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The Cognitive Phenomenology of Doors in the Book of Revelation: A Spatial Analysis

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Received: 1 January 2019; Accepted: 8 March 2019; Published: 14 March 2019



Abstract: Following Rowland’s and Foucault’s respective observations that apocalypses are not necessarily temporal, and that historical analyses have diverted attention unduly from spatial phenomena, this paper examines Revelation using a spatial hermeneutic, comparing it to the semi-contemporaneous *Parables of Enoch*. Analyzing ostensibly similar spaces that are presented divergently, the paper focuses particular attention on “doorway” phenomena in Revelation. Recent research in cognitive psychology by Radvansky et al. suggests that passing through a doorway has a measurable cognitive effect, inducing forgetfulness of prior thoughts. Revelation employs doorway and gateway language repeatedly, while *Parables of Enoch* does not. The respective spatial emphases of Revelation and *Parables* suggest diverging engagements with a traumatized material world. References in *Parables of Enoch* to oppressive landowners and transformative goals for the earth suggest a continuing critical engagement with the material world. The lack of comparable language in Revelation suggests a comparatively more escapist perspective. Revelation combines polemic against all the “inhabitants of the earth”, an emphasis on the replacement of the old order, and the use of compensatory cultic language to orient the reader away from the existing material world. The parallel narrative employment of doorway language suggests an operative governing psychology of separation and forgetfulness in Revelation.

Keywords: apocalypse; Revelation; Parables of Enoch; space; cognitive psychology; phenomenology

1. Introduction

Scholars have long recognized that apocalypses are not simply eschatological¹ in spite of how they are popularly understood.² Christopher Rowland has pushed this observation even further to suggest that eschatological or temporal concerns are not even inherently germane to the genre.³ Further examination of the spatial dimensions of the apocalypses is still warranted to better understand this less considered aspect of their meaning. This imperative is buttressed by the observations of postmodern philosophers of space such as Michel Foucault and Edward Soja. Foucault famously suggested that undue attention to history had hampered attention to spatial realities.⁴ Soja echoes these concerns and suggests that spatial hermeneutics must be developed.⁵ He writes, “We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power . . . are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life”. Further, geographer Yi Fu Tuan has written,

¹ Carmignac (1979, pp. 79–82).

² Collins (1987, p. 4).

³ Rowland (1982, p. 14).

⁴ Foucault (1986, p. 22).

⁵ Soja (1989, p. 2).

“Every activity generates a particular spatio-temporal structure, but this structure seldom thrusts to the front of awareness . . . What compels us to reflect on experience? Untoward events”.⁶

It has been commonplace for decades to note that apocalypses (e.g., The Book of the Watchers, Daniel, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, 3 Baruch), especially early ones,⁷ often arose out of just such a traumatized environment. That such events facilitate consideration of previously neglected spatial phenomena militates further in favor of attending to the role of space in such works. And whether⁸ or not⁹ one sees a generative environment of persecutions behind the text of Revelation, it is without doubt that the loss of the Temple¹⁰ and the experience of prison for the author (Rev 1:9) were significantly shaping traumatic experiences. As such, the focus of this article is to consider spatial themes present in the book of Revelation through comparison to those employed in the semi-contemporaneous *Parables of Enoch*, that is, 1 En. 37–71. This comparison will allow examination of the significance of differences in the ways that each of these apocalypses, which otherwise share much in terms of language and background,¹¹ address and reproduce space. The utility of *Parables of Enoch* for this comparative endeavor lies in its very detailed descriptions of many spaces as part of its heavenly tour. Revelation describes many of the same places, but far less exhaustively and with less detail. Where details about these spaces appear in Revelation differently from in *Parables of Enoch*, or when they are entirely absent from the ostensibly more detailed *Parables of Enoch*, this may allow significant observations regarding the perspective of the author of Revelation.

At the outset, it must be noted that some degree of selectivity is necessary in analyzing the spaces important to the authors of *Parables of Enoch* and Revelation. Both apocalypses are rife with spatial imagery, too much in fact for close analysis with brevity. For the purposes of this examination, we have chosen to consider only a few of the relevant spaces that appear in both apocalypses with significantly different descriptive language. For instance, polemics against landowners, while important for understanding the world of the author of *Parables of Enoch*, do not appear in Revelation even in similar judgments against the powerful of the earth, while rather wholesale condemnations of “those who dwell upon the earth” appear in Revelation but not *Parables of Enoch*. The heavenly Temple is very prominent in Revelation, while effectively nonexistent in *Parables of Enoch*, in spite of the presence of descriptions of God’s court, throne, and house. Perhaps most telling is the usage of the doorway/gateway theme in Revelation in heavenly descriptions and its complete absence in *Parables of Enoch*.

That said, attention to operative cognitive phenomenologies of space is a critical aspect of spatial analysis.¹² In his landmark work, *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard wrote “Topoanalysis . . . [is] the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives”.¹³ In light of this important element of spatial analysis, some consideration of the cognitive phenomenology of space in Revelation is warranted, particularly the cognitive effects of the door/gate/threshold both in antiquity and modern scholarship. This study will enable new insights into the distinctive employment of this language in Revelation, which to this point has been effectively ignored in modern scholarship. The identification of cognitive phenomena of doorways operative in Revelation holds significant

⁶ Tuan (1977, pp. 130–31).

