



# THE GREAT TRANSITION

From decline to a degrowth society

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# The Beginning: Unesco Conference Paris 2002

Degrowth originates from two streams of thought:

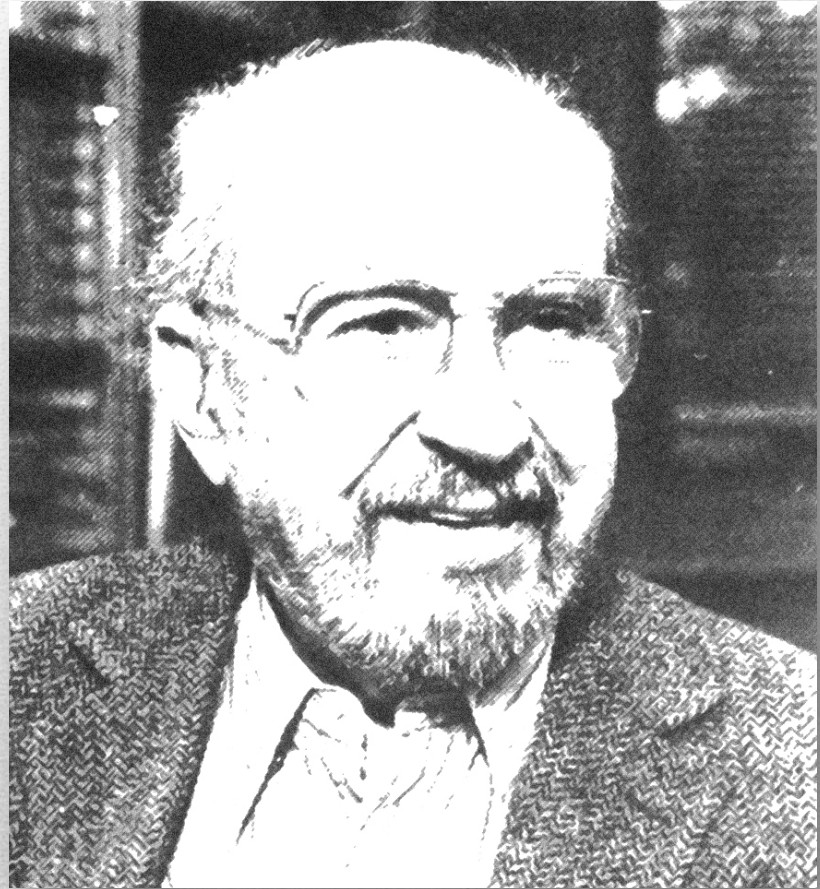
1. Bioeconomics
2. Criticism of development

They both shared the criticism of sustainable development and “economical imaginary”.



## Bioeconomics

“There cannot be much doubt, sustainable development is one of the most toxic recipes.” (1991)

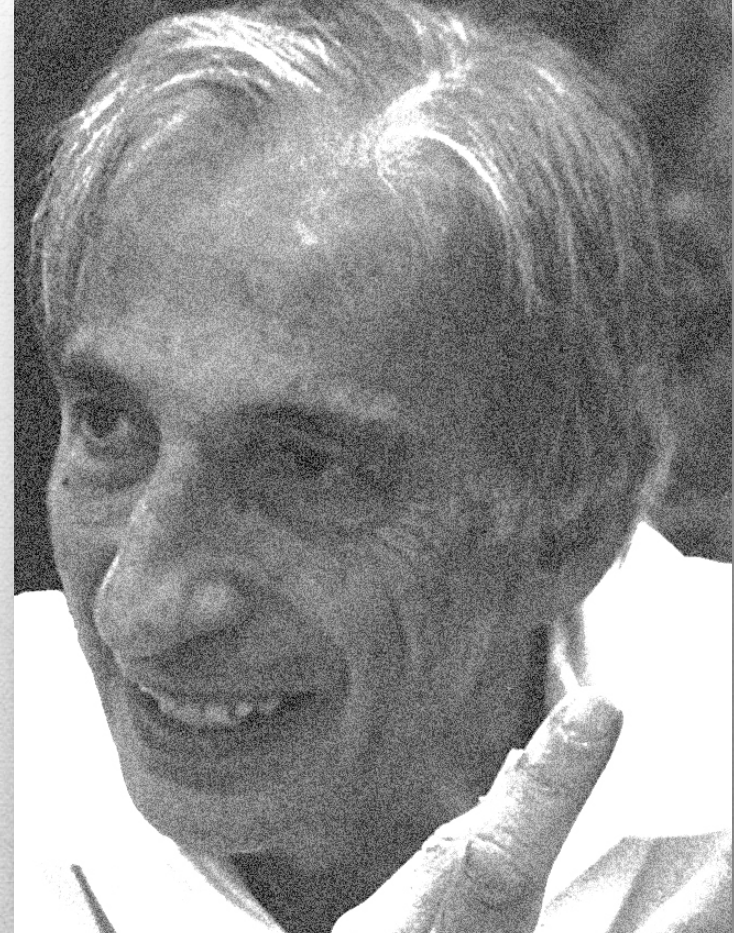


[Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen]



## Criticism of development

“The good news is that we must not give up our way of life to avoid the negative side effects of something that would be good in itself. This is not the case, since the meal is intrinsically harmful and we will get healthier just not eating it.”



[Ivan Illich]



