

# Capitalism, Climate Change, and Ecological Modernization

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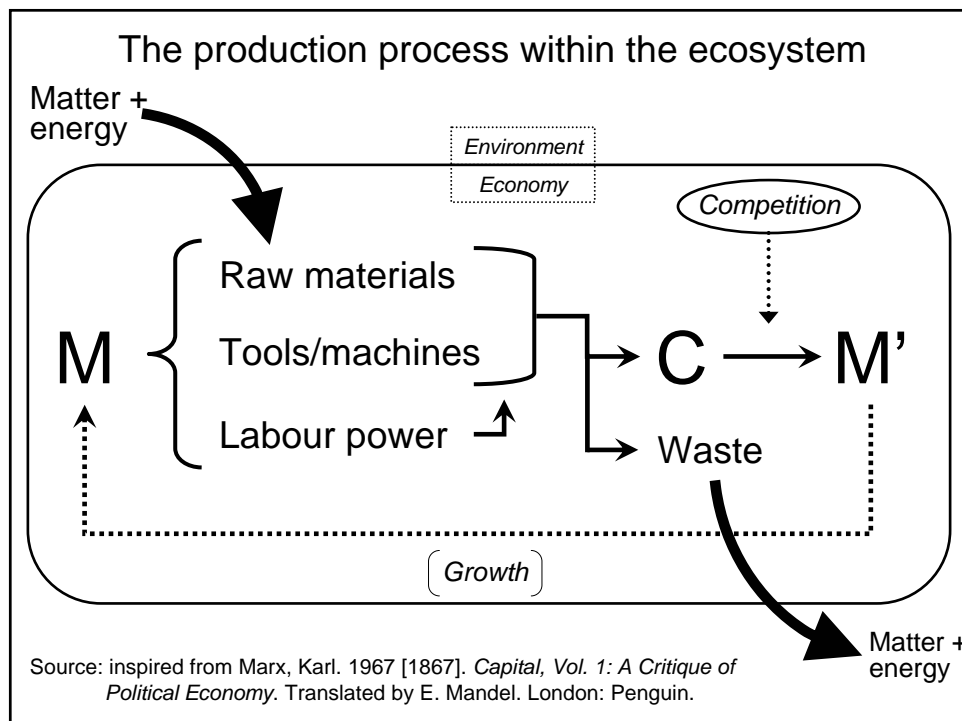
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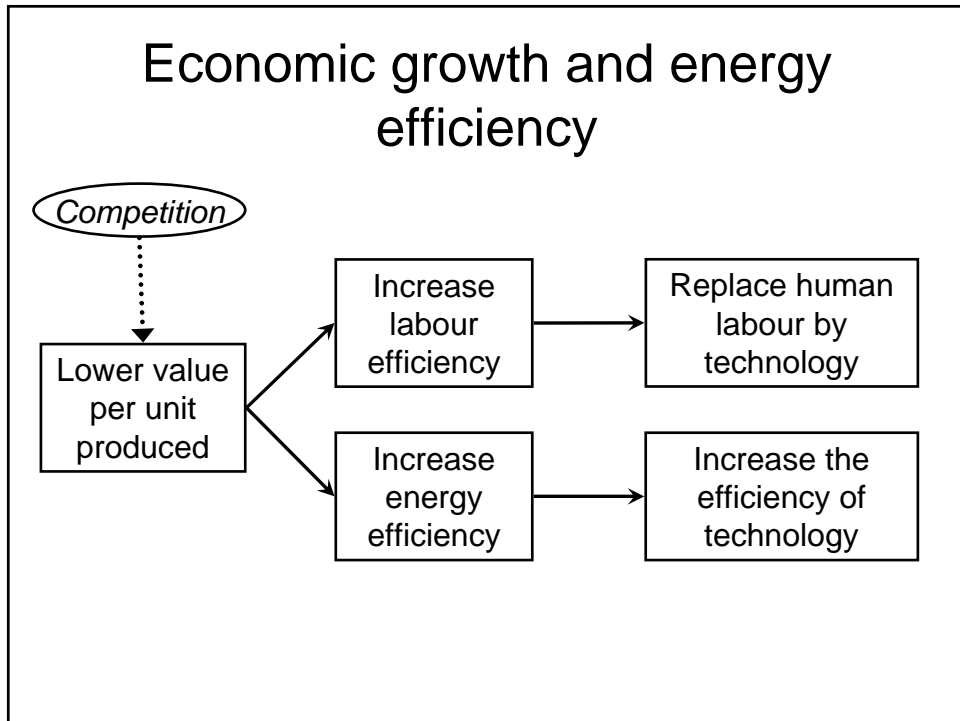
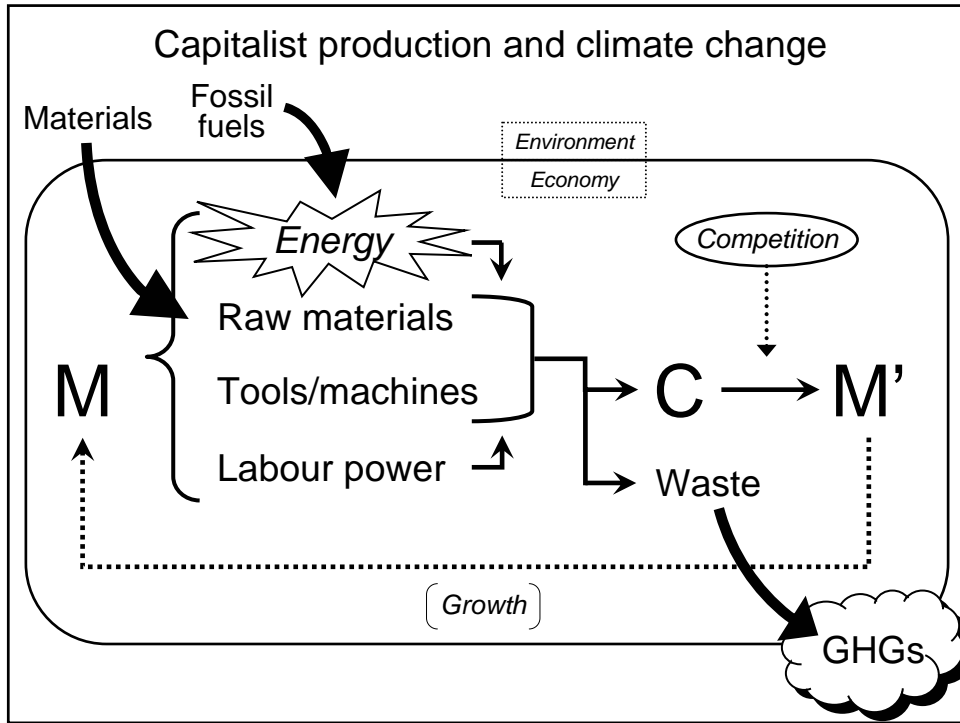
## Ecological modernization

