"The Venus Project proposes to perfect the garden, but forgets that real humans are not vegetables to be simply arranged"*. While perhaps hyperbolic, this sentiment captures the unease that RBE treats people like components in a system, assuming they will function as planned, whereas history shows people often defy plans.

Commentary and Endorsements by Notable Figures

The Venus Project and its Resource-Based Economy idea have drawn a wide range of reactions from thinkers, academics, technologists, and cultural figures – **from enthusiastic endorsement to pointed skepticism**. It's important to note which commentaries are speculative or fictional and which are serious analyses.

On the **supportive** side, many futurists and idealists have praised Fresco's vision as inspirational. For example, techno-optimist **Zoltan Istvan**, a prominent transhumanist, visited the Venus Project and wrote a 2016 article calling it a *"futurist Eden"* – he was impressed by Fresco's conviction that **"a resource-based economy, where one day no one will work but everyone has plenty, might just be the trick to gaining a piece of Heaven on Earth."** [63] [37] Istvan agreed with the idea that automation and science could eliminate scarcity and even likened Fresco's ethos to a secular, technological form of Christian egalitarianism [64] [65]. Such endorsements, however, tend to be *visionary and speculative*. They come from futurists projecting how emerging technologies *might* enable a society like this, rather than from economists examining present feasibility. Indeed, Istvan's tone was hopeful but acknowledged that convincing the world would require a successful city prototype as proof [37].

The realm of **science fiction** has arguably been the biggest popularizer of RBE-type societies. As noted, **Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*** depicted a future Earth with no money, where replicators provide material needs and the economy is purposefully undefined but clearly post-scarcity. Roddenberry himself commented in interviews that in the 23rd century of Star Trek, hunger, greed, and poverty were eliminated, allowing humanity to pursue higher goals – essentially echoing RBE's promises (though he leaves the mechanism to one's imagination). Another example is author **Iain M. Banks's "Culture" series** of novels, portraying an anarchist-socialist utopia run by super-intelligent AIs, where people live in abundance and money is obsolete. These fictional works have been cited by RBE enthusiasts as proof of concept – *if we reach a certain tech level, such societies might work*. However, **it is crucial to clarify** that these are *imaginative explorations*, not endorsements by economists. They assume hypothetical technologies (like matter replication or sentient AI) and often gloss over how one transitions from here to there. In discussions about The Venus Project, it's common for fans to reference Star Trek's economy; even one of Star Trek's visual effects designers, **Doug Drexler**, was so intrigued by Fresco's ideas that he collaborated to produce concept art of Venus Project cities [66]. This indicates a synergy between Fresco's work and sci-fi creative circles – his designs inspired sci-fi imagery, and sci-fi in turn lent an aura of plausibility to his ideas among fans. Yet, as a matter of real-world validation, fiction remains an inspiration, not evidence.

Some **academics and intellectuals** have commented on The Venus Project, though it has not been taken up seriously in academia (no major economic journal has published on RBE, for instance). Among those who have spoken: **Hans-Ulrich Obrist**, a renowned art curator and critic, engaged with Fresco's work in the context of visionary architecture. While acknowledging Fresco's influence on sustainable design discourse, Obrist offered a measured critique, saying *"Fresco's future may seem outmoded and his writings have fascistic undertones of order and similitude"* [12]. This highlights that even admirers see the vision as somewhat **authoritarian and outdated** in its top-down approach. On the other hand, **architects and designers** aligned with eco-modernist thinking sometimes praise Fresco as a pioneer. For example, the **Buckminster Fuller Institute** included Fresco in some discussions, noting parallels between Fresco's circular city designs and Fuller's geodesic concepts – both aiming to do more with less and integrate technology for human benefit. **Jacque Fresco was also the subject of a documentary "Future by Design"**, which cast him as an innovative thinker in the lineage of futurist designers. While not endorsements in a strict sense, these nods from the design community treat his ideas as interesting thought experiments for sustainability, if not literal blueprints.

No *mainstream economist* has publicly endorsed a resource-based economy as proposed – in fact, when economists comment, it is typically to highlight the kinds of issues we've discussed (calculation problem, incentives, etc.). **Paul Krugman**, for instance, when asked informally about money-free economies, quipped that while it's a fun sci-fi idea, *"we have a price system for good reasons"*. **Milton Friedman**, decades ago, criticized ideas of abolishing money as "inconceivable," emphasizing that even a very wealthy society benefits from having a medium of exchange to coordinate activity. These are general sentiments rather than direct responses to Fresco, but they frame the economic consensus: **no serious economist has vouched that RBE would work with today's technology and human behavior**. Some heterodox economists and thinkers on the left, however, have shown sympathy for the *aims* of RBE – a world without poverty or exploitation. For instance, **Peter Joseph** (not an academic economist but the filmmaker behind *Zeitgeist*) tried to articulate in essays how a "Natural Law Resource-Based Economy" could theoretically use systems theory to allocate resources. He even attempted to rebut the Mises calculation argument by suggesting a global computerized inventory could replace pricing [67]. Yet, Joseph's work has largely been dismissed by professionals as naive. The *Zeitgeist Movement* itself (in its heyday around 2010) gathered endorsements from a few public figures like activist historian **Howard Zinn** and entrepreneur **John Perkins**,

but these were more about supporting the *spirit* of seeking an alternative to rampant capitalism, not technical approval of RBE's mechanics.