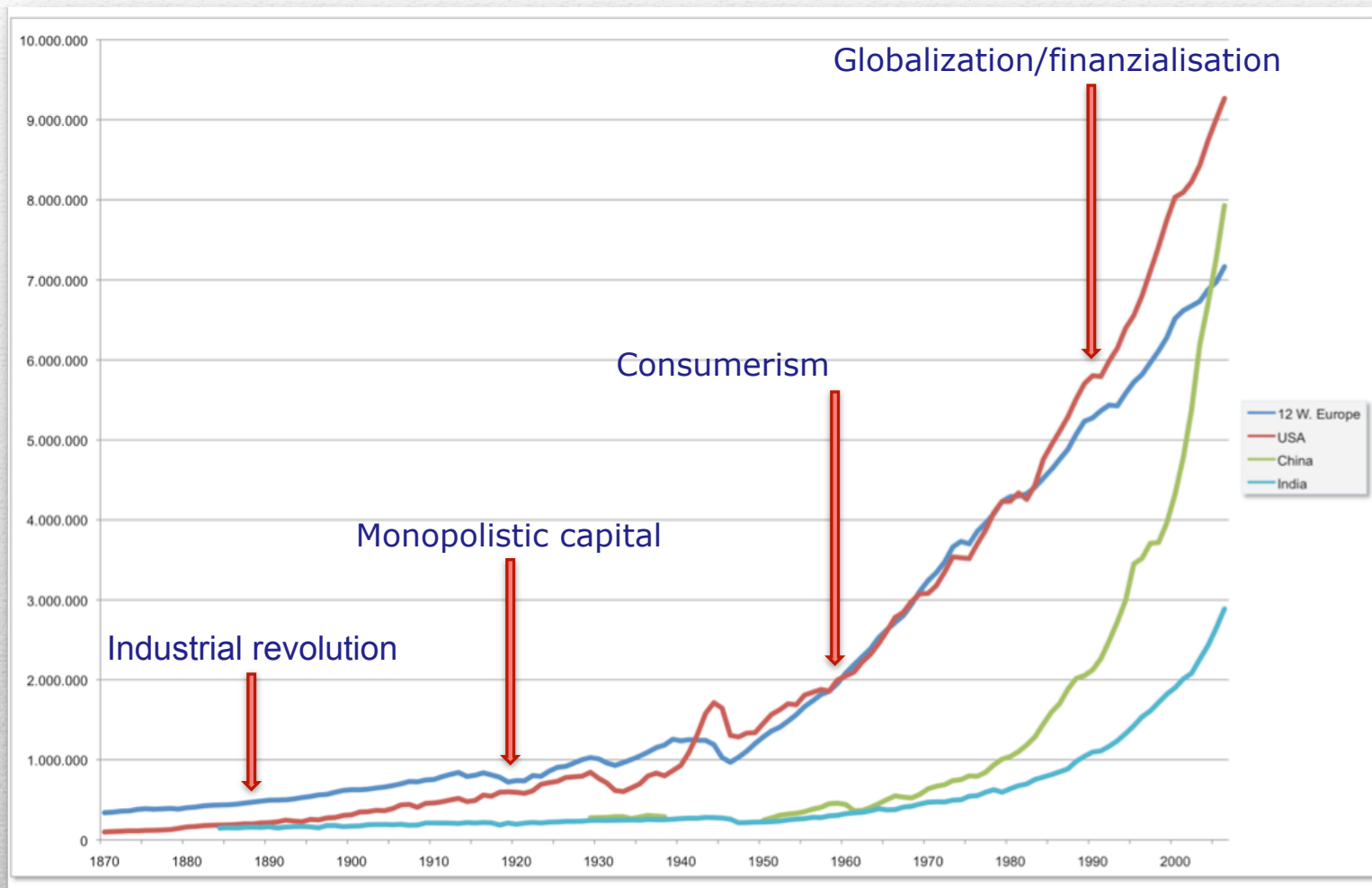
## **An autonomous society**

"What I call autonomy is the work with which we try to think about what we do and to know what we think."



[Cornelius Castoriadis]

# The issue of scale: growth and structural change



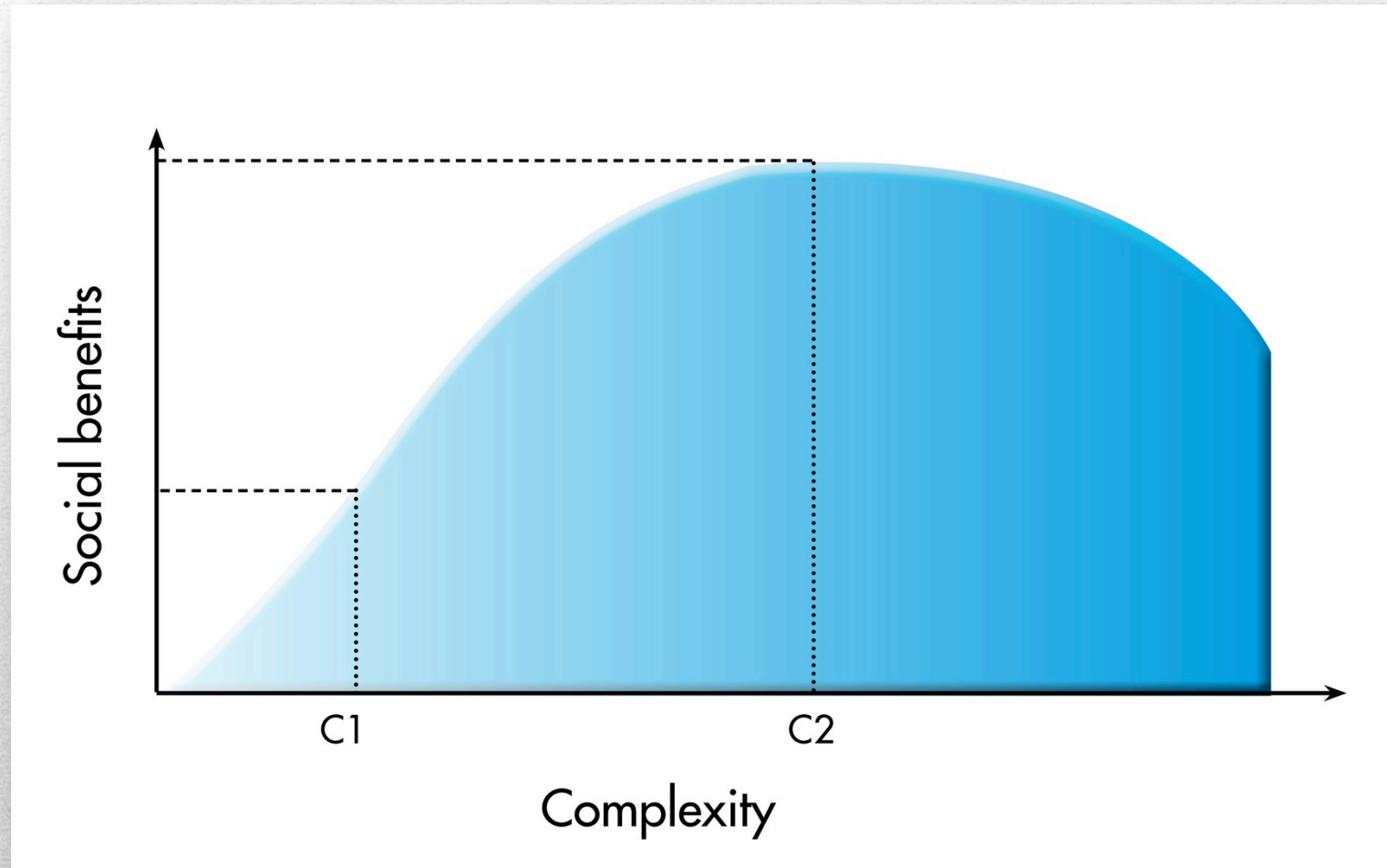
GDP 1870-2007 - Source: Maddison, 2008



I find it no easier to picture a completely socialized British Empire or United States than an elephant turning somersaults or a hippopotamus jumping a hedge."