⁷ Among those who support this contention are Himmelfarb (2010, pp. ix–x); Portier-Young (2011, 2014, pp. 145–50); Horsley (2010); and Flusser (1978).

⁸ Gager (1975) maintained this perspective even as he set the stage for future examinations of the data underlying historical persecution claims. Schüssler-Fiorenza still supported this position in *The Book of Revelation* (Schüssler-Fiorenza 1985), suggesting that the perspective of the author was that of one experiencing exploitation.

⁹ More recent studies have dated the text later, to Domitian’s reign (Yarbro Collins 1984), and have questioned whether matters were indeed terribly challenging for the church in Asia Minor at the time (Thompson 1990; Friesen 2014).

¹⁰ The date and Jewish generative milieu make this very likely, as indicated by, among others, Yarbro Collins (1999, p. 122); Collins (2011, p. 18); and Portier-Young (2014, p. 146).

¹¹ Charlesworth (2008, p. 193–242).

¹² Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 59).

¹³ Bachelard (1994, p. 8).

implications for interpretation of the apocalypse generally, pertaining not only to its early reception but to its continued reception in modernity. This analysis, while acknowledging the anti-empire language present in the Apocalypse,¹⁴ continues the work of problematization of meaningfully “anti-empire” readings of Revelation,¹⁵ since wholesale condemnation and disengagement¹⁶ appear implied. In short, the spatial emphases present in the apocalypse point to an operative governing psychology of separation and forgetfulness, orienting the reader away from both the material world and from those who the reader believes will be judged.

2. A Consideration of “Same” Spaces: Heaven, Earth, and What Lies Between

As apocalypses, *Parables of Enoch* and Revelation both clearly involve commerce between the earthly and heavenly spheres. These relationships between the heaven and earth drive both narrative action and theological priorities. Typical apocalyptic spatial themes appear in both texts, including Hades/Sheol (Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14; and 1 En. 51:1; 56:8; 63:10); the abyss of condemnation (Rev 9:1–2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1–2; and 1 En. 53:1; 54:5 ff.; 56:3; 67:4); the wilderness/desert (Rev 12:6, 14; 17:3; and 1 En. 42:3; 60:8–9; 61:5); and visions of earthly places (mountains, valleys, the sea, islands, waters, etc.); and heavenly places (moon, sun, stars, the paths, storehouses of the winds and rains, etc.). There is attention to the earth, its inhabitants (“those who dwell upon the earth” or similar), and its seats of oppressive powers in both apocalypses, as well as to the heavenly dwelling of God and God’s throne. Thus, one might be inclined to believe that *Parables of Enoch* and Revelation feature similar constructions of space. The commonality of imagery has often been pointed out,¹⁷ yet the descriptions and usages of the spaces employed by the different authors may suggest rather different understandings of space and its significance.

2.1. Discrepancies Regarding the Earth

Much of the language related to the earth, usually rendered γῆ, in Revelation is general: often indicating concern for oppression and evil overall, but rarely indicating specifics. Beyond the fact that Jesus Christ is identified as the “ruler of the kings on earth” (ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, Rev 1:5), there is precious little positive identification attached to specifics. In fact, “the inhabitants of the earth” (οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, a designation found in some form in Rev 3:10; 6:10; 11:10; 13:8, 12; 13:14; 14:6; 17:2) are never mentioned in a positive light. They are known exclusively for persecuting the saints, allying themselves with the harlot Babylon, and being judged. This characterization, caricature even, suggests that the author’s attitude toward the existing earth is quite negative; it is perhaps even irredeemably evil and worthy of destruction, incapable of being transformed for the better. The only truly positive characterization of the earth occurs when it “came to the help of the woman” (Rev 12:16), and yet, immediately thereafter, the whole earth follows the beast “with wonder” (Rev 13:3).

In language that is almost as totalizing, the “kings of the earth” are described negatively throughout the apocalypse, except at the very outset (Rev 1:5) and in the concluding discussion of the light of the new Jerusalem: “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it”. (Rev 21:24, NRSV). The most significant language regarding the kings comes in the discussion of the harlot Babylon in chapters seventeen and eighteen: “The woman you saw is the

¹⁴ Studies which have emphasized this aspect of the text include those by Bauckham (1993) and Horsley (2008).

¹⁵ Key works highlighting the issues with entirely “anti-colonial” interpretations of Revelation include Moore (2006), who suggested that Revelation replicates many aspects of empire, Pippin (1992), who noted that the text perpetuates patriarchal structures, and Royalty (1998), who observed that the Apocalypse appropriates Rome’s wealth for the new Jerusalem.

¹⁶ Several studies, including Thompson (1990); Barr (1998); and Maier (2002), have noted the tendencies, and even outright agenda, in Revelation toward disengagement and avoidance of any imperial entanglements: economic, religious, or ideological.

