

CYCLICITY IN LANDSCAPE:  
ITS REALITY IN NATURE AND CLASH WITH HUMAN CIVILIZATIONAL PROGRESS

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The saying that the beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning, stems from a seemingly fundamental order of the natural world's law. Whether it is in the link between life and death or the sea that erodes shores, there exists a circular pattern where the landscape undergoes a cycle that grows, declines, and rebirths. Indeed, this pattern follows a simple circle where its end meets its beginning. However, as reality permits, an individual who dies cannot be reincarnated back to life exactly as they once were. The unrevivable dead reflect a discontinuous cyclicality between life and death that more accurately bears the conceptual structure of a spiral. A spiral also follows cyclical motion, but at the point that it comes full circle, its location is either elevated or lowered, and is not exactly the same as where it previously started. In *Cape Cod* by Henry David Thoreau, the dichotomy between land and sea, one of the many dualities that landscape encompasses, reflects the dichotomy between life and death that together form nature's irreversible cycle of rebirth. Following in an examination of *The Course of Empire* paintings by Thomas Cole, the civilization and the landscape, despite circling through life and death back to rebirth, do not return to the same state in which they started. Their cycle offers a discontinuous interplay between growth, decay, and rebirth, which stands in ideological contrast with a human empire's so-called linear progression. As to be explored in this paper, seeking to understand how landscape's dualities serve as the basis for its inherently natural cyclicality in Henry David Thoreau's *Cape Cod* brings us to a clearer recognition of its odds with the American ideal of civilization's unidirectional progression. As follows, discontinuous cyclicality in the landscape of Thomas Cole's *Course of Empire* shows how landscape's fundamental, natural cyclicality is linked to the rise and fall of human civilizations built atop it. Landscape's discontinuous cyclicality and its connection to civilization's cyclical theory of history, a concept accepted by Chinese dynasties' mandate of heaven, lead us to a discussion of its conceptual clash

with American Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism to heliotropic theory. Indeed, this paper will examine how the landscape's natural cycle of death and rebirth elicits a subconscious American fear of disruptive decay to their nation's ongoing, linear progress.

As can be seen in *Cape Cod* by Henry David Thoreau, discontinuous cyclicity in the landscape arises from dualities that give the landscape capability to reshape itself. The first of these dualities to be examined is between the sea and the land. Thoreau draws a distinction between the sea and the dry land as two individual forces that interact, seem to engage in conversation, and often times, appear at odds with each other. One quick note to make here regarding terminology is that Thoreau refers to land as dry land, whereas the definition of landscape to be used in this discussion encompasses both the land and sea. Thoreau describes the two parts of the landscape, the dry land and sea, as interacting with their own vitality when he says, "the sea sends its rapacious east wind to rob the land, but before the former has got far with its prey, the land sends its honest west wind to recover some of its own."<sup>1</sup> As we see, Thoreau speaks of the land and sea as distinct entities that seem to act on their own. Notably, the verbs he uses to attribute the actions of the land and sea, "sends," establish both to have agency. While he does not use diction that personifies the land and sea with human traits, readers can still see the personality of the two. From the text, we observe the sea has the upper hand "to rob the land" while the latter recovers itself in defense with an "honest west wind."<sup>2</sup> As Thoreau describes the sea meeting the land, their interaction appears more of a clash. Indeed, this interaction forms the basis for a cycle in which the landscape reshapes itself.

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1. Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1866), 122.

2. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, 122.

In the interactive clash between the land and the sea, the sea is often described as predatory, where it “plays with the land holding a sand-bar in its mouth...as a cat plays with a mouse.”<sup>3</sup> The sea’s action of ‘eating’ the land is the driving force for changing the cliff’s shapes. It can be noted a predator and prey relationship in itself is a form of cyclicity. As Tim O’Keefe summarizes Lucretius from Book III of *De Rerum Natura*, “the matter which composes present creatures is needed in order to make future ones.”<sup>4</sup> As applied to the interaction between predator and prey, prey is consumed by the predator, and when the predator eventually dies, its corpse nurtures the rebirth of new life that will inevitably give way to the next cycle. The interaction between the ocean and the land reflects the cycle of predator and prey intertwined with life and death – a cycle embodied by the landscape. It is with this cycle that the landscape changes its own appearance over time. Thoreau describes, “perhaps what the Ocean takes from one part of the Cape it gives to another...Thus the bank preserves its height as fast as it is worn away.”<sup>5</sup> Instead of a static, unchanging scene, he describes the cliffs of Cape Cod to change organically over time due to the ocean eating away at them, removing sediment from one part, and depositing it in another. In a scenario of linearity, the ocean might erode away at the cliffs until no sediment remains, but this is not the case Thoreau describes. Instead, the action of eroding and then re-depositing sediment form a dynamic cycle of destruction and reconstruction.