*J. S. Haldane - On Being the Right Size (1928)*

# Complexity and Declining Marginal Returns



Joseph Tainter 1988

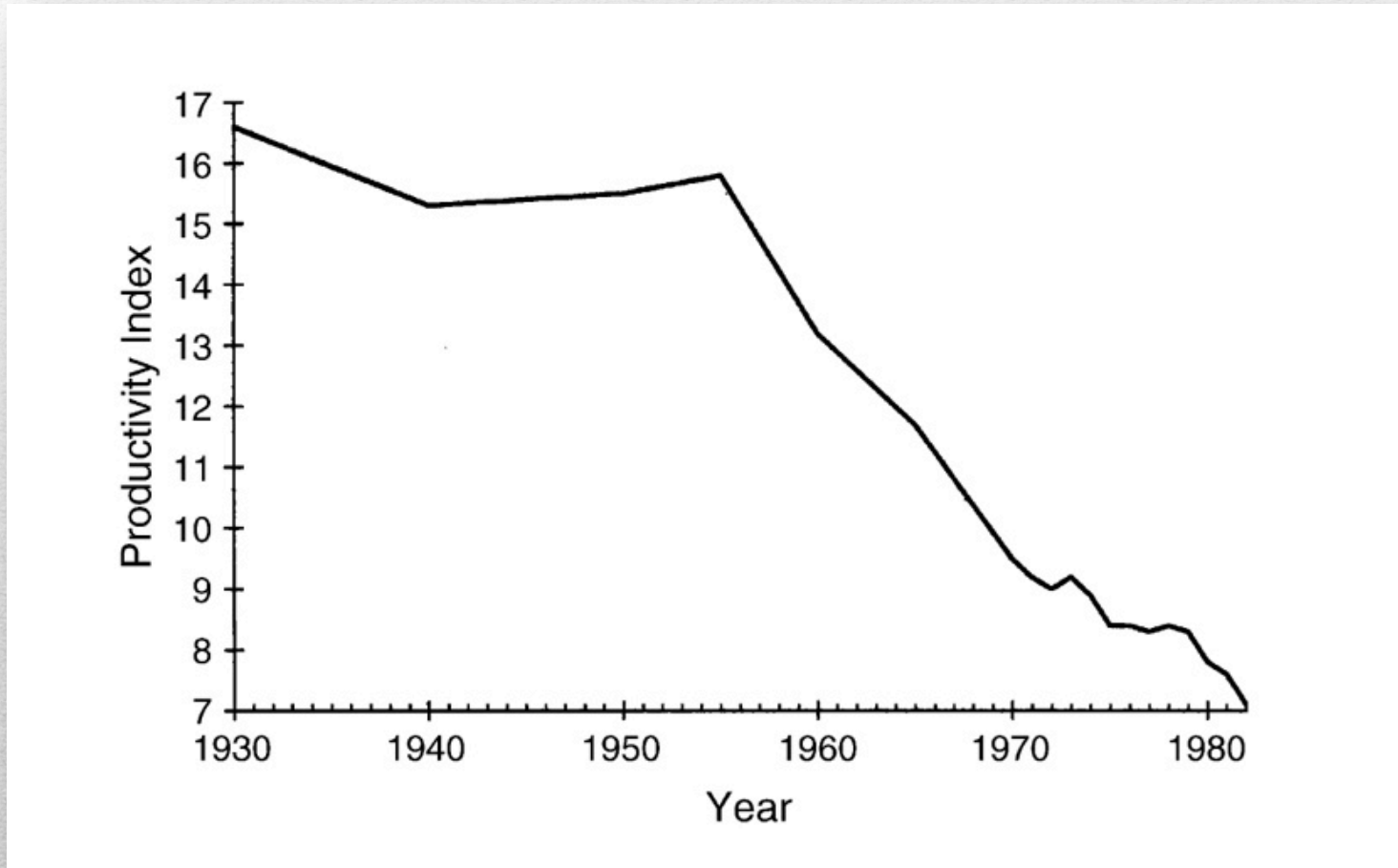


## EROEI – Energy invested on energy return

YEAR	OIL	COAL
1930	100	80
1970	30	30
2005	10-18	-

Source: Charles A.S. Hall, 2008

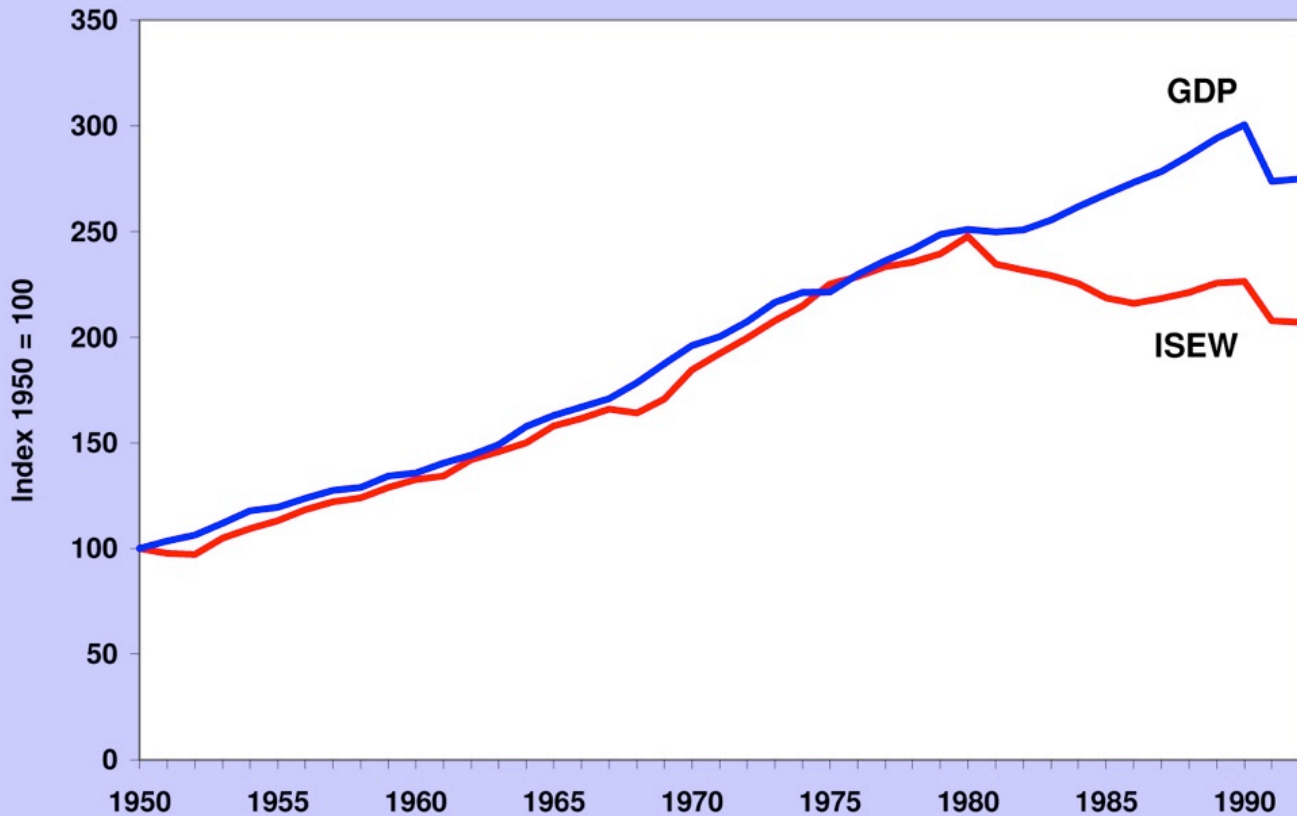
## Productivity of US Health Care System 1930-1980



