

A historical inquiry into the hegemony of the growth paradigm

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Overview

- Introduction: Economic growth and the socio-ecological transformation
- The ecological implications of economic growth
- Paradigm and hegemony
- The history of the growth paradigm
 - The origins of the growth paradigm
 - The scientification of economic growth
 - The quantification of economic growth
 - The OECD & the hegemony of the growth paradigm
- Conclusion

Economic growth – a modern phenomenon

- Economic growth as the prevalent dynamic of capitalist societies
- Economic growth associated with narratives of progress and development
- Economic growth constitutes a modern phenomenon

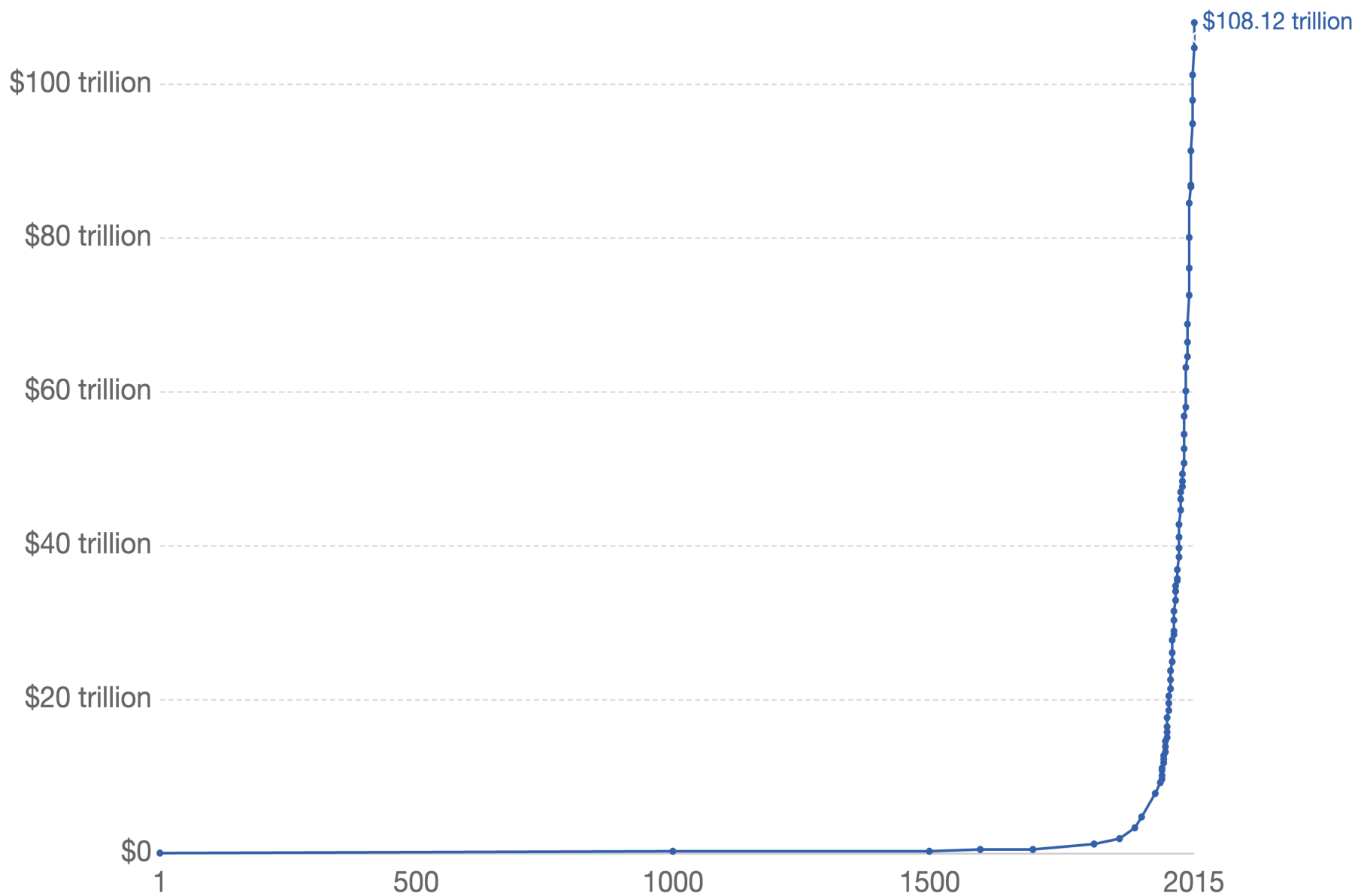
The socio-ecological transformation

- Socio-ecological transformation as an umbrella term
- Central question: Is economic growth reconcilable with sustainability?
- Green growth vs. post-growth/degrowth