¹⁷ As in Aune (2008, pp. 169–92) and Charlesworth (2008).

great city that rules over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18; see also 17:1–2; 18:2–3, 9–11). They have partaken fully of her evil.

An interesting addition to the polemics against the kings of the earth is that against merchants. In chapter eighteen, the author of Revelation has included merchants in a denunciation of the kings: "the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury" (Rev 18:3). These men are the beneficiaries of the evil practices of those who dominate the earth. At the destruction of Babylon, their sponsor, "the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her . . . for your merchants were the magnates of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery" (Rev 18:11, 23). One may be inclined to think that the polemic against merchants is indicative of a particular historical problem or concern,¹⁸ but the condemnation is more likely a literary trope against an easy target¹⁹ than a critique aimed at altering the existing, unjust state of affairs. A very similar trope appears in Ezekiel (e.g., 16:29) and in various Greek²⁰ and Latin²¹ authors. Not only so, but the simplification and demonization of merchants, along lines similar to the monstrous spectacles described by Frilingos,²² suggests less an interest in engagement and transformation and more in fantastical domination and retribution.

Though filled with much similar language, *Parables of Enoch* deals very differently with the earth (*yabs* or *medr* in Ethiopic), those who dwell in it, and those who exercise dominion on it. Even more than the author of Revelation, the author of *Parables of Enoch* exhibits significant interest in "those who dwell upon the earth", a designation that appears in it in some form at least 24 times.²³ Rather than a univocal condemnation, like the author of Revelation, the author of *Parables of Enoch* moves back and forth between intercessory concern (e.g., 1 En. 40:6–7) and judgment (e.g., 1 En. 54:9; 65:10; 66:1). The inhabitants of the earth are not one-dimensional. There is clear divine care for them (1 En. 40:6–7; 55:2; 60:5, 22). They are the recipients of revelation (1 En. 37:2, 5; 38:2). They also are judged for evil and are accountable for their actions (1 En. 53:1–2; 54:9; 55:1). They are led astray (1 En. 54:6; 67:7; 69:1). At times, they are described as participating in oppression (1 En. 55:3–4 ff.; 65:6, 12; 67:8).

This last category is of particular interest because it coincides with a very unique emphasis made by the author of *Parables of Enoch*. In 1 En. 55:4 and 67:8 "those who dwell upon the earth" are included in a list of oppressors who will be judged. In E. Isaac's translation, this list appears in other places with the alternate, and more specific designations "landowners" (1 En. 48:8) "landlords" (1 En. 62:1, 3, 6; 63:12), "those who possess the earth" (1 En. 38:4), "those who rule the earth" (1 En. 62:9), and ones "who possess the land" (1 En. 63:1). Nickelsburg and VanderKam employ similar renderings.²⁴ In this deployment, the terminology "those who dwell upon the earth" is not general in scope, but specific to those who oppress others by their dominion over the land. In a recent examination of questions related to the dating of *Parables of Enoch*, James Charlesworth²⁵ highlights the significance of this polemical language against landowners. In his estimation, the intentional addition of "those who possess the dry ground"²⁶ to a normal polemical list, e.g., "kings, governors, and high officials",²⁷ is indicative of a specific historical-political concern: namely, the appropriation of ancestral lands in the Huleh Valley by Herod and Herodian sympathizers, as depicted in Josephus (*Ant.* 17.304–314), and the disinheritance of a whole region of farmers:

¹⁸ E.g., Bauckham (1993, pp. 338–83).

¹⁹ Aune (1997, pp. 988–89).

²⁰ E.g., Hesiod, *Op.* 286; Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 4.32.

²¹ E.g., Cicero, *De officiis* 1.150; Seneca, *Medea* 361.

²² Frilingos (2004).

²³ Isaac (1983).

²⁴ Nickelsburg and VanderKam (2012).

²⁵ Charlesworth (2013, p. 51).

²⁶ 1 En. 48:8 as it appears in Knibb (1978).

²⁷ Isaac (1983).

After a discourse on the desired place to dwell, the author notes that the Chosen One will make the ground a blessing so that the “chosen ones” may finally dwell on it (45:5). When the Son of Man appears he will destroy “the kings and the powerful from their resting places” who along with “the strong” will be punished (46:4). When the Son of Man appears “the kings of the earth and *the strong who possess the dry ground . . . will not save themselves*”. (48:8)²⁸

The author, or redactor, of *Parables of Enoch* appears to be thoroughly engaged with this specific problem of the day, in possible contrast to the author of Revelation who seems more content to deal in generalities.