Source: Joseph A. Tainter, *Social complexity and sustainability*, 2006

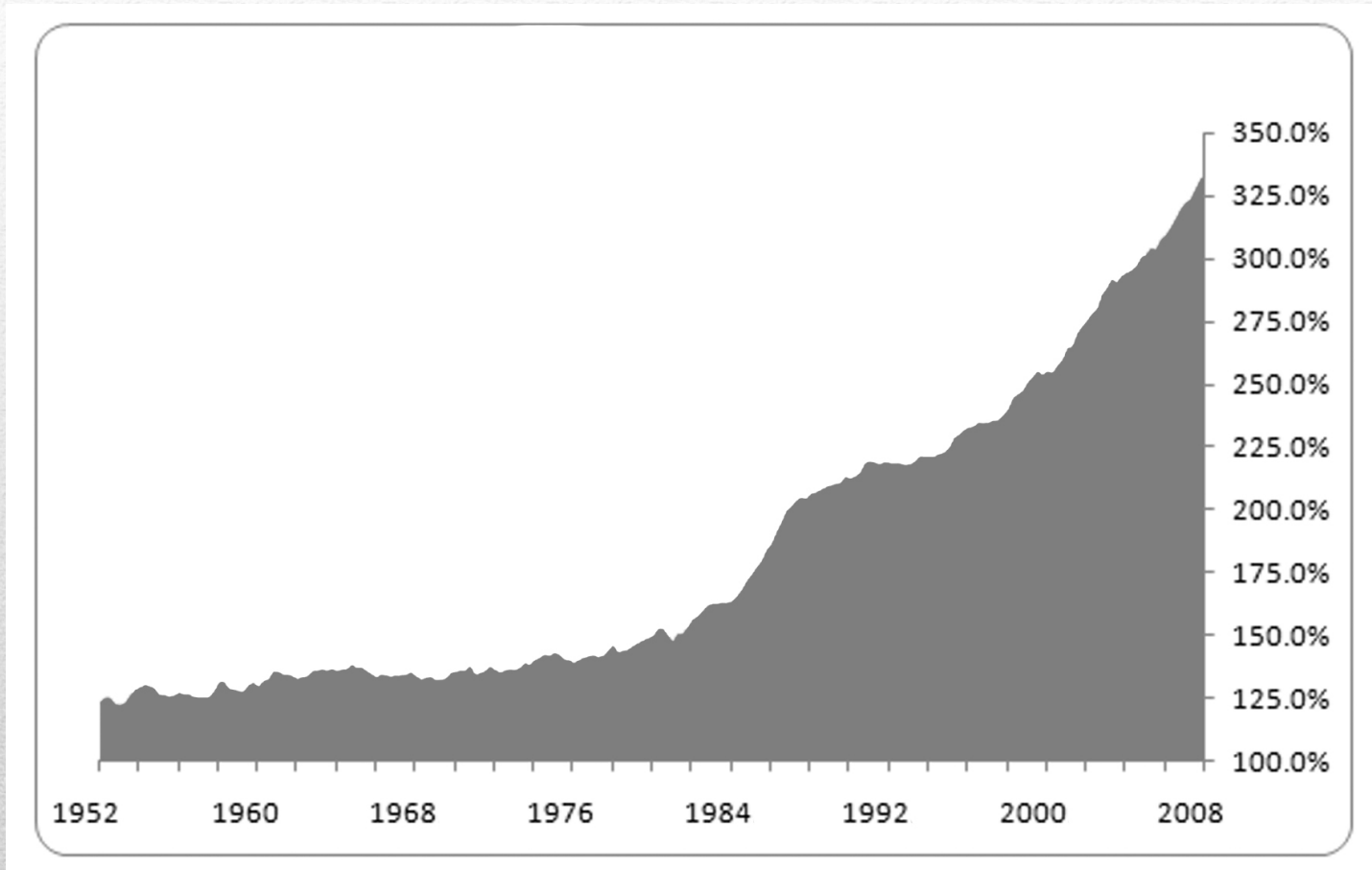


# Europe 6 ISEW - 1950 -1992



Source: Measuring Progress? Tim Jackson and Nat McBride, 2005

# Total U.S. Debt as % of GDP



From 1980 total debt increased in all advanced capitalistic countries.



