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INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Riddle of 'I'

The subject of this study is the identity of the 'I' in Romans 7. Few, if any, passages in the Pauline corpus have attracted more sustained attention. And yet few passages continue to leave interpreters with so many unanswered questions and lingering uncertainties. Comments to the effect that the passage is supremely difficult to understand are not hard to find.[1]

The first-person singular pronoun 'I' is, in principle, the least ambiguous pronoun from a grammatical point of view, since it refers to only one person and is self-referential.[2] Given that there is no longer any significant dissent from the view that Paul authored the letter to the Romans,[3] it is ironic that the identity of the 'I' has become, of all issues, the most vexed. Of course, it is too straightforward to say that 'I' is self-referential, since the self-reference is not authorial when the 'I' is used fictively. Nevertheless, given the length of the ἐγώ's speech in Rom 7, the interpreter would expect to be able to clarify the pronoun's function. There are two reasons why what ought to be a straightforward task is, in fact, a very difficult one.

First, the ἐγώ speaks within a context marked by a great antithesis that divides up the world and its inhabitants. On the one side stands Adam, and an accompanying reign of sin and death (5:12–21), and those who, as subjects of this reign, are slaves of sin (6:15–23). On the other side stands Christ, and the reign of righteousness and life (5:12–21), and those who, as subjects of this reign, are slaves of God (6:15–23). In Paul's map of the cosmos there appears

[1] Wright, 1991, 196: 'The passage is, of course, notoriously difficult.' Hofius, 2002, 104: 'Die Verse Röm 7,7–25 gehören ohne Zweifel zu den schwierigsten Abschnitten des Römerbriefs wie der Paulusbriefe überhaupt.' Kuula, 2003, 238: 'There is little hope that, in the manner of Theseus of old, an exegetical hero will emerge to provide the definitive solution to the problems of this passage and convince other scholars.' Westerholm, 2004, 134: 'No chapter in the Pauline corpus has aroused more controversy than Romans 7, and no question in that difficult chapter is more disputed than the identity of the "I" who speaks there.'

[2] Fasulo and Zucchermaglio, 2002, 1122.

[3] See further, Cranfield, 1975, 1–2; Longenecker, 2011, 3–5.

to be no middle ground. But it is far from clear on which side the ἐγώ belongs. Within the church's reception of Paul, the question of the ἐγώ's identity quickly took on a life of its own, being inseparable from debates over the nature of conversion, grace and obedience.[4] Nevertheless, the question itself is clearly informed by the surrounding context of the ἐγώ's speech. Different parts of the text seem to belong most naturally on one side of the Pauline antithesis, and it is a relatively straightforward task to draw up a list of the apparently opposing elements.[5]

Secondly, compounding this problem is the challenge of fitting the ἐγώ into Paul's autobiography. No-one has highlighted this more forcibly than Kümmel in his influential 1929 monograph. The problem with understanding 7:7–13, a section marked with past tenses, as a description of Paul's past is that it is hard to imagine a time within Paul's Jewish upbringing when he was without the law.[6] The problem with understanding 7:14–25, marked by the present tense, as a confession of the believing apostle is, quite simply, that Paul's deeply pessimistic depiction hardly fits the life of a believer.[7] This difficulty is not easily resolved by reading vv. 14–25 as a present depiction of Paul's past experience, since the resulting picture of angst is very different from the way Paul portrays his past elsewhere, especially in Phil 3:4–6.[8]

The reasons why the question is so difficult to resolve are also the reasons why it is important to the interpretation of Paul. Dunn's statement that our understanding of Rom 7 'will in large measure determine our understanding of Paul's theology as a whole'[9] risks overstatement, but not by much. A passage tied to our understanding both of Paul himself and the fundamental structures of his theology is obviously of great importance. Käsemann, for example, argues that if the ἐγώ is understood to be a Christian, then 'all that Paul says about baptism, law, and the justification of the ungodly, namely, all that he says about the break between the aeons, will have to be interpreted differently.'[10]