Furthermore, the concept of reshaping constitutes the idea of ending in a state different from its start. When Thoreau states, “what the Ocean takes from one part of the Cape it gives to

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3. Thoreau, 122.

4. Tim, O'Keefe, “Lucretius on the Cycle of Life and the Fear of Death,” *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 36, no. 1(2003): 45.

5. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, 120.

another,”<sup>6</sup> his description indicates the Cape does not keep the same eternal appearance. The repeated erosion and reconstruction do not return the cliffs to their original form, despite the circularity of the sea and land’s interaction. Thus, though the cliffs are rebuilt, they are not the same cliffs as they once were, thereby illustrate the concept of discontinuous cyclicity. It may seem a strange concept to grasp at first: a cycle that, although it ventures in a circular path, ends in a state that is similar but not identical to its start. To conceptualize this, we can return to the visualization of a spiral, where traveling in a full circle brings us to a locus either above or below the starting coordinate, but not at the same original point in space. In *Cape Cod*, Thoreau further touches upon the discontinuity of a cycle, specifically, the one between life and death, when he speaks of those drowned in the sunken shipwreck. He states, “no doubt, we have reason to thank God, that they have not been ‘shipwrecked into life again,’”<sup>7</sup> with an understanding that those who have died cannot be brought back to life. In other words, his words illustrate the idea of what has been lost cannot be completely reobtained, even if it returns to a state similar to its initial condition. It is this loss which stands at such odds with the American mindset of linear progression without fall, as to be illustrated later. As for Thoreau’s comments on the shipwrecked humans, acceptance underlies his tone when discussing their deaths, thereby implying discontinuous cyclicity between life and death as an unshakable law of the natural landscape.

In his exploration of how life and death, another paired duality in the landscape, converge on the shores of Cape Cod, Thoreau marks a single location where the two ends of a cycle overlap. In doing so, he shows how the landscape houses both life and death as part of its natural

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6. Thoreau, 120.

7. Thoreau, 10.

self-reshaping. He states that “the sea-shore is a sort of neutral ground” as a place where waves meet the land.<sup>8</sup> In his description of the shore, he posits it as “a vast *morgue*,” where “the carcasses of men and beasts together lie stately up upon its shelf, rotting and bleaching in the sun and waves, and each tide...tucks fresh sand under them.”<sup>9</sup> The comparison to a morgue as a place of death goes hand in hand with the image of corpses strewn over the sand. Then, in another passage discussing the locals that gather clams and shellfish from the sands, Thoreau notes that “the shores are more fertile than the dry land.”<sup>10</sup> Together, his observations show a connective link between life and decay embodied in the sands of the shore. The corpses deposited by the sea decompose to part of the sand, which then provides nurturing fertility for life in the new form of clams and shellfish. As summarized from the words of Lucretius, “for...ecological need...creatures die in order to free up resources (including their own bodies as food) for future generations.”<sup>11</sup> As for the conceptual link between life and death in landscape, Robert Abrams posits in *Landscape and Ideology in American Renaissance Literature*, that “the ‘exceedingly grotesque’ objects and sights Thoreau encounters on Cape Cod beach similarly resist tidy location within settled category and image.”<sup>12</sup> As they converge on the shore, life and death are inseparable as distinct categorical states of the landscape, which instead displays a cycle where life and death are interconnected. Combined with the biological process of

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8. Thoreau, 147.

9. Thoreau, 147.

10. Thoreau, 27.

11. O’Keefe, “Lucretius on Cycle of Life,” 46.

12. Robert Abrams, *Landscape and Ideology in American Renaissance Literature: Topographies of Skepticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46.

decomposition, the shore alludes to a grander cycle of life and death in which mankind is but a small part of.

