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"Environmental Economics: The Meaning of an 'Objective' Policy Science"

Deblonde, Marian K.

Deblonde, Marian K. "Environmental Economics: The Meaning of an 'Objective' Policy Science." *Environmental Values* 9, no. 2 (2000): 235–48. doi:10.3197/096327100129342056 .

Environmental economics is a policy science. Environmental economists, however, find that their policy recommendations are often neglected by political officials. Some of them react to this neglect by reproaching public authorities with lack of efficiency: this so-called inefficiency is considered to be a manifestation of government failure. Others propose a redefinition of environmental economics in order to make it fit better with actual political objectives. After briefly outlining the case for an economic paradigm that differs from conventional (i.e. neo-classical welfare) environmental economics, I argue that an alternative paradigm demands a different interpretation of economic "objectivity." I claim that economic "objectivity" ultimately comes down to a non-neutral common consent within a particular community of economic scientists. This interpretation leaves room for a multiplicity of "objective," but non-neutral economic theories. The fact that the inevitable value ideas underlying a particular theory cannot be made fully transparent, urges us to accept a different conception of the theory's political relevance. Environmental economic theory should be considered not so much a provider of political "instruments," as of scientific "insights." It should not simply be considered a theory that responds to actual political objectives, but one that inspires political objectives. These two latter suggestions of mine are only preliminary recommendations, which require further conceptual analysis.
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