However, nowadays, many scholars doubt that quite so much hangs in the balance over our interpretation of the ἐγώ. Kümmel's anti-autobiographical reading of Rom 7 was accompanied by an argument for understanding the

[4] See further, Chester, 2010.
[5] As done, for example, by Schreiner, 1998, 379–392.
[6] Kümmel, 1974, 76–84 (originally Kümmel, 1929).
[7] Kümmel, 1974, 97–109.
[8] Kümmel, 1974, 109–117.
[9] Dunn, 1975, 257.
[10] Käsemann, 1980b, 211. We will return to Käsemann's concern later, in our discussion of 7:25.

'I' as a fictive *Stilform* that has parallels within both Paul and other Greek literature.[11] Not only was his thesis quickly adopted as an answer to the problem of the 'I',[12] but he created the context within which Stendahl could argue that 'the anthropological references in Rom 7 are seen as means for a very special argument about the holiness and goodness of the Law.'[13] Stendahl's concern was a hermeneutical one: Paul was still being interpreted through the lens of late medieval piety, which read into the apostle an introspective conscience that he did not have. This misreading was nowhere more apparent than in Rom 7, where Paul's argument for the integrity of the law had been usurped by a fixation on man's predicament.[14] Although Kümmel's fictive ἐγώ has not stood the test of time,[15] Stendahl's legacy is a lasting one. Now it is common for interpreters to read Rom 7 as an apology for the law and to relegate anthropology to a matter of secondary significance.[16] Therefore, some scholars suggest that it is time to abandon 'the pitfall of persevering about the identification of the "I"'.[17] In this study, we seek to do the very opposite: to reopen the investigation. We hope to show that what is a matter of secondary significance to Stendahl and his heirs is, in fact, integral to Paul's argument concerning the law.[18]

1.2 The Return to a Fictive 'I'

The literature devoted to the study of Rom 7 is vast. Lichtenberger, who devotes more than one hundred pages to the task of summarising it,[19]

[11] Kümmel, 1974, 119–132.

[12] See especially Bultmann, 1961, 147 (originally Bultmann, 1932), who considered the matter settled. Westerholm, 2004, 134, notes that in the wake of Kümmel, 'Hübner, Sanders, and Räisänen, each of whom has written a major monograph on Paul and the law, do not feel the need to address this particular problem in depth.'

[13] Stendahl, 1977, 93. Originally Stendahl, 1963.

[14] Stendahl, 1977, 91–94.

[15] For telling critiques, see especially Wilckens, 1980, 76–77; Theissen, 1987, 194–204; Seifrid, 1992a, 150–152; Laato, 1995, 111–145; Thurén, 2002, 425–428. As Seifrid, 1992b, 314, notes, Kümmel's 'I' fits neither the context of the passage (in which Paul identifies himself with his readers), nor the thought of the passage (human encounter with the law is hardly an idea alien to Paul's experience as a Jew), nor the parallels Kümmel cites.

[16] For example, Wilckens, 1980, 75, Moo, 1996, 424, and Schreiner, 1998, 358, all assert that the central topic of Rom 7 is *not* anthropology *but* the Mosaic law.

[17] Gaventa, 2013, 90. For Gaventa, however, as for Meyer, 1990, whom she follows, Rom 7 is not about the law (or the ἐγώ) but about the power of sin.

[18] See especially the introductions to Chapters 5 and 6 for the interrelationship of the law and the ἐγώ.