The ecological implications of economic growth

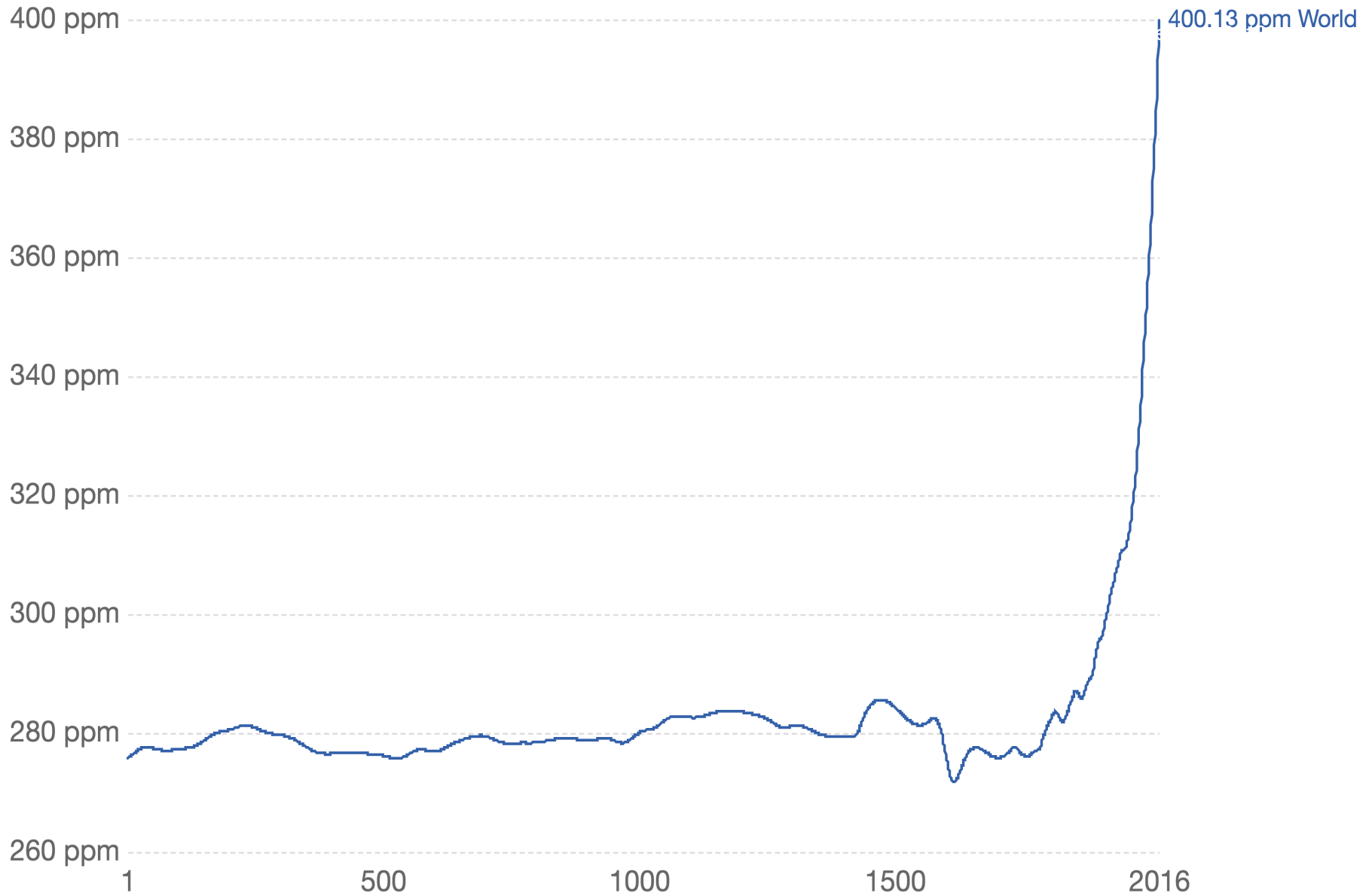
World GDP over the last two millennia

Total output of the world economy; adjusted for inflation and expressed in 2011 international dollars.



Atmospheric CO₂ concentration (ppm)

Global average long-term atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂), measured in parts per million (ppm).



The ecological implications of economic growth

- Central insight: the ecological crisis is of anthropogenic origin
- Identification of the current geological epoch as *anthropocene*
- *Capitalocene*: the ecological crisis as the product of capitalist social and natural relations
- A profound socio-ecological transformation requires a transformation of the growth paradigm!

Paradigm & hegemony

- The growth paradigm refers to „a specific ensemble of social, political, and academic discourses, theories, and statistical standards that jointly assert and justify the view that economic growth as conventionally defined is desirable, imperative, and essentially limitless” (Schmelzer, 2015b, p. 264)
- The hegemony of the growth paradigm refers to the primacy of economic growth as a socio-political goal

The history of the growth paradigm

The origins of the growth paradigm

- The 16th & 17th: the ideas of linear progress
- Scientific revolution
- Emergence of capitalist social relations
- Quantification of economic activities over time

The scientification of economic growth

- Classical economics
 - Economic growth as the natural development path of capitalist societies
- Neoclassical economics
 - Economics becomes an increasingly mechanistic social science
 - Detachment of the economy from its socio-political and natural environment

The quantification of economic growth

- 1930s: gross national product (GNP)
- Historical context: the Great Depression & Second World War
- Construction of the economy as an autonomous sphere
- Facilitated the rise of economic growth to a socio-political goal

The OECD & the hegemony of the growth paradigm

- Historical context: Cold War
- Legitimation of growth ideology through the media
- Definition of three growth targets
- Establishment of economic growth as a primary socio-political goal

Conclusion

- Socio-ecological transformation requires a transformation of the growth paradigm
- Historical understanding of the growth paradigm important with regard to post-growth approaches
- Approaches to transform the growth paradigm:
 - Transdisciplinarity and plurality of economics
 - Alternative measures of welfare and progress
 - Reduction of structural growth dependencies
- Re-orientation of policy-making towards well-being and sustainability

Thank you for your attention!

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