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**Debito totale dei governi centrali in percentuale del PIL  
(paesi per i quali esistono i dati del 1980)**

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	1980	2003
Austria	24,7	60,1
Belgio	54,9	97,5
Danimarca	35,2	49,7
Germania	13,4	38,3
Islanda	22,6	34,5
Italia	53,9	96,8
Giappone	37,3	138,6
Messico	17,5	24,7
Portogallo	31,7	64,1
Spagna	14,6	42,7
Svezia	38,8	49,7
Usa	25,7	35,3

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Fonte: Dati Ocse (in Andriani, L'ascesa della finanza, 2006)

## A definition of Collapse

- Tainter says that a collapse is: *a relatively rapid, unplanned loss of complexity of the system and its main organizations.*



# Four possible scenarios



1. Collapse



2. New expansion cycle



4. Fortress



4. Resilience



# 1. Collapse



The Roman Empire



## 2. New expansion cycle

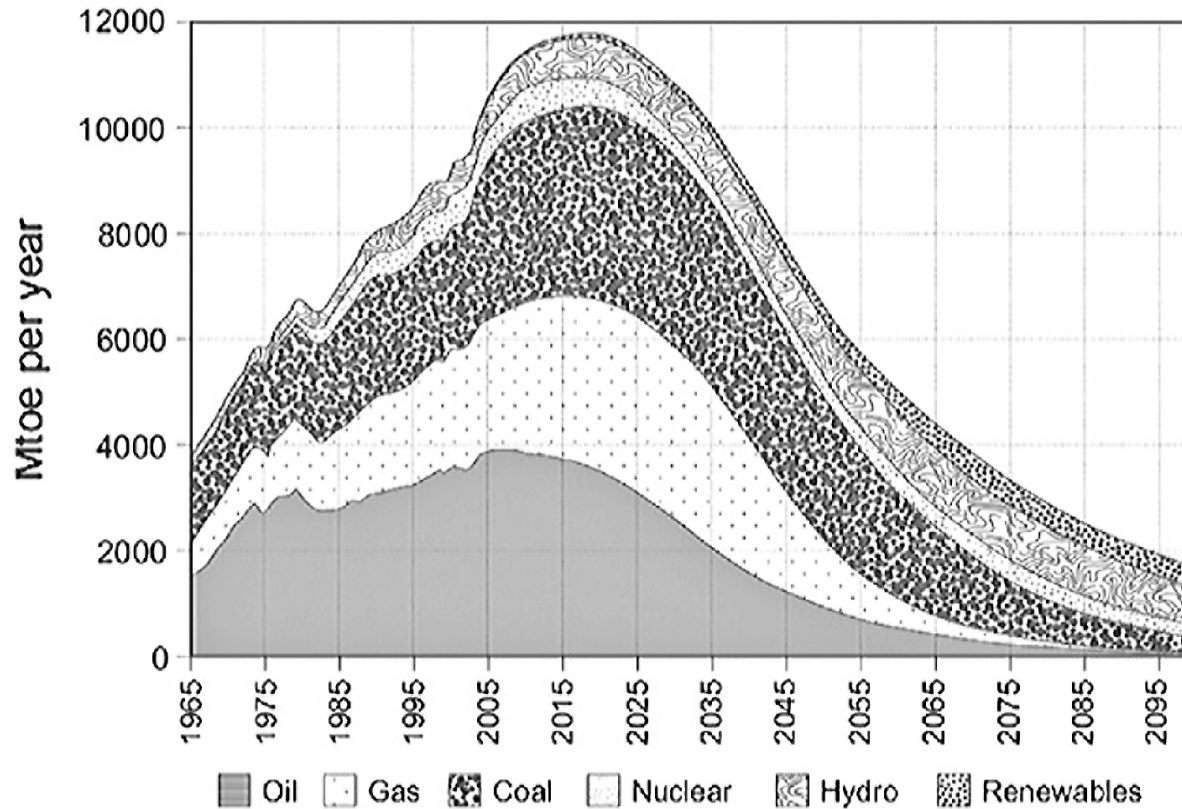


Europe 1500 - 1700



# ENERGY RESOURCES PEAK

How the world's total energy supply might decline



Source: Paul Chefurka, 2007



### 3. Fortress



20<sup>th</sup> century Totalitarianism (Polanyi The Great Transformation)



## 4. Resilience/degrowth society



Bisantium





Thank you very much

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## A first conclusion

Capitalism cannot survive in a situation of steady state or degrowth.