2.2. Discrepancies Regarding Heaven

Perhaps an even more striking difference between *Parables of Enoch* and Revelation is the depiction of the heavenly dwelling of God, specifically the area in the vicinity of the throne. In *Parables of Enoch* this area, the heavenly locus of God’s presence, is described with various permutations of the generic designation “before the Lord of Spirits”. Much less frequently employed specific terms describe the area as “underneath the wings of the Lord of Spirits” (1 En. 39:7), “the court of the Lord” (1 En. 65:6) or in its fullest description:

He carried me off my spirit, and I, Enoch, was in the heaven of heavens. There I saw—in the midst of that light—a structure built of crystals, and between those crystals tongues of living fire. And my spirit saw a ring which encircled this structure of fire. On its four sides were rivers full of living fire which encircled it. Moreover, seraphim, cherubim, and ophanim—the sleepless ones who guard the throne of his glory—also encircled it. And I saw countless angels—a hundred thousand times a hundred thousand, ten million times ten million—encircling that house. Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Phanuel, and numerous (other) holy angels that are in heaven above, go in and out of that house. (1 En. 71:5–8)²⁹

What is most striking here and most at odds with the description of the same location in Revelation (in the presence of God at the throne), is the complete lack of any language related to a temple or cultic practice in *Parables of Enoch*. Revelation, on the contrary, is overflowing with cultic language for this place. On fifteen separate occasions, this area is referred to as “the” Temple (Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 2, 19; 14:15, 17; 15:3, 6, 8; 16:1, 17; 21:22). It is filled with all the cultic appurtenances: the altar (Rev 6:9; 8:3, 5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7), the Ark of the Covenant (Rev 11:19), and incense (Rev 5:8; 8:3, 4). Worship goes on there nearly constantly, and this temple is never explicitly described as being replaced with a new version along with the “new heavens”, “new earth” and “new Jerusalem”. One might argue that the referents to “that house” (*we’ etu sete*) in *Parables of Enoch* suggest the technical phrase “house of God” (*’elohim bet*) used often in the Hebrew Bible for the Temple, but an Ethiopic corollary of the technical phrase “house of God” never appears. The difference between the two apocalypses in this area could not be starker. Either the Temple does not seem to be a crucial concern to the author of *Parables of Enoch*, or it was perhaps so compromised in the mind of the author that he or she had consciously divorced the language of the Temple from that of God’s heavenly dwelling.³⁰

2.3. Discrepancies Regarding What Lies Between: A Door!

While each apocalypse presents earth and heaven explicitly, the liminal space between is largely assumed, but not entirely. Revelation describes a door between heaven and earth (4:1), but *Parables of Enoch* does not. Perhaps the most telling aspect of the differentiated spatial depictions in *Parables of Enoch* and Revelation is the regular notation, emphasis even, of doors and gates in Revelation and

²⁸ Charlesworth (2013, p. 48) emphasis original.

²⁹ Isaac (1983).

³⁰ As suggested by Himmelfarb (1993, p. 20; 2006, pp. 21–22).

their parallel utter absence of notation in *Parables of Enoch*. Though some do not consider doorways to be a space in and of themselves, they do in fact constitute a meaningful liminal space. Moreover, their very nature—of connecting other spaces—bears significantly on spatial analysis. *Parables of Enoch* is bereft of any language specifically referencing doors or gates, in spite of their presence elsewhere in the greater composite corpus of 1 Enoch, and of the bare fact that they certainly would pertain to the spaces described in the apocalypse, such as the habitations of the righteous and the divine dwelling-place. Yet doors and gates seem not to be important to the author's particular vision of heaven or to the world produced by the apocalypse. Conversely, the author of Revelation not only connects earth and heaven via a door, but uses the door/gate theme repeatedly.

3. Further Examination of Doors and Gates in Revelation

At the first appearance of this theme, in the proclamation to the church in Philadelphia, it is said: "Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut" (Rev 3:8). The implication in the passage is that the open door is one to heaven for the hearers and is not open to those who are disobedient. The hearer is encouraged to be one of those who enter through the door, that is, to imagine themselves entering through. The next proclamation, to the church in Laodicea, also includes doorway language: "Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To the one who conquers, I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev 3:20–21). Here the state of fellowship with Christ is defined by whether one permits Christ to enter through the door. The implication of not allowing Christ to pass through is that judgment will remain upon those within, whereas if he is allowed to enter, the judgment is forgotten and full fellowship granted. Further, the narrative action suggests that the one who has eaten with Christ then goes with him to sit on his throne (3:21), implying exit through the door.

The transition between the messages to the churches and the subsequent "heavenly journey" occurs at the beginning of chapter four with "After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open!" (Rev 4:1, RSV). This is the most explicit employment of the language of doorway transit in the Apocalypse. In this instance, the door marks a separation between the earthly temporal concerns of the first three chapters and the heavenly transcendent language of the subsequent ones. Chapter four in particular is known for the vivid visual stimuli that meet the reader upon transiting the door in the heavens.³¹ After the door, not only does the apocalypse shift in tone and focus, but much of the parenetic language of exhortation and contingency from chapters 1 to 3 is forgotten in favor of descriptive and definitive visionary language.