[19] Lichtenberger, 2004, 1–104. See also: Lambrecht, 1992, 59–91; Seifrid, 1992b, 313–320; Middendorf, 1997, 15–51; Jewett, 2007, 441–445; Chester, 2010.

notes 'doch ist er weit davon entfernt, eine repräsentative Gesamtschau der kirchlich-theologischen Rezeption dieses Textes zu bieten.'[20] We will not retrace the ground that Lichtenberger has so ably covered, but instead evaluate in detail the contribution of Stanley Stowers, a name lacking from Lichtenberger's survey,[21] but someone whose interpretation of Rom 7 is, nevertheless, by far the most influential of the past two decades. We will devote the next chapter to a close study of Stowers' *prosopopoeia* thesis. For now, we will briefly sketch the context of his contribution, which will highlight its critical significance for the question we are addressing.

As Theissen has noted, there are three broad categories for understanding the ἐγώ in Rom 7: it is a personal 'I', a typical 'I', or a fictive 'I'.[22] However, this risks oversimplifying the issue, since it is hard to find a personal/autobiographical reading of the ἐγώ that denies its typical/representative function. The view of the later Augustine, often considered the pioneer of autobiographical readings of the ἐγώ, was that the ἐγώ of 7:14–25 was a *believer* under grace, caught between the opposing forces of flesh and Spirit.[23] There is, likewise, no sharp line of demarcation between a typical and a fictive 'I', since there may be particular *rhetorical* reasons why an author presents himself as a representative figure.[24] In fact, already from the time of Origen and the early Augustine, understanding the rhetorical function of the 'I' was considered an important aspect of identifying the ἐγώ.[25]

What was new about Kümmel's thesis was an argument for how this rhetorical 'I' could be *purely fictive* and, therefore, bear no relation to Paul's own experience. Of course, the attraction of this view is that it

[20] Lichtenberger, 2004, 15.

[21] Lichtenberger, 2004, 74–87, covers English-speaking scholarship, but without Stowers.

[22] Theissen, 1987, 191.

[23] See Augustine, 1994; Chester, 2010, 140; Bright, 2005, 71–72. What is now commonly referred to as the 'Augustinian' reading is the view of the later Augustine.

[24] See, for example, Thurén, 2002, 431–438, who argues for a rhetorical, representative use of 'I' in Rom 7.

[25] The 'early' Augustine, who understood the ἐγώ of Rom 7 to be living in the second stage of the four stages of man ('sub lege positus ante gratiam': cf. Landes, 1982, 16; Bright, 2005, 69–71), understood the ἐγώ as Paul putting himself in the place of someone who was under the law (Chester, 2010, 139). This is very similar to the position that Origen adopted. As we will see in the next chapter, Origen understood Paul, from 7:14 onwards, to be adopting a persona for the sake of the weak believers in Rome. Although often credited with taking very different approaches to the ἐγώ (e.g. Reasoner, 2005, 80–81), this point of connection between the early Augustine and Origen is a significant one.

sweeps away, in a stroke, every difficulty with harmonising the ἐγώ with Paul's own experience or his understanding of Christian identity. However, the problem, beyond those already noted, is that the struggle that the ἐγώ narrates sounds like it is *someone's* experience. Stendahl's suggestion, that later interpreters have been misled because Paul 'happened to express [his] supporting argument' about the law so well,[26] fails to explain *why* Paul chose a form of argumentation that gave such realism to the experience of the ἐγώ. As Beker notes, 'the personal tone of vv. 14–25 seems inexplicable, if not deceptive, if it in fact describes something that was completely alien to Paul's Jewish experience.'[27]

The solution for Beker, and many others, has been to read 7:7–25, including vv. 14–25, as Paul's Christian perspective on his former Jewish life.[28] This solution is, according to Jewett, 'the most plausible of the basic approaches to the enigma of Rom 7.'[29] Engberg-Pedersen considers it 'established that Paul is describing an experience of living under the Mosaic Law as seen from the Christ-believing perspective.'[30] However, Seifrid has exposed the fundamental flaw of this popular approach. First, it actually involves reading the text as expressing *two* different viewpoints, dividing it into those parts that represent Paul's past perspective (7:15, 18b–19) and those parts that represent Paul's present perspective on his former life (7:21–24). Secondly, the passage is introduced in 7:14 by the first-person plural οἴδαμεν, 'which links the narrative to the present which Paul shares with his readers.' And, thirdly, the anticlimatic v. 25b is marked as having present reference by the preceding exclamation of thanks to God through Christ.[31] To our knowledge, Seifrid's telling criticisms of the retrospective view have not yet been answered.