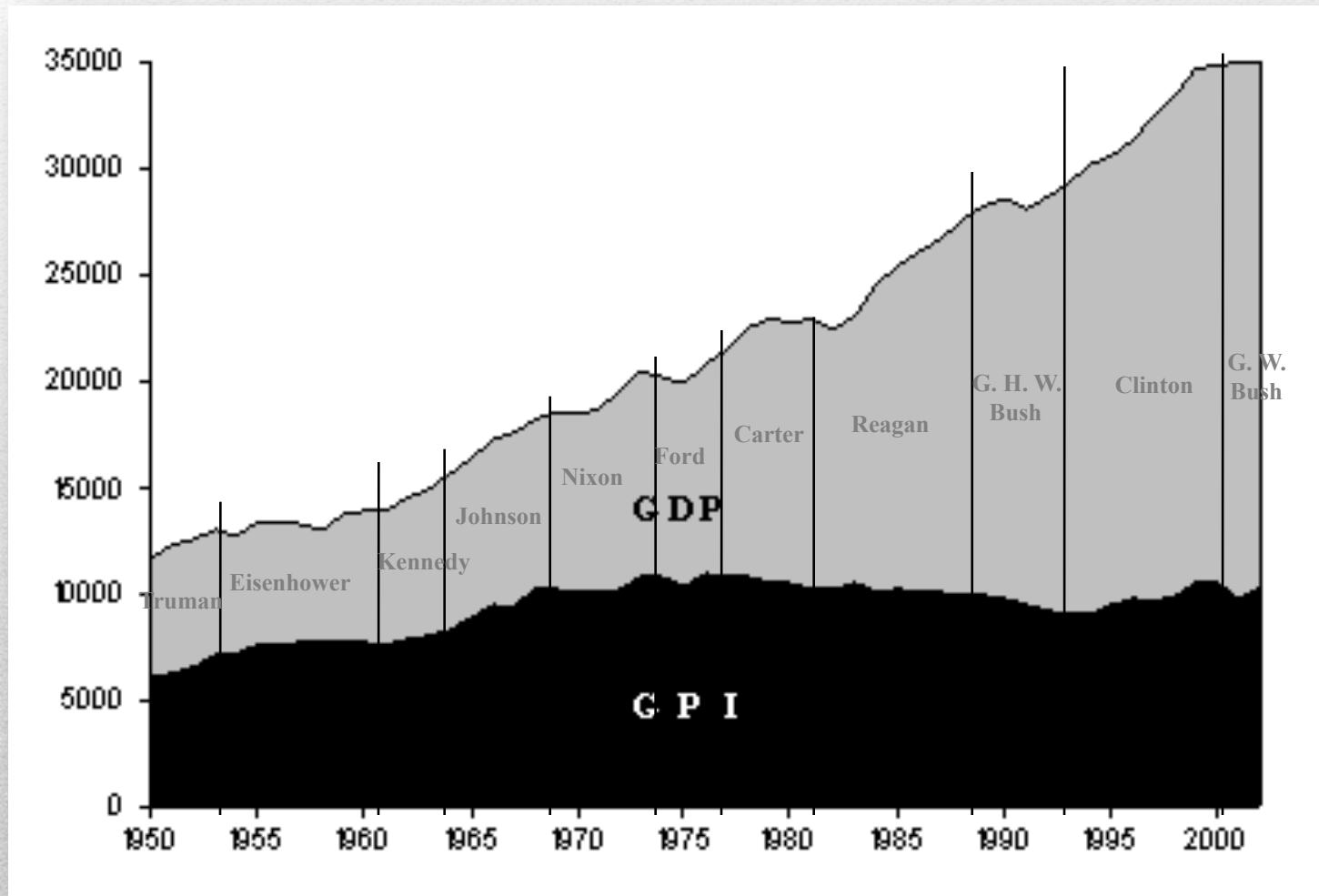


# The decolonization of the imaginary



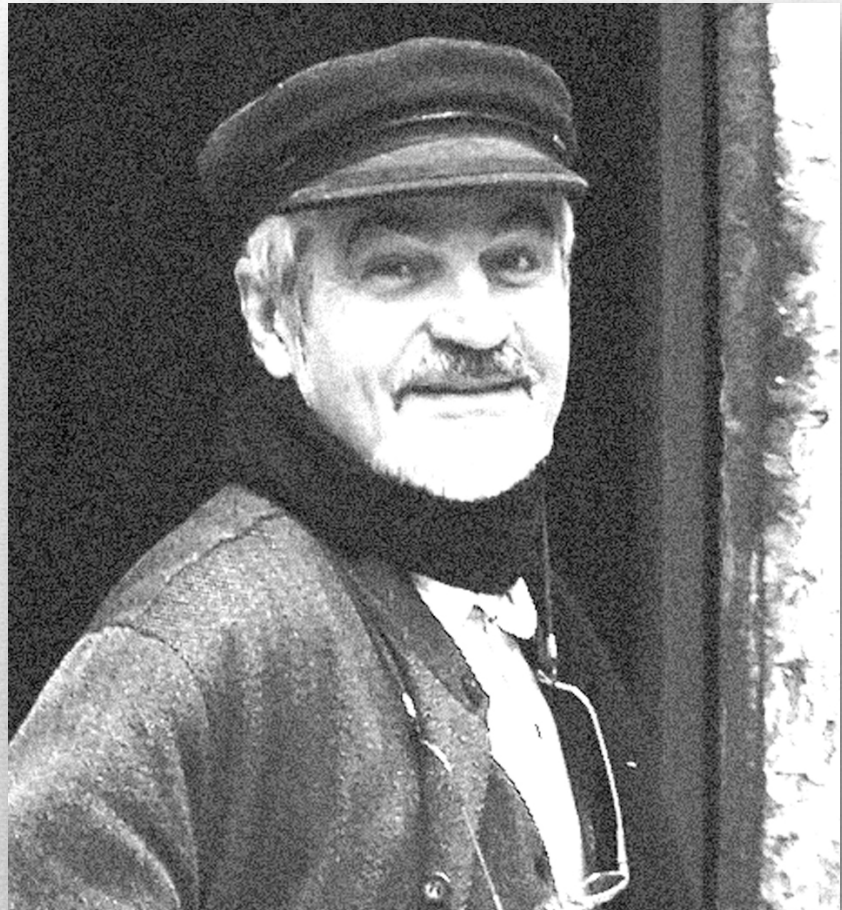


# GDP vs. Genuine Progress – (USA 1950-2002)



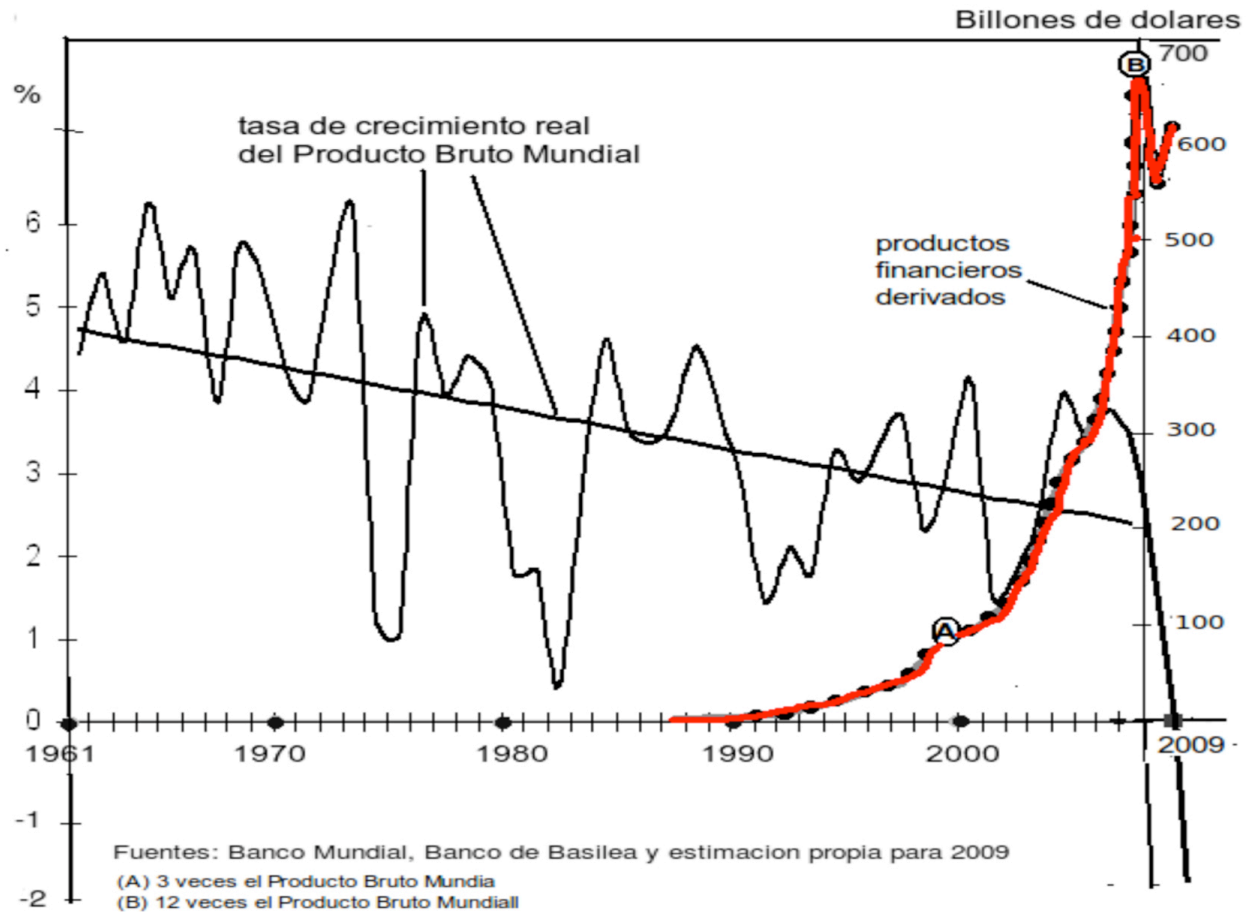


“Degrowth is not an alternative but an array of alternatives and has no dogmas”