In his examination of the land and sea's ongoing interaction, Thoreau's discussion suggests mankind becomes more closely united with the natural landscape in death. When describing a corpse on the shore, he observes how the bones "were alone with the beach and the sea, whose hollow roar seemed addressed to them, and [he] was impressed as if there was an understanding between them and the ocean."<sup>13</sup> In death, the corpse appears to have been accepted by the natural landscape, as seen by the way the sea "speaks" to the bones. Thoreau reiterates, "that dead body had taken possession of the shore, and reigned over it as no living one could, in the name of a certain majesty which belonged to it."<sup>14</sup> The bones on the beach unveil a fundamental design of nature where mankind only becomes strongly reconnected to the natural landscape in death. Death caused by the sea carries additional symbolism of a human returning to a place harboring the origins of its life, as the ocean is also described as a place of "inexhaustible fertility."<sup>15</sup> The idea that humankind is a mere participant in the landscape's natural cycle of life calls into question human exceptionalism to territorially govern such land in the spirit of American Manifest Destiny.

The concept of cyclicity itself contrasts with the American ideology of progress, which emphasizes social progression in linear fashion. The American ideal of Manifest Destiny embodies the concept of linear progression that continually looks forward, in hopes of growth without interruption. The term "Manifest Destiny" was first coined and used by John L.

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13. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, 85.

14. Thoreau, 85.

15. Thoreau, 94.

O’Sullivan in the *Democratic Review for July–August 1845*, in context of the annexation of Texas. In its second time of usage in the *Morning News of December 1845*, the term was applied to taking Oregon in “our manifest destiny to overspread the continent.”<sup>16</sup> The westward march of America embodies expanding the nation, improving territorial reach, and building upon the existing civilization to the reigning nation’s benefit. An important component of the tenet is the nonexistence of limits. Robert W. Johannsen articulates in his essay “The Meaning of Manifest Destiny” the sense of “boundlessness, the rejection of limits on a national as well as individual development.”<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the concept of a discontinuous cycle follows life and ends in death, where decay is the limit to life’s progression. The discontinuity of the restarted life post-rebirth only serves as another blockage to continuous, linear growth. Manifest Destiny’s concept of unlimited forward marching also embodies imposition and intrusion onto a landscape without regard for the landscape’s own abilities to reshape itself. In summary, as stated by William Boelhower in *Through a Glass Darkly*, the imperative of Manifest Destiny is appropriately stated to “EXPAND!”<sup>18</sup> The natural landscape’s discontinuous life cycle stands at odds with American unidirectional progression, which then perhaps hints at a subconscious American fear of civilizational decay.

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16. Julius W. Pratt, “The Origin of ‘Manifest Destiny,’” *The American Historical Review* 32, no. 4 (1927): 795.

17. Kenneth R. Stevens, “Reviewed Work: *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* by Robert W. Johannsen et al.,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 3 (1998): 579.

18. William Boelhower, *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 73.

The ideological avoidance of cyclic fall in Manifest Destiny is more evidently seen from an examination of the American response to heliotropic theory. In a baseline definition of heliotropic theory, also known as Apollonian theory of westward progress, “‘heliotropic’ comes from the Greek *helios* (‘sun’) and *tropos* (‘direction’). Just as the sun moves from east to west, goes the ahistorical theory, so does civilization.”<sup>19</sup> Heliotropic theory ties into the construction of empires: civilizations experience a buildup of power where, upon attaining their peaks, fall into decline. As such, the theory embodies acceptance of a cycle of growth, death, and rebirth in each new empire arising further to the west. In the words of Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt from *The Myth of the West America as the Last Empire*, the sun’s movement from east to west over the course of a day “form a self-enclosed whole, an eternal circle; applied to history, they could invoke a cyclical explanation, the belief that all that has ever been will come back again, or, in the words of a Romantic poet, that to rise, prosper, and decline is our common fate.”<sup>20</sup> As aptly put by heliotropic theory, a civilization’s growth follows the westward direction of the rising and setting sun across four empires, “Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, and Rome.”<sup>21</sup> However, the pattern of rise and fall in heliotropic theory contradicts the ever-forward, westward expansion of Manifest Destiny. In the American mindset, summarized in *Bishop Berkeley and the Progress of Arts and Learning: Notes on a Literary Convention* by Rexmond C. Cochrane, “America, though now a dependent colony, would, once self-sufficient, break away and become a new and greater

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19. John Mack Faragher and Robert V. Hine, *The American West: A New Interpretive History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 405.

20. Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt and Herbert Harvey Rowen, *The Myth of the West America as the Last Empire*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 1-2.

21. Nordholt, *Myth of West America*, 5.

Carthage in the West.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Manifest Destiny embodies the implications that America is the “highest point...in the heliotropic vein,” “the last empire” that can and will “break away” from the cycle of rise and fall.<sup>23</sup> In its response to heliotropic theory, the American mindset to maintain its everlasting empire resonates with American exceptionalism. Such American exceptionalism denies the existence of cyclicity that applies to both an empire’s lifetime and the natural cycle of the landscape which it is built upon.

As previously alluded to, in his objective regard of human bodies on the Cape Cod beach, Thoreau seems to regard the discontinuous cycle of life, death, and rebirth as an unwavering reality. The American ideals of “boundless” Manifest Destiny and exception to heliotropic theory conceptually clash with cyclicity as a fundamental order of the natural landscape.<sup>24</sup> Thoreau’s lack of human condolence or sympathy suggests his understanding of death’s inevitability, to which an argument can be made that Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism ignore such an understanding and acceptance of landscape’s cyclicity. When describing the shipwreck on the beach in the first chapter, Thoreau’s descriptions of “marble feet and matted heads” and “one livid, swollen and mangled body of a drowned girl” are clear-eyed in tone.<sup>25</sup> Even with the realization that mankind is a much less significant existence in a larger design by nature, he asks, “if this was the law of Nature, why waste any time in awe or pity?”<sup>26</sup>

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22. Rexmond C. Cochrane, “Bishop Berkeley and the Progress of Arts and Learning: Notes on a Literary Convention,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (1954): 229.

23. Nordholt, *Myth of West America*, 106.

24. Stevens, “Reviewed Work: *Manifest Destiny*,” 579.

25. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, 5.

26. Thoreau, 9.

In further support, his statement, “there is naked Nature, inhumanly sincere, wasting no thought on man” not only embodies his accepting honesty to Nature’s harshness but recognizes the landscape with respect.<sup>27</sup> The landscape is its own entity that has the capacity to reshape itself, regardless of human presence. Thus, Thoreau’s description displaces mankind as an exceptionally special existence, which sharply differs from Manifest Destiny’s concept of self-given right to advance progression over the landscape.

Thoreau’s openly observational mindset is evidenced as Abrams writes, “Thoreau thus puts enormous pressure upon perception through scrutiny of sights and scenes that disrupt categorization and blur ostensible ontological boundaries.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Thoreau’s “enormous pressure upon perception” comes with fascination, and perhaps more importantly, emotional acceptance of decay as a necessary mindset for successful, objective observation. Such a mindset of removing militant bias against Nature’s lack of mercy brings him to a state of negative knowledge dominated by open-minded attentiveness to his surroundings. In doing so, it suggests that an impeccable awareness and open presence of mind is required to accept nature’s cyclicity as reality. Through his observation of the surrounding landscape, Thoreau’s language when he “sympathized rather with the winds and waves, as if to toss and mangle these poor human bodies was the order of the day” hints at an understanding of the natural cycle of life as an unquestionable law of the landscape.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, at the time of its establishment, Manifest Destiny carried a militant, imposing tone. Its declaration is evident in Robert C.

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27. Thoreau, 147.

28. Abrams, *Landscape and Ideology*, 47.

29. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, 9.

