

ophy and produces nothing else, nothing whatsoever. If he receives enough for his efforts to defray the costs of shelter, food, heat, light, and countless other desiderata, he is wealthier than any Lord of the Manor of bygone days. And solely because of a practice of freedom — a baby in the realm of enlightenments — this open road to wealth!

I repeat, affluence has had a disgusting effect on a great number of individuals. Wealth has become so much a god that it knows no satiety.³ Imagine, some of the wealthiest people who ever lived shouldering a debt without historical parallel — the combined indebtedness of U.S. citizens in excess of a trillion dollars! And more: an enormous siphoning off of accumulated capital assets by diluting the medium of exchange — inflation!

However, we must remember that this affluence exceeds anything mankind has heretofore experienced; we are not conditioned to such wealth; it is not in man's tradition. Thus, we resemble chil-

dren turned loose in a candy bin; if they make themselves ill, it is not the fault of the sweets or a reason to outlaw candy. It is, instead, the occasion for some dietary sense and self-discipline.

And ours is the occasion for some sense in political economy and morals as related to the evolution of man. It is pitiful to observe millions of people enthusiastically working against their own interests, that is, working their way back to the closed road. And it is easy to tell which way we are heading. Substitutions of political for private ownership, wage and price controls, labor or business cartels, subsidies, inflation, or other schemes that feather the nest of some at the expense of others rebuild the barricades. Such hazards preclude the several necessary steps to the open road and turn us against our self-interest!

While I deplore the way many affluent people behave, I trust their wealth to them far more than to politicians or others who had nothing whatsoever to do with its acquisition.

Finally, regardless of how unfavorably we may view the way wealth is used by its owners, let us not, under any circumstances, throw out the baby with the bath. This infant enlightenment is one of the most priceless blessings of mankind.



GARY NORTH

THE THEOLOGY OF THE EXPONENTIAL CURVE

**Growth for the sake of growth is
the ideology of the cancer cell.**

Edward Abbey

CARL BECKER, the late Cornell professor, was once regarded as the "dean of America's historians." His most famous work, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (1932), was a literate defense of the idea that the "rationalism" of the Enlightenment was really a religious faith modeled after the thirteenth century's theological concerns. Enlightenment rationalism is best understood, Becker argued, as secularized theology; its presuppositions were as unprovable as those of the scholastic philosophers. Both systems, in the final analysis, are equally based on faith. While he has been criticized for his handling of particular ideas, most notably by Peter Gay, Becker's fundamental presentation still holds: the reigning faith of an age — the "climate of opinion" as he called it — is no less a faith just because its devotees like to refer to themselves as rationalists.

Becker believed that certain key terms reveal the true concerns of the Enlightenment: Nature, Reason, and Progress were three of these. These were self-attesting, "self-evident" propositions. Nature,

Mr. North is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Riverside.

³ This is no merely modern defection; Plato describes the decay of an oligarchy in Book VIII of *The Republic*: "And so, as time goes on, and they advance in the pursuit of wealth, the more they hold that in honor the less they honor virtue . . . From being lovers of victory and lovers of honor they become lovers of gain getting and money."