If 7:14–25 describes the human situation before the coming of Christ, then, as Winger neatly puts it, 'if Paul is talking about himself he is not talking about his present self, and if he is talking about the present he is not talking about himself.'[32] But, for the reasons Seifrid gives, vv. 14–25

[26] Stendahl, 1977, 93.
[27] Beker, 1990, 108.
[28] Beker, 1990, 108; Käsemann, 1980b, 199; Lambrecht, 1992, 90; Moo, 1996, 448; Engberg-Pedersen, 2002, 37; Lichtenberger, 2004, 161; Jewett, 2007, 443; Chester, 2003, 183–195, adds to this approach the argument that retrospective biography reconstruction is typical behaviour of converts.
[29] Jewett, 2007, 443. Jewett combines it with the *prosopopoeia* hypothesis of Stowers.
[30] Engberg-Pedersen, 2002, 37. Quoted in Jewett, 2007, 443.
[31] Seifrid, 1992b, 318; Seifrid, 1992a, 230–231. See further our discussion of 'The Time of "I"' in Chapter 6.
[32] Winger, 1992, 169.

cannot be understood as a portrayal of Paul's former self. Therefore, unless we return to an Augustinian reading of the ἐγώ,[33] with its associated problems enumerated by Kümmel, it is assumed that Paul is talking about the present condition of people outside of Christ. However, if he is doing so, then the ἐγώ must be functioning *fictively* and *not typically*. But how can this be maintained without returning to Kümmel's questionable *Stilform* hypothesis? Enter Stowers, who has argued that in Rom 7:7–25 Paul is employing a *prosopopoeia*, a 'speech-in-character', by which he represents the speech, not of himself, but of *another person or type of character*.[34]

It is obvious why Stowers' resurrection of the fictive ἐγώ has proved so popular. The apparent alternative is to choose between the lesser of two evils: either we adopt an Augustinian reading of the ἐγώ as a believer under grace, caught between the flesh and Spirit, or we adopt a retrospective reading of the ἐγώ as a depiction of Paul's former life as a Pharisee. The problem with these two readings is not that they cannot be argued within a plausible theological framework, but that they come into conflict with significant aspects of the text. We need to find a solution that makes sense of the text as we have received it, that is able to integrate all the relevant data into a coherent whole. However, it is for this reason that we will also have cause to reject Stowers' hypothesis and, by doing so, open the way for another understanding of the ἐγώ.

We do not propose to return to the dead ends we have just outlined. That is to say, we will not be arguing that the ἐγώ is an expression of Paul's past as a Pharisee or a generalising depiction of humanity outside of Christ. Nor will we be arguing that the ἐγώ's division is an expression of being caught in the eschatological tension between flesh and Spirit. Further reasons to reject these positions will become clear as our argument unfolds. A radical, but nevertheless straightforward, solution to the riddle of the ἐγώ has been offered by Seifrid[35] and Thurén.[36] Seifrid argues that 7:14–25 corresponds to 7:5 and, therefore, should be read as an absolute statement of life as it is apart from Christ.[37] *However*, this state is confessed by the *Christian* according to the manner of Jewish

[33] A position still held by a few scholars: Cranfield, 1975, 341–347; Dunn, 1988a, 382, 397–99; Winger, 1992, 167–172; Laato, 1995, 109–145; Middendorf, 1997; Packer, 1999; Jervis, 2004.

[34] Stowers, 1994a, 16; Stowers, 1994b, 180.