Winthrop's speech to the House of Representatives in 1846, where he discusses a "new revelation of right which has been designated as *the right of our manifest destiny to spread over this whole continent.*"<sup>30</sup> The repeated, emphasized proclamation of a "right" reinforces human capacity to impose manmade civilization over the natural landscape. In doing so, Manifest Destiny lacks the open presence of mind that Thoreau utilizes to accept discontinuous cyclicity as a fundamental trait of the landscape. Ignorance of the landscape's cyclicity disregards how mankind is a part of the larger natural world, when in counterargument by Thomas Cole's *Course of Empire*, there exists an interaction where human civilization and landscape are interlinked in the cycle of growth, destruction, and rebirth.<sup>31</sup>

In *Course of Empire*, a series of paintings, Thomas Cole depicts the same landscape over time in stages titled *Savage State*, *Arcadian*, *Consummation of Empire*, *Destruction*, and *Desolation*. In the series of paintings, Cole portrays how the landscape changes through time with a circular pattern. In tandem, he illustrates death and rebirth for the human civilization that interacts with the painted landscape. In the first painting, *Savage State*, a patch of sun breaks through the sky, which gives a raw lighting beneath dark storm clouds over a landscape sparsely touched by human presence, save the few indigenous inhabitants. The second painting, *Arcadian*, embodies a much more domesticated atmosphere with clothed people, rolling hills, and plowed fields. Much of the untamed shrubbery in *Savage State* has been cleared out, leaving gentle slopes of green grass and trails that lead to town roofs and a colosseum in the distance. *Arcadian* thus shows the taming cultivation of a landscape to fit human domestic prosperity, thus marks

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30. Pratt, "Origin of Manifest Destiny," 796.

31. Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire*, painting, New York Historical Society, 1836.

the start of a progressing expansion of human civilization – the very ideal of Manifest Destiny’s imperative to spread civilization across wild, western lands previously considered Terra Incognita.

Unlike in *Savage State* and *Arcadian*, there is a remarkable lack of naturally growing flora in the third painting, *Consummation of Empire*. In its place are man-made constructions: architectural columns, fountains, and statues, which illustrate the idea of settler culture imposing civilization over a landscape that previously existed without human interference. The progression of the human civilization, from the sparse hunters in *Savage State* to the thriving population in *Consummation*, parallels the growth of civilization that is similarly hailed in the spirit of Manifest Destiny’s progress. Any plants in the frame are confined to vases or pots in the city, which could be taken to represent human containment and taming of natural flora – in other words, an interaction between human and landscape that is subtly hinted as a tug-of-war for dominating control. While the natural flora is obscured by the advanced human architecture, the human empire has reached the peak of its progress to prosperity in economy, cultivated lifestyle, and dominating presence over the surrounding landscape.

As the saying goes that “all good things must come to an end,” the peaked progress of the human civilization makes an abrupt descent in the fourth painting, *Destruction*. The same human population previously in *Consummation* is now wrought with slaughter and execution. The marble statue in the foreground embodies the human conflict with a pose diving into battle, shield poised over the head, with a resolute charge forward that nevertheless cements the inevitability of destruction. Interestingly, the empire’s peaking progress reflects the climax of power shown by civilizations that follow heliotropic theory. In its establishment, Manifest Destiny disregards the consequences of militant imposition as a God-given mandate that posits

“the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High – the Sacred and the True.”<sup>32</sup> However, as Cole’s series of paintings displays, the resolution of the empire’s progress does not stop the civilization from collapsing in on itself.

The final painting in the series, *Desolation*, recaptures an abundance of greenery and natural flora that have overgrown the remnants of the civilization’s constructed architecture. Notably, the raw lighting is most similar in undertone and shade to *Savage State*, which reflects a new morning of rebirth for the landscape. A prominent aspect of the painting is the lack of human presence. Shrubbery climbs the architectural ruins in an image that once again drives home the symbolism of nature returning to its reign. As can be seen, the end of the cycle is not an identical state to its start, again showing how discontinuous cyclicity aligns with the analogy of a spiral rather than a circle. The scene in *Desolation* is littered with the ruins of an empire that leave a mark on a landscape previously free of man-made architectural remnants, as in *Savage State*. Thus, the cyclicity of *Course of Empire* at the same time embodies a discontinuity of its phases, where each start follows the cycle’s pattern but bears a record of previous changes in the landscape. With the return to a landscape where nature dominates with minimal human presence, the descent of the civilization in *Course of Empire* displays a disruption in the empire’s continuity that simultaneously encompasses the landscape’s cyclicity. The growth and descent of human civilization show birth, growth, death, and ultimately rebirth in the landscape. Over time, the relationship between the natural landscape and humankind shifts in a dynamic interaction that alternates power between the hand of nature and the hand of mankind. The human

