

**Kari Väyrynen • Lecturer PhD • Department of History • University Of Oulu**

## **Styles of Environmental Thinking and Environmental Economy**

Environmental problems are fundamentally disturbances in the material co-operation between man and nature. Consequently, environmental economy must play a central role in the analysis of environmental questions. As our economy no longer works in a sustainable way within the ecological context, the economy needs to be organised differently. This change requires fundamental philosophical reflection about the ecological, social and ethical possibilities inherent in various modes of economical thinking.

We must, first of all, become critically aware of fundamental ecological and philosophical choices within traditional economics. These are closely related to the environmental ideology so much in evidence in traditional natural sciences, which strongly believe in our technical capacity to rule over nature. Today this one-sided anthropocentric attitude is, however, no longer justifiable in environmental thinking. As a result, economists must also look for new, ecologically more sustainable approaches. In this paper, I shall sketch four styles of environmental thinking that are likely to prove fruitful in terms of this re-thinking: (a) scientific-technological dominion over nature, (b) romantic criticism of civilisation, (c) institutional criticism, and (d) educational optimism. As it is, (a) and (c) are already existing paradigms within environmental economy, while the other two, with their strong economic implications, represent powerful lines of discussion in environmental policy.

My main claim is that instead of putting our thrust blindly in the possibilities suggested by scientific-technological thinking, we should change our ethical, social and economic institutions and attitudes. I see no other way of turning the economy in ecologically more sustainable direction. We need these fundamental changes because traditional ways of thinking merely consider the symptoms of the environmental crisis, though its roots are much deeper embedded in our social and cultural approach to nature.