[Serge Latouche]

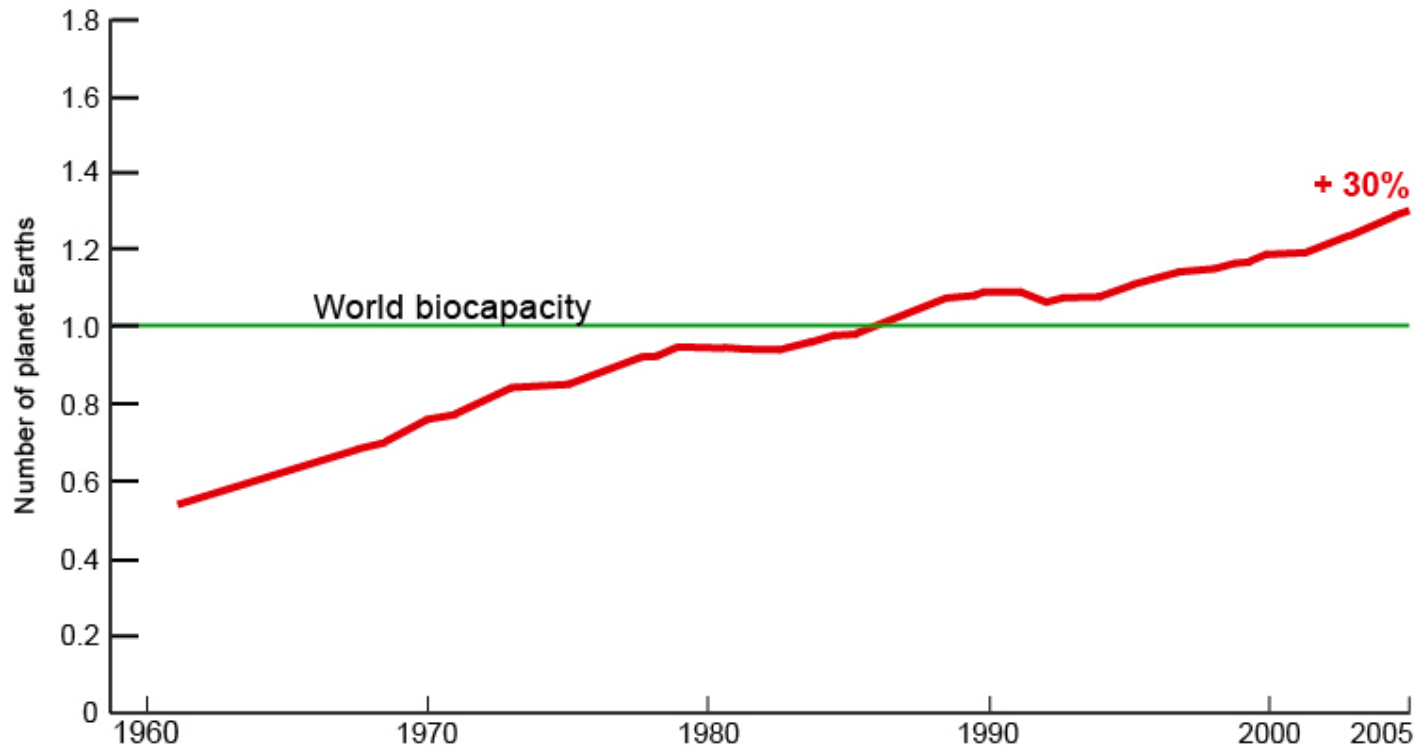
## Desaceleración económica y expansión financiera



J. Beinstein 2009



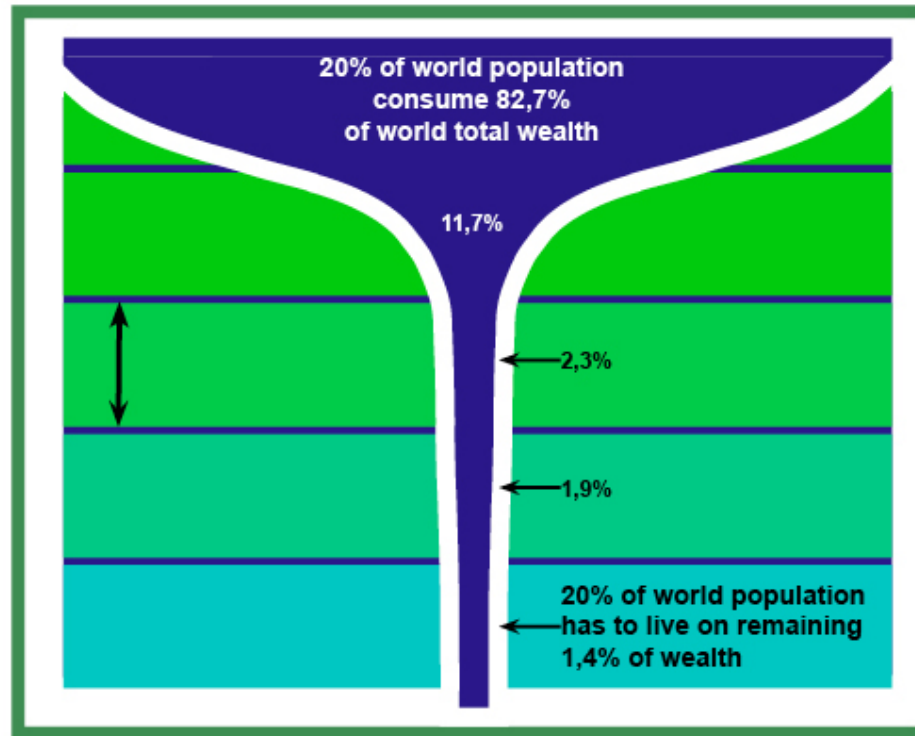
## HUMANITY'S ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT, 1961-2005