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32. Pratt, “Origin of Manifest Destiny,” 797.

civilization built atop the landscape follows a similar cycle of life and death, and as examined by Alan Wallach in “Cole, Byron, and the Course of Empire,” is also known as “cyclical theory of history” which “justified – indeed predicted – social and political change” and “civilization’s inevitable demise.”<sup>33</sup> The push-and-pull relationship between the empire and the landscape can be considered a cycle in itself, which suggests changes in the landscape and human civilization are closely linked.

The rise and fall of the empire illustrated in Thomas Cole’s paintings bring in a discussion of mindsets that have accepted cyclicity’s inevitability as part of their civilizations’ construction. Acknowledgment of an end to all progress with rebirth contrasts with the subconscious denial of decay present in Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism. One of the most notable ideologies that comes to mind is the mandate of heaven, from Confucius’s time, as applied to the civilizations of Chinese dynasties. In A.T. Nuyen’s article on “The Mandate of Heaven,” he summarizes a definition that encompasses how people shape an empire: a “liberal interpretation, of the ‘mandate of heaven’ ... allows for a popular revolt against a despotic ruler,” or in other words, “the mandate of heaven lies in the will of the people.”<sup>34</sup> In its liberal interpretation, the mandate of heaven “allows” destruction, thereby acknowledges the potential for a civilization to be torn down by its very people should they deem its rule inept. Such an admission of cyclicity, in the words of “whatever arises declines,” stands at odds with Manifest Destiny’s optimistic linearity to progress a boundlessly expanding civilization over the

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33. Allan P. Wallach, “Cole, Byron, and the Course of Empire,” *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 4 (1968): 379.

34. A. T. Nuyen, “The ‘Mandate of Heaven’: Mencius and the Divine Command Theory of Political Legitimacy,” *Philosophy East and West* 63, no. 2 (2013): 113.

landscape.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to American exceptionalism towards heliotropic theory, the mandate of heaven realizes the cycle of destruction and rebirth to manage an empire's growth of power.

Additionally, the mandate of heaven and Manifest Destiny differ sharply in regard to how they utilize divine right to justify their platforms. Such a contrast further highlights an American avoidance of recognizing discontinuity in their civilization's growth. In A.T. Nuyen's discussion, he brings up "the 'Divine Command Theory of political legitimacy,' analogous to the Divine Command Theory of morality. Just as the latter says that an action is morally obligatory (or forbidden) because God commands it (or forbids it), the former says that a ruler is legitimate (or illegitimate) because heaven has given to (or withdrawn from) the ruler the mandate to rule."<sup>36</sup> In analyzing the mandate of heaven, Nuyen pinpoints a divine right from God used to justify a civilization's construction. Notably, this divine right encompasses a baseline acceptance of conditional destruction if the empire gains too much power to support itself. With its conditional assertions – "God commands it or forbids it," "heaven has given to or withdrawn from the ruler the mandate to rule" – the mandate of heaven's addressed divine power permits destruction and rebirth.<sup>37</sup> The mandate of heaven's definition admits its civilization will inevitably follow the aforementioned "cyclical theory of history" examined in Thomas Cole's *Course of Empire* paintings that ends in "inevitable demise," followed by rebirth.<sup>38</sup> Such an accepting perspective shows similar traits to Thoreau's open mindset to the reality of death illustrated in *Cape Cod*. To reiterate, Thoreau regarded such a state of awareness as necessary to accept the inevitable cycle

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35. Nordholt, *Myth of West America*, 2.

36. Nuyen, "Mandate of Heaven," 113.

37. Nuyen, 113.

38. Wallach, "Cole, Byron, Empire." 379.

of growth, destruction, and rebirth. In doing so, the mandate of heaven upholds realization and embrace of discontinuous cyclicity – a realization and embrace not necessarily shared by American Manifest Destiny.