In considering this door and gate language, it is important to remember the observation made by Merleau-Ponty that one cannot imagine a space without imagining oneself in that space.³² This allows us to expect that a reader or hearer of Rev 11:1–2 would, along with the recipient of the divine command, imagine him or herself entering the temple of God through the gates to measure it and "the altar and those who worship in it" (NRSV). Soon thereafter, the reader would imagine the transit into heaven of the two revived prophets (Rev 11:10–12) upon their being called to "ascend here!" Christopher Rowland has suggested that even the indirect expression "the heavens opened" implies the operation of a door to peer through if not pass through,³³ and, if this is so, it seems likely that this transit to heaven would be imagined to include transit through the aforementioned "door" in the heavens (Rev 4:1). This same implied doorway idea is again invoked in Rev 11:19, according to which the temple of God "was opened" and the interior seen. The language of 11:12 is echoed later, in the passage describing the fall of Babylon, in which a voice from heaven commands those dwelling in

³¹ Whitaker (2015).

³² Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 101).

³³ Rowland (1982, p. 78).

Babylon the similar words “Come out” (Rev 18:4). This is either an admonition to “disengage” or to “come through the door in the heavens to heaven”, or both.

The remainder of the explicit language on this theme concerns the twelve gates of the new Jerusalem described at the end of Revelation (Rev 21:12–13, 15, 21, 25; 22:14–15, 17). The gates are always open (21:25), but only the righteous may enter (21:27). The gates mark the boundary between those who enter into blessed communion with God and those left outside in judgment, that is, the “sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (Rev 22:15). In the account of the vision, the recipient imagines both entry through the gates (21:27) and being in the city (Rev 21:22–22:5), identifying with the righteous. All evil is excluded and forgotten. Finally, parenetic exhortations return following this vision, encouraging the reader or hearer to be among the blessed ones who “enter the city by the gates” (Rev 22:14). The exhortations to “come” that appear three times thereafter in 22:17 and conclude with the admonition to “come . . . take the water of life” refer most directly to the water that was just described as flowing inside the city (Rev 22:1–2). Imagining taking it at this point in the narrative would involve imagining entry through the gates into the blessed city. This conclusion with entry through the gates of the new Jerusalem indicates the importance of this image to the author and to the work as a whole.

4. A Cognitive Phenomenology of Doors

The cognitive phenomenology of doors may hold an important key to interpreting the significance of the doorway and gateway language in Revelation. Of course, various sources attest that thresholds have an important liminal function in the demarcation of sacred space. The Hebrew Bible and Hellenistic-era Jewish literature clearly preserve interest in the doors and gates of the Temple, Jerusalem, and heaven (Gen 28:17; Ps 78:23; Isa 54:12; 60:11; Ezek 10:19; 40 ff.; Tob 13:16–17; 3 Macc 6:18; 2 Esd 3:19). We find repeated mentions of “those who guard the threshold” of the Temple (2 Kgs 22:4; 23:4; 25:18; 1 Chron 9:19; 2 Chron 34:9; Jer 35:4; 52:24). In 1 Sam 5:1–5, the god Dagon was discovered broken upon the threshold. The theophany of Isaiah 6 involves the shaking of the threshold (Isa 6:4). Both 1 Kings 14:17 and Zeph 1:9 suggest that the threshold represents a significant event horizon. And certainly, one need look no further than the Rabbis for extensive discussions of just what happens at the threshold or gate with respect to purity and sanctity (e.g., b. Shabbat 6a, 8b, 9a, 91b). Indeed, the cognitive phenomenology of doorways is so extensive and opens so many possibilities for analysis that Gaston Bachelard, in his rather exhaustive treatment of the phenomenology of intimate spaces, decides that he must deal with doorways only briefly due to the too-extensive possibilities. An open door can express potentialities, or a closed one limitations. It can operate to include or exclude. And he writes, “Is [s]he who opens a door and [s]he who closes it [even] the same being?”³⁴

4.1. Cognitive Phenomenology of “Doorways” in Recent Scholarship

While many options could be considered, a recent study of the cognitive phenomenology of doorways by researchers at the University of Notre Dame is likely instructive for our purposes. This study, entitled “Walking Through Doorways Causes Forgetting: Further Explorations”,³⁵ confirmed a long-suspected, and increasingly established correlation³⁶ between the action of passing through a doorway and the precipitation of forgetfulness relating to what one was thinking about before passing through the door.

The researchers ran tests on subjects using a virtual environment similar to a video game, in which participants attempted to memorize the characteristics of a particular object and then used their digital avatar to “transport” the object to another location in the digital environment. Once in the new

³⁴ Bachelard (1994, p. 224).

³⁵ Radvansky et al. (2011).

³⁶ As described in Kurby and Zacks (2008); Swallow et al. (2009); and Zacks et al. (2009).

location, the test subjects were quizzed for how much they remembered about the object characteristics and how quick their recall was. The study found that, in this digital environment, the process of moving from one virtual room to another through a virtual “door” induced a statistically significant drop in recall speed and content compared with recall for object transport to another location within a virtual room, that is, without transiting a door.

The experiment was repeated with various monitor sizes used to display the digital environment to approximate varying degrees of “immersion” in the virtual environment, but there were only small differences recorded between measured degrees of “immersion”. The experiment was also repeated in like terms in the nonvirtual, physical environment of the lab with, once again, similar, but somewhat more dramatic results. Memory of object characteristics was quicker and better within the room and dropped off significantly after having passed through a doorway.