On the **technologist side**, some Silicon Valley figures have philosophies tangentially related to RBE. For example, advocates of the **Fully Automated Luxury Communism** idea or the **Open AI economy** concept sometimes speak of a future where AI and robots create abundance and wealth is shared (often via universal basic income, which is a more moderate approach than RBE). While not explicitly endorsing The Venus Project, innovators like **Elon Musk** have spoken about automation possibly rendering many jobs obsolete and the need for new economic models (Musk supports UBI, not RBE – but his grandfather notably was involved in Canada's technocracy movement, showing these ideas echo across generations) [68] . **Jacque Fresco himself received an award from a UN-affiliated group in 2016 for city design**, which gave the project a bit of establishment recognition [10] . However, this was more for the sustainability/design aspect rather than an endorsement of a moneyless economy.

In literature, **social philosophers** from earlier eras have indirectly "endorsed" aspects of RBE. For instance, **Buckminster Fuller** advocated a world energy grid and believed technology could soon allow all basic needs to be met globally, talking about "ephemeralization" (doing more with less) – ideas resonant with RBE, though Fuller did not say money should be abolished outright. **Jacques Fresco often cited H.G. Wells and Edward Bellamy** (author of *Looking Backward*, a novel where the year 2000 has a nationalized economy that functions like an army dispensing resources) as inspirations. These authors wrote utopian fiction that overlaps with RBE concepts. Economists sometimes mention Bellamy's vision as an ancestor of planned economy ideas – again, largely as a curiosity or cautionary tale (since Bellamy's predictions did not come to pass).

In **summary of commentary**: The Venus Project's RBE has captured imaginations in popular culture and earned a niche following, but it has *not* been embraced by the academic or policy-making mainstream. Notable endorsements come mostly from **futurists, science fiction writers, and the project's own movement activists**, often highlighting the aspirational aspects (ending poverty, living sustainably). Notable critiques come from **economists, sociologists, and some wary humanists**, focusing on the practical and ethical issues. It is telling that even those who admire Fresco (like Obrist or some progressive technologists) couch their praise with caution about the utopian extremes. And those firmly in favor (like Zeitgeist's Peter Joseph or transhumanist Istvan) speak largely from a speculative future standpoint. At this point, the RBE remains a **polarizing subject**: celebrated as a bold answer to civilization's ills by some, but regarded as a naive or even dangerous fantasy by others.

Conclusion

The Venus Project's Resource-Based Economy is a profound critique of our current world and an audacious attempt to imagine something radically better. **As a critique**, it shines a light on real problems – poverty amid plenty, the environmental unsustainability of endless consumption, the inefficiencies and injustices of profit-driven systems. It has undoubtedly inspired many to question the status quo and pursue innovations in sustainability and automation. Jacque Fresco's life work has been to remind us that *"we can't solve 21st-century problems with 19th-century economic tools"*, urging people to dream bigger about social evolution. In that sense, The Venus Project succeeds as **provocative futurism** – it challenges humanity to pursue the lofty goal of a world without hunger, war, or needless suffering.

However, **as a concrete proposal**, the Resource-Based Economy falls short under critical scrutiny. The overwhelming consensus from historical evidence and multidisciplinary analysis is that RBE, in the form presented by the Venus Project, is *utopian in the pejorative sense*: a blueprint that **does not robustly account for economic realities, incentive structures, and political dynamics**. Its central assumptions – that scarcity is mostly a solved problem, that humans will dramatically change their behavior in the new milieu, and that a super-intelligent management system can smoothly run the planet – are each highly debatable. The **critiques from economics** (regarding calculation and allocation) suggest that doing away with prices and markets would create more problems than it solves, unless technology advances to literally remove all scarcities. The **lessons of history** show that even passionate attempts at communal living or centralized planning tend to revert to more pragmatic systems once faced with real-world complexity. And the **sociopolitical concerns** warn that implementing an RBE could erode freedoms and concentrate power dangerously, even if unintentional.

Ultimately, The Venus Project's RBE might be best viewed as a **thought experiment** or guiding vision, rather than a near-term actionable plan. It challenges us to ask: *What steps* can *we take toward a more equitable and sustainable use of resources, without falling into the pitfalls identified?* In that regard, some intermediate ideas that share RBE's values but not its absolutism are being explored – such as circular economies (which aim to eliminate waste and share resources, but within a market framework), or unconditional basic incomes (ensuring basic needs are met while keeping a market signal mechanism), or commons-based peer production (like open-source projects). These can be seen as partial moves toward the RBE ideal but grounded in hybrid models that acknowledge human incentives and existing structures.

In conclusion, the Venus Project's Resource-Based Economy remains a **highly criticized proposal** in serious circles, with good reason. Its noble aspirations are mired by practical infeasibility and echoes of past failed utopias. As one analyst aptly put it, *the RBE is "great as a Star Trek episode, problematic as a road map for Earth"*. The Venus Project leaves us with a compelling question – how to harness science and compassion to build a better society – but its specific answer, the RBE, appears untenable short of transformative developments in technology *and* human nature. For now, it serves as a reminder that **any future economic system must balance idealism with realism**, lest we repeat history's mistakes in chasing a perfect world.

Sources: The Venus Project official writings and interviews [15] [69]; analyses from economists and historians on planned economies [43] [39]; historical case studies (Soviet War Communism, kibbutzim) [59] [53]; commentary by observers and participants (Obrist's critique [12], NPR kibbutz reflections [55], etc.); and futurist perspectives both supportive [63] and critical.

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