[35] Seifrid, 1992b; Seifrid, 1992a, 146–152, 226–244; Seifrid, 2000, 114–119; Seifrid, 2011.

[36] Thurén, 2002.

[37] Seifrid, 1992b, 319–320.

penitential prayers and confessions and serves to describe the believer from the limited perspective of his or her intrinsic soteriological resources.[38] Although, as a believer, Paul has died to the law, he 'portrays his present person as one in the flesh and under the Law', as belonging entirely to the old order.[39] As such, even though this is the confession of a believer, it can be described in more general terms as the 'human being in confrontation with the Law.'[40]

Equally bold is Thurén, who argues that in Rom 7, when read alongside Rom 6, 'the Christian is presented as totally free from sin, and yet totally subject to it.'[41] Both of them face this seeming contradiction head on. For Thurén, it is explicable as rhetorical hyperbole.[42] For Seifrid, it is an application of Paul's theological antithesis to the life of the believer. In the flesh, the believer is still under the law and its condemnation. In the Spirit, he is a free man. In this way, Seifrid seeks to maintain Paul's absolute antithesis between Christ and the law.[43] Paul, by *modelling* the proper human response to the law,[44] seeks to bring his audience to recognise themselves as transgressors under the sentence of death.[45] His audience's hoped-for confession of radical guilt and condemnation corresponds to an acceptance of Paul's gospel of justification apart from the law, which Paul reaffirms in 8:1–4.[46]

The strength of Seifrid's solution is that he refuses to overlook either the profoundly negative portrayal of the ἐγώ's plight or the temporal markers that situate that plight in the present that Paul shares with his readers. However, it is arguable whether the resulting theological dialectic escapes from being a contradiction at the level of the text. Would Paul's audience in Rome have been able to make sense of being both under the law and not under the law at the same time? Our own conclusions, which we will now briefly anticipate, will be seen to support those of Seifrid in two ways and differ in two others. First, our exegesis supports the idea that in 7:14–25 the ἐγώ is portrayed according to his intrinsic resources and capacities. Secondly, we also conclude that the

[38] Seifrid, 1992b, 320–324.
[39] Seifrid, 1992b, 326, 330–331.
[40] Seifrid, 1992b, 325; Seifrid, 2011, 116–118, 155, 159.
[41] Thurén, 2002, 437.
[42] Thurén, 2002, 433–437.
[43] Seifrid, 2011, 155: 'Where Christ is present, the law is absent.' Seifrid, 2011, 161: 'where the law is present, Christ is absent.'
[44] Seifrid, 1992b, 320–321.
[45] Seifrid, 1992a, 228; Seifrid, 1992b, 328.
[46] Seifrid, 1992b, 330–333.

ἐγώ functions as a representative model of right belief and behaviour. On the other hand, first, we conclude that the ἐγώ is not portrayed as being in the flesh (7:5), but as being fleshly (7:14).[47] In other words, while the *condition* that the ἐγώ laments in Rom 7 belongs entirely to the old order, the ἐγώ *himself* is not presented as belonging entirely to the old order. We argue that in 7:14–25 Paul portrays the *anthropological* condition of the ἐγώ as an Adamic state of powerlessness, without direct reference to the ἐγώ's relational ontology, viz. without reference to being 'in the Spirit' (Rom 8:9). The ἐγώ's condition is a lingering, lasting solidarity with the old order, but, as an *anthropological* condition, it remains with the ἐγώ even when he is no longer in the flesh, under the law. Secondly, whereas for Seifrid a depiction of the ἐγώ's radical *guilt* corresponds to Paul's doctrine of *justification*, we read the confession of the ἐγώ's radical *powerlessness* as corresponding to the *assurance* of hope, which is the dominant theme in Paul's exposition of his gospel in chs. 5–8, and which is emphasised especially clearly in 8:1–11.