In order to determine whether recall was affected mainly by the location of memorization and recall, the researchers used a virtual environment to allow subjects to memorize object characteristics, leave the room through a virtual doorway, and then return back through the doorway to the original virtual location to attempt to remember the object characteristics. Interestingly, recall remained depressed even when attempted in the original location, isolating the primary effect of forgetfulness to the experience of transiting the doorway.

To quote the authors, “when people pass through a doorway to move from one location to another, they forget more information than if they do not make the shift”.³⁷ This is thought to occur either to prepare the mind for perception of new information or stimuli, or as a simple result of the experience of new stimuli driving previous thoughts away. The results clearly indicated that transit through a doorway had a similar cognitive effect, whether in a “real” material environment or in a virtual “imagined” one, without much effect from the degree of immersion in the “virtual” environment.

This observation of the equivalency of effects between “real” and “imagined” environments should not be surprising in light of observations made at least as early as the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He wrote:

The essence of consciousness is to provide itself with one or several worlds, to bring into being its own thoughts before itself, as if they were things, and it demonstrates its vitality indivisibly by outlining these landscapes for itself and then by abandoning them. The world structure, with its two stages of sedimentation and spontaneity, is at the core of consciousness.³⁸

The analysis of this paper assumes that this equivalency of effects between the “real” and “imagined” is extensible to at least partial equivalency between material and textual environments. As such, among the associations with doorways that we must consider relevant for our analysis of Revelation is this one, according to which, passing through a doorway, gateway, or similar portal, or even just imagining such, is highly associated with the cognitive function, or induction, of forgetfulness.

4.2. Plausible Function of the “Doorway” Cognitive Phenomenon in Antiquity

One objection to making much of this association is the protest that Revelation is largely derivative of Ezekiel. Gates appear frequently in Ezekiel, so is it not likely that their presence in Revelation simply indicates employment of a literary trope, that is to say, rote borrowing from Ezekiel? Though Revelation certainly draws on Ezekiel, the relative prominence of doorways and gates in Revelation compared to Ezekiel militates against this objection. In Ezekiel there are exhaustive and detailed descriptions of the whole built environment of the Temple, not just the gates. The gates are included, but do not seem to receive really special attention. Conversely, in Revelation the gates are more

³⁷ Radvansky et al. (Radvansky et al. 2011, p. 1632).

³⁸ Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 130).

prominent compared to the total picture of descriptive language, which largely focuses on actions. Also, in Ezekiel there is not the same emphasis on replacing the existing reality of Jerusalem or the Temple. They are improved, in some ways miraculously, but they are the same city and Temple. In Revelation, the emphasis is on a new one. The old earthly spaces all pass away. The slate is wiped clean. In Ezekiel, there is separation that occurs between the sides of the gates, but those outside the gates are still involved in the function of the Temple. In Revelation, those outside are utterly excluded.

Another possible objection to the relevance of this cognitive phenomenon for the interpretation of Revelation is related to the protest that this study was only completed in 2011. How could Roman-era Jews have possibly been aware of this phenomenon? Certainly, they had not made a scientific study of this phenomenon, but they may have been consciously, or unconsciously, aware of it. P.M. Phillips speculates that the author of the prologue to the Gospel of John, for instance, employed the prologue as a textual threshold intended to induce befuddlement or forgetfulness, allowing a new Christological understanding of the *logos* to be established in the mind of the listener.³⁹ In fact, several biblical passages may allude, more literally but indirectly, to the operation of the phenomenon, including discussion of “forgetting God” after being delivered from the “house of Egypt” (Deut 6:12; 8:14), the pharaoh’s cupbearer forgetting Joseph when he exited the prison (Gen 40:23), the foolish man in James forgetting what he looks like in a mirror immediately upon “going out” from there (Jas 1:24), or even Peter’s immediate forgetfulness upon departure of Jesus’ warning to him at the last supper, only remembered when the cock crows (Matt 26, Mark 14, Luke 22).

Admittedly, the apparently glancing similarities of these passages may only strain credulity; however, definitive evidence for the phenomenon can be found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria. In his discussion of the Temple, in *De ebrietate* he writes:

To [a perfect man] it is permitted to enter once a year and behold the sights which are forbidden to others, because in him alone of all resides the winged and heavenly yearning for those forms of good which are incorporeal and imperishable. And so . . . when he approaches . . . ignorance and the condition of the uninstructed are forgotten . . . when [he] enter[s] into the tabernacle of testimony . . . (34.136–138 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL])

Here we clearly see forgetfulness of what was in the mind before passing a doorway, and the changing of attention to other things in light of that passing. This becomes even clearer in a passage from *De somniis II*. Philo, in describing the actions of the high priest writes:

“about the high priest: ‘When *he enters* . . . into the Holy of Holies, he’ . . . *forgets all else, forgets [him]self*, and [*the mind*] fixes its thoughts and memories on [God] alone Whose attendant and servant it is, to whom it dedicates not a palpable offering, but incense, the incense of consecrated virtues”. (34.230–232 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL])⁴⁰

Here we see again a clear cognitive effect of forgetfulness operative in the priest as a result of passing through the entrance to the holy of holies. It would appear then that the operation of the phenomenon in question, an association of passing a doorway with forgetfulness, is at least represented in Philo and was likely operative in antiquity. This increases the likelihood that the author of Revelation may have been shaped, at least unconsciously or unwittingly, by an awareness of the phenomenon. This is not to suggest that there is explicit evidence of the phenomenon in Revelation, as in Philo, but rather that, in light of the indirect evidence, it is likely to be operative and, to some degree, hermeneutically explanatory.