While Manifest Destiny also draws upon a divine right from God, it does so in a completely different way that portrays a focus on unidirectional progress. In Democratic papers from the New York *Morning News* in 1845, the editorial provides the following passage regarding Manifest Destiny: “the God of nature and of nations has marked it for our own; and with His blessing we will firmly maintain the incontestable rights He has given, and fearlessly perform the high duties He has imposed.”<sup>39</sup> There is no conditionality in O’Sullivan’s description of Manifest Destiny. The declarative diction, like “firmly maintain,” “incontestable rights,” and “fearlessly,”<sup>40</sup> all support the definitive focus on forward progress to “EXPAND!”<sup>41</sup> Unlike the mandate of heaven, which regards a God-given right to maintain a civilization’s cycle of growth and destruction, Manifest Destiny asserts a God-given right to progress without fall. Examination of this contrast amplifies an American denial of decay, evident in both Manifest Destiny’s statement and American exceptionalism. Manifest Destiny’s outwardly stated focus on growth indicates a subconscious disregard for cyclical theory of history’s predictions (a civilization with too much power will topple). Similarly, the American response to heliotropic theory presents a more openly expressed denial that the American empire will follow such a pattern of rise and fall. The American exceptionalist mindset of continuous, linear progression, in refusing the

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39. Pratt, “Origin of Manifest Destiny,” 796.

40. Pratt, 796.

41. Boelhower, *Through a Glass Darkly*, 73.

cyclical theory of history, ignores the existence of an inherently natural cyclicity in the landscape that is linked to the cyclicity of human civilization.

The question remains, then, as to where mankind stands in relation with a dynamic and constantly shifting landscape, and with what perspective American progress holds in regard to the inevitable destruction that comes with the landscape's intrinsically discontinuous cyclicity. The American ideal of boundless, linear advance, embodied in Manifest Destiny and exceptionalism to heliotropic theory, avoid considering the consequences of ignoring a prospect of downfall. The landscape's natural, discontinuous cyclicity – present when Thoreau describes the way the sea reshapes the cliffs of Cape Cod, the way the unrevivable dead can still decompose to fertilize new flora – connects to a human civilization's cycle of rise and fall. Civilization and landscape interact with one another, and cyclicity links both their changing images over time. Just as life and death are interlinked, human civilization and landscape are intertwined as well. Manifest Destiny's denial of landscape's cyclicity can be seen through the settler culture's militant imposition of its civilization on top of a land. As reflected in Thomas Cole's *Consummation of Empire*, the empire's suppression of the landscape precedes the war in *Destruction*. It serves almost as a warning to the human civilization, with its unstable increase in power, that eventually wreaks havoc on both itself and the surrounding land in its own fall.

As the American nation still progresses today in the spirit of Manifest Destiny, the rest of the human civilization occupying the globe continues to grow as well. In the current age of the Anthropocene, the "Age of Man," humankind's "technology is the driving force [of progress] ... by domesticating and controlling nature by transforming landscapes and global ecosystems."<sup>42</sup>

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42. Maria Paula Diogo et al., "Uncanny Nature: Why the Concept of Anthropocene Is Relevant for Historians of Technology," *Icon* 23 (2017): 25.

Disregarding the landscape's cyclicity while attempting to suppress it with taming control, as beheld by Manifest Destiny, may place irrevocable strains on the relationship between mankind and the natural landscape that have yet to be encountered in full. The linear mindset of American progress ignores and perhaps even subconsciously fears decay. Death and rebirth are the missing cyclic components to American-idealized progressive growth. In contrast, the mandate of heaven embraces growth reaching a peak, declining, and returning reborn in a new Chinese dynasty. Acceptance of discontinuous cyclicity's spiral structure – the dead cannot be revived, but new life can grow from their decomposition – requires a shift to an open, aware mindset that Thoreau emphasizes in his portrayal of the landscape in *Cape Cod*. Such an acknowledgment has yet to be realized by the American ideal of linear progression, as Manifest Destiny's tenet of advance stands in ideological contrast to acceptance of natural decay and rebirth. In our current age, where humankind – specifically the American empire – continues to juggle power for control of the land, the consequences of avoiding acceptance of an irrevocably linked cyclicity in human civilization's relationship with the natural landscape remain to be seen.

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