Source: WWF 2008

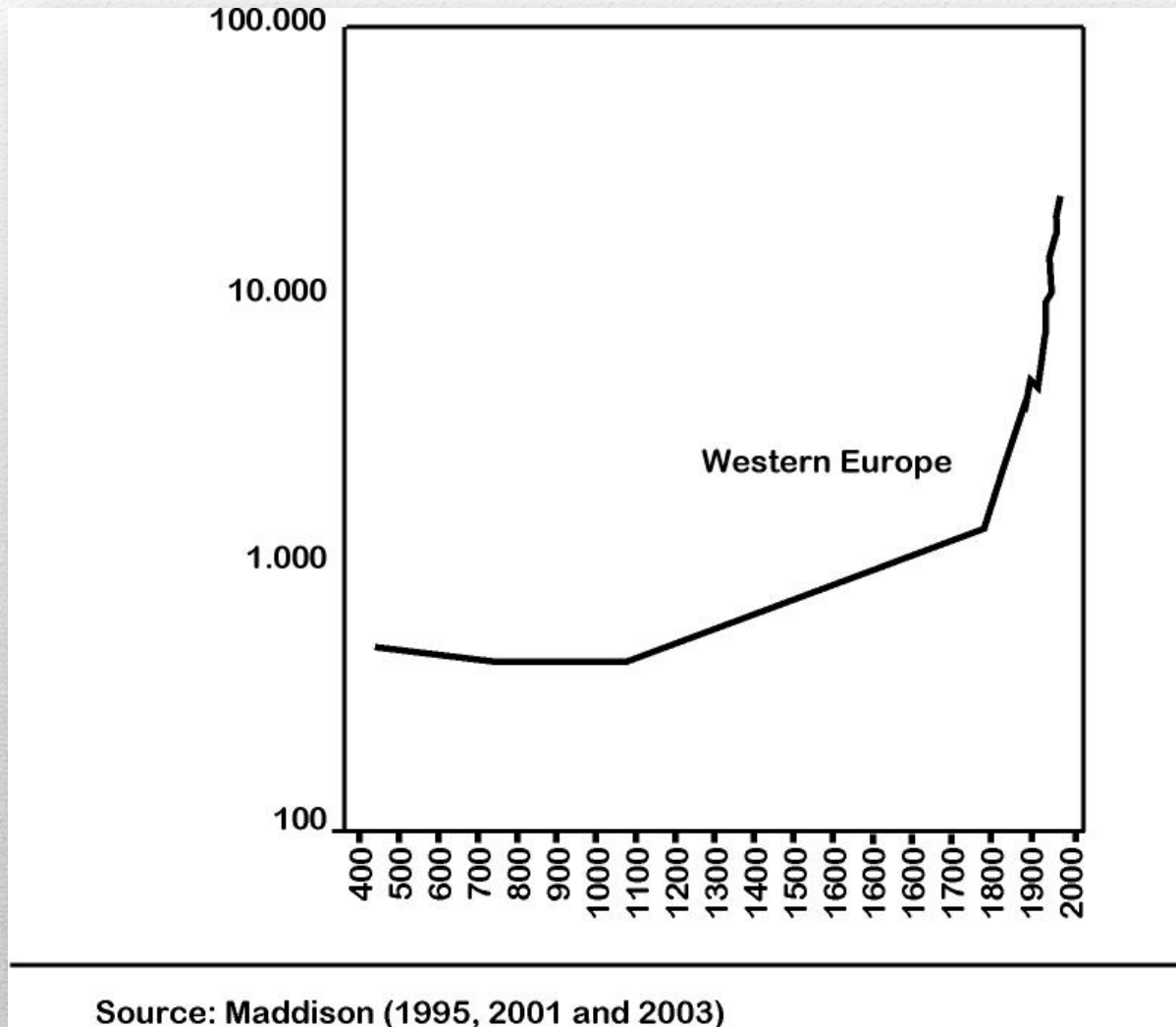
## The “champagne glass” of world wealth distribution

source: PNUD

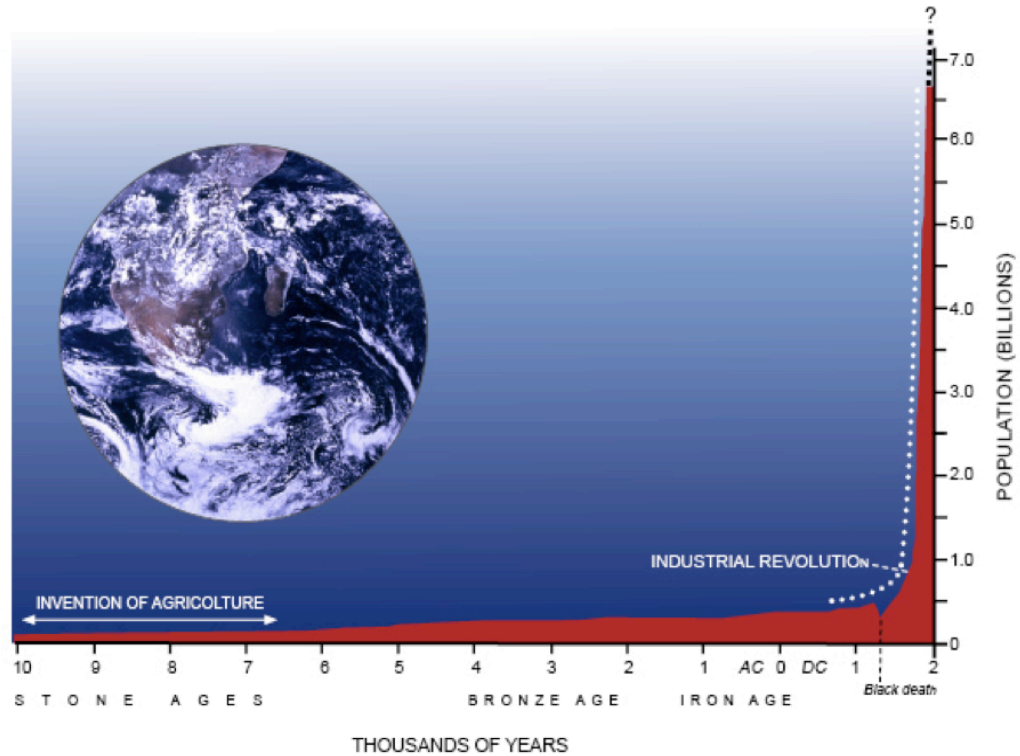




# PIL Europa dal 400 al 2000



# THE GROWTH OF HUMAN POPULATION





# Degrowth as a project of transition

The analysis of the ecological limits cannot be separated from that of society and its institutions.

Degrowth is not an alternative but an array of alternatives and has no dogmas.

Which are the consequences  
of the multidimensional crisis  
on capitalism?