³⁹ Phillips (2006, pp. 139–40).

⁴⁰ Emphasis added.

5. Discussion: What Doors and Gates May Indicate about Earth and Heaven

It seems likely that the presence of the very significant language of doorways and gates in Revelation, and the deployment of that language in concert with its theological interests, suggests a subtle but important theological distinction between Revelation and *Parables of Enoch* in their respective orientations toward the material world and its concerns.

It is becoming increasingly common for scholars with postcolonial interests to emphasize the political commitments of Revelation and anti-empire polemic.⁴¹ This is not unimportant. But, it seems likely, based both on the thematic spatial differences between Revelation and *Parables of Enoch* and, particularly the role of doorways and gates in Revelation, that the author of Revelation is actually inclined further away from detailed engagement with the material and quotidian struggles of earthly reality than is the author of *Parables of Enoch*.

While it would not be fair to argue that the author of Revelation is not at all interested in the political concerns of his or her time and place,⁴² it may be fairer to say that he or she seems less oriented toward transforming the existing earthly structures of power to undo specific instances of earthly oppression than the author of *Parables of Enoch*. Specific concerns that appear in the direct addresses to individual congregations (Rev 2:1–3:22) are not explicitly politically oriented, in spite of the suggestion by some scholars that “worship is a political protest”.⁴³ These concerns are spiritual and, as previously mentioned, directed toward enabling escape or disengagement from the existing, corrupted, and possibly traumatized world.⁴⁴ The author of *Parables of Enoch* appears to be very interested in remembering the injustice done, seeing it judged, and seeing the *existing* earth and heaven fixed: “On that day, I shall cause my Elect One to dwell among them. I shall transform heaven and make it a blessing of light forever. I shall also transform the earth and make it a blessing” (1 En. 45:4–5).⁴⁵ The author of Revelation seems more interested in forgetting the memory. The existing, traumatized heaven and earth vanish (e.g., Rev 6:12ff.; 20:11; 21:1). They are replaced with new heavens, new earth and new Jerusalem (Rev 21:1–2). The old simply pass away.

In the process of reading or hearing the apocalypse, the reader imagines passing through the successive doors and gates with the author, ending up in the new Jerusalem, forgetting what lies behind. Even the emotions associated with those previous places “have passed away” (Rev 21:4) when God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (Rev 21:4; see also Rev 7:17). “Wipe” is the operative word here, as those punished outside the gates at the denouement of Revelation receive barely even a mention. The generic and totalized enemies of the middle of Revelation are essentially forgotten except for a brief tropological vice list, ending in liquidation (Rev 21:8).

There is a good deal of support for the idea that the author of Revelation, and possibly the communities that received it favorably, had suffered greatly and were mourning the loss of the Temple. The heavenly temple and the heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation are consolatory, as per classical definitions,⁴⁶ and compensatory in their function in a utopic, or heterotopic, sense.⁴⁷ But it seems increasingly likely that the tone of the apocalypse leans toward forgetting and disengagement with the known, and traumatized, material world, especially when compared with *Parables of Enoch*. It appears that the author of Revelation has turned much of his or her attention away from the earthly details of oppression. The focus is on the memory wipe that will occur with the institution of the New Jerusalem.

⁴¹ E.g., Friesen (2001); Maier (2002); and Friesen (2014).

⁴² Pace Schüssler-Fiorenza (1985); Bauckham (1993); Carter (2002); Horsley (2008); Pagels (2012).

⁴³ Carter (2002, p. 486).

⁴⁴ As Thompson (1990); Maier (2002); and Barr (1998).

⁴⁵ Isaac (1983).

⁴⁶ See Parsenios (2005, pp. 96–98) and Holloway (2005, p. 4).

⁴⁷ E.g., Foucault (1986, p. 27).

One must not, however, argue too forcefully for the development of an ethic (or anti-ethic) of disengagement and forgetting in Revelation. It *does* represent a departure from the mindset that generated *Parables of Enoch*, but only of degree, not of kind. Apocalypses, by their very phenomenology, are productions of alternate worlds which transcend but also inherently inform engagement with the pre-existing world.⁴⁸ In this sense, *Parables of Enoch* still produces an alternate, idealized world which could be deemed escapist, even as it seeks to critique and judge the depredations of the known world. Conversely, Revelation, though very plausibly escapist, still alters the existing material world through the production of an alternate world of critique, in line with normative functions of apocalypses,⁴⁹ and healing, through ideal “site attachment”.⁵⁰ This alternate vision was clearly effective and was cherished by many who were exposed to the apocalypse.⁵¹ Furthermore, the reader, or hearer, upon finishing Revelation, still “returns” to the known world and must decide what to do. It should be noted that neither of these texts was ever intended to be read in isolation, but are productions for religious communities shaped by other religious texts. To think that the perspective of one apocalypse was ever intended to obliterate the previous perspectives of honored scripture is injudicious. The departure of Revelation is marked, but not complete.