- Address environmental issues by improving efficiency of production
- Argues it is also profitable for industry, as it reduces production costs
- Business version (and not sociological version)

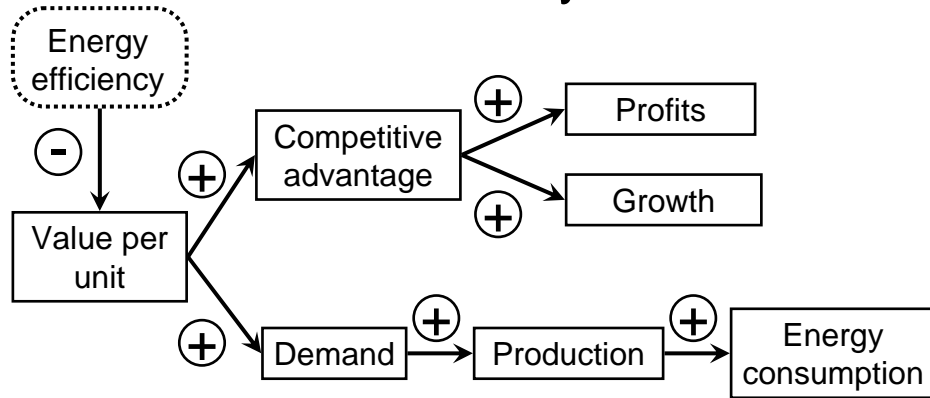
# Capitalism, Climate Change, and Ecological Modernization

- Capitalism, competition and growth
- Shortcomings of ecological modernization to address climate change
- Short history of the concept of ecological modernization





## Consequences of increased energy efficiency



### *The Jevons paradox*

(Jevons 1865; Alcott 2005; Clark and York 2005)

## Ecological modernization

- *Decoupling* between production output and GHG emissions
  - Reduction of carbon intensity of production processes
  - i.e. improving energy efficiency per unit produced...
  - ...by increasing the efficiency of technologies
- Supposedly a “win-win” scenario: less GHGs and more profits

## Critique of ecological modernization

- The Jevons paradox
- Displacement effect
  - Increased efficiency brings more profits
  - Gains invested in more economic growth, with associated environmental pressures (Schnaiberg 1980)

## Socio-historical origins of ecological modernization

- Neoliberalism
  - Deregulation, less state intervention, voluntary approaches
  - Response to profit crunch – late 1960s-1970s
- Limits to growth debate
  - Publications: *The Limits to Growth* (1972), *Blueprint for Survival* (1972)
  - Increasing awareness of contradiction between economic growth and environmental protection

## Chronology of ecological modernization

- 1980 – The concept of sustainable development becomes more widely used
- 1984 – OECD International Conference on Environment and Economics
  - Attended by ministers of the environment
  - Goal: Convince participants that “environment and economy can be mutually reinforcing” (Bernstein 2000)

## Chronology of ecological modernization

- 1987 – *Our Common Future*, report by the WCED (“Brundtland Report”)
  - Concept of sustainable development emphasizes the need for economic growth alongside environmental protection
  - Secretary of the WCED: Jim MacNeil
    - Also environmental director of the OECD
    - Responsible for writing the agenda of the WCED (Bernstein 2000)

## Chronology of ecological modernization

- 1992 – UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)
  - Secretary general: Maurice Strong (canadian businessman and diplomat)
  - Important business input, through the *Business Council on Sustainable Development* (Chatterjee and Finger 1994)
  - Institutionalization of ecological modernization in the UNFCCC, the CBD and Agenda 21 (Bernstein 2000)

## Summary

- Ecological modernization promoted by organizations interested in growth
  - OECD
  - Western governments
  - BCSD
- Ecological modernization part of the project of neoliberalism
- Environmental NGOs adopted ecological modernization later

## Ecological modernization as a legitimizing discourse

- From:
  - Environmental protection *is incompatible* with economic growth
- To:
  - Environmental protection *is dependent on* economic growth
- Effect:
  - Gives *legitimacy* to policies supporting economic growth

## Conclusion

- Ecological modernization is a discursive attempt to reconcile environmental protection with economic growth
- Discourse constructed and promoted by organizations interested in economic growth
- Legitimizes the interests of business and governments in unlimited economic growth



# References

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