6. Conclusions

It seems likely from the preceding analysis that the mode of engagement with a traumatized material world suggested by the spatial emphases of the author of Revelation represents a departure, at least from that employed by the author of *Parables of Enoch*. In *Parables of Enoch*, the author’s references to oppressive landowners and transformative goals for the heavens and earth suggest a meaningful and critical engagement with particular social struggles in the material world. That is to say, it envisions a somewhat “realistically alternative possible future”.⁵² The lack of similar specific language in Revelation, combined with the author’s polemic against all “those who dwell upon the earth”, the emphases on the disappearance of the old order and its replacement with a new one, the compensatory cultic language, and most especially the significant use of doorway language, interwoven, as it is, with themes of both exclusion and forgetfulness, suggests an orientation toward the existing world that is comparatively less engaged and more escapist. That doors and gates appear so prominently, and that the reader or listener is invited to pass through them, implicates the cognitive phenomenological processes suggested in the studies by Radvansky et al.,⁵³ according to which, the passing of a doorway, whether physical or imagined, induces forgetfulness in the subject. The operation of this phenomenon appears consonant with the narrative logic, spatial structure, and theology of Revelation.

It would be too speculative to suggest a particular direction of influence between the general authorial perspective posited and the spatial phenomena, particularly of doors, highlighted in this study. It is perhaps more provident to say that the two appear to cohabit comfortably, co-confirming and co-magnifying. A world-negating perspective is not the exclusive product of forgetfulness, nor vice versa. Nor is disengagement from worldly struggles the necessary result of a narrative of door or gate transit, but rather, it may be enhanced by it. At root, it makes sense why an author who had experienced prison, and who held a very negative view of the extremely powerful empire doing the imprisoning, would gravitate, even unconsciously, toward an experience of cognitive phenomena that enabled disengagement and forgetfulness of these difficulties and enabled focus on a compensatory, ideal vision of the world. And regardless of whether the phenomenology of doorways fits with the

⁴⁸ Newsom (2014, p. 211).

⁴⁹ Magdalino (1993, p. 6).

⁵⁰ Allen (2004, p. 40).

⁵¹ Kovacs and Rowland (2004, p. 250).

⁵² Allen (2004, p. 292).

⁵³ Radvansky et al. (2011).

overall tone of the Apocalypse, it remains that the proposed phenomenon is likely very relevant for interpreting the experience of reading, or hearing, and imagining along with the text of Revelation now.

The interpretive observations regarding Revelation that are presented in this article allow, at least at a very general level, a kind of harmony of interpretive trends in studies of the Apocalypse. The author's orientation is clearly against the Roman empire, as indicated by many recent postcolonial readings.⁵⁴ But at times this condemnation appears stereotyped and not oriented toward engaged meaningful transformation for the better, as indicated in readings that see the author's colonial critique as ineffective, or compromised.⁵⁵ Rather, the author's employment of spatial language, particularly that of doorways, seems to indicate an attitude of disengagement toward the empire and forgetful escapism from the world, in accord with some readings from at least Thompson⁵⁶ onward.⁵⁷ The effect of Revelation's spatial phenomena could then be viewed both as "therapeutic", in line with broader conclusions suggested by Gager,⁵⁸ and "cathartic", as posited by Yarbrow Collins,⁵⁹ but not oriented around fostering engagements with, or transforming, Rome.

In light of these observations, it is too much to say that Revelation is entirely escapist. That would be to misread the genre (as many modern readers are wont to do). However, it seems safe to say that the differences in spatial emphases between *Parables of Enoch* and Revelation indicate possibly significant discrepancies between the respective authors' approaches to engagement with the existing, traumatized world. We must return to Merleau-Ponty's contention that one cannot imagine a place without imagining oneself in that place.⁶⁰ If this is so, the cognitive phenomenology of the doorway⁶¹ may provide a helpful interpretive guide to understanding not only the mindset of the author (or authors) of Revelation and its initial community of reception, but also the modern communities of reception, who in passing the gates of the Apocalypse themselves often appear forgetful both of earthly concerns and of those they believe will suffer judgment outside the gates.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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⁵⁴ Among them, as noted earlier, Bauckham (1993); Horsley (2008); and Friesen (2001, 2014).

⁵⁵ Some of the most salient among the proliferation of studies on this topic are those by Pippin (1992); Royalty (1998); Frilingos (2004), and Moore (2006).

⁵⁶ Thompson (1990).

⁵⁷ E.g., Barr (1998) and Maier (2002).

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⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 101).

⁶¹ Radvansky et al. (2011).

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