Therefore, as our argument unfolds, we will seek both to challenge Stowers' recent return to a fictive 'I' and also to build a case for understanding the ἐγώ as a representative, paradigmatic 'I', but one who is a believer in Christ who confesses an ongoing, Adamic, anthropological condition of fleshliness.

1.3 The Approach of This Study

Thurén states simply that, 'whereas the mind of the historical Apostle is beyond our reach, it remains our duty to scrutinize the text and its context.'[48] However, there are multiple contexts within which the text of Rom 7 is situated, and, therefore, we must make a deliberate decision on where to focus our attention. Most recent studies of Rom 7 have focused on the *religio-historical* context of Paul's writing as a means of discovering both likely influences and divergences vis-à-vis various religious and philosophical traditions.[49] Lichtenberger is attentive to this context, but mainly so as to illumine the *scriptural* backdrop against

[47] We take at face value Paul's contrast in 7:5–6 and negation in 8:9: the believer in Christ no longer lives in the realm of the flesh, under the law.

[48] Thurén, 2002, 426.

[49] Stowers, 1994a, reads Rom 7 in terms of the philosophical tradition of *akrasia*. Likewise, Engberg-Pedersen, 2002, who argues for a specifically Stoic model. Wasserman, 2008, argues for a Platonic model for the ἐγώ and for the problem as extreme immorality, not *akrasia*. Maston, 2010, reads Rom 7 within the context of the 'two-ways' tradition and brings Paul into conversation with Ben Sira and the *Hodayot*.

which the ἐγώ's speech should be read.[50] In this study, we will primarily focus on the *literary-argumentative* context of the ἐγώ. Surprisingly, previous studies have given comparatively little attention to this setting. In the aftermath of Kümmel and Stendahl, interest in the literary context has typically not extended beyond the function of Rom 7 within Paul's overall argument about the law in Romans.[51] Some scholars give the impression that all that now remains is a more precise locating of the religio-historical setting.[52]

However, given that the particular difficulties of understanding the ἐγώ appear *in the light of the preceding literary-argumentative context of the letter*, we propose that this literary context needs to be carefully re-read so as to better understand ἐγώ's identity. One of the strengths of Stowers' thesis is that he seeks to place, not just the law, but the ἐγώ within the context of Paul's argument in the letter. We will seek to do the same, both because the peculiar problems of understanding ἐγώ's identity demand it, but also because previous research on Rom 7 has done this in only a cursory manner. The task before us, therefore, is that of exegesis, reading and rereading the text within its literary context, being sensitive to the particulars of the ἐγώ's speech, as well as to the wider contours of Paul's argument. This will involve using the traditional canons of good interpretive method, namely text criticism, lexicography, grammar, syntax analysis and the like, as well as insights from more recent interpretive methodologies, such as discourse grammar, rhetorical criticism, and intertextual allusion.

The temptation the interpreter faces, and perhaps nowhere more than in Rom 7, is to disregard those parts of the text that stubbornly refuse to fit the proposed paradigm. It is with the riddle of the 'I' as with the Rubik's cube: even a single piece which remains out of place betrays the need for a new solution. There is a draconian answer to this dilemma, one that involves the forceful extraction and realignment of the offending piece, a solution to which some have had recourse in the interpretation of Rom 7.[53] However, this must be considered a last resort. Certainly Moo is correct in his assessment that 'it is inconclusive, and even misleading, to cite several

[50] Lichtenberger, 2004, 205–264.

[51] Kümmel, 1974, 5–13, briefly sketches the literary context of Rom 7 by surveying chs. 1–8. However, his survey only pays attention to the theme of the law and so risks prejudging the question he is seeking to answer.

[52] For example, Wasserman, 2008, 3. Similarly, Krauter, 2011, 113, who states that 'current exegetical research . . . tries to work out in detail how Rom 7:14–25 relates to the various philosophical models of akrasia.'

[53] See our discussion of Rom 7:25 in Chapter 6.

arguments in favor of one's own view and conclude that the issue has been settled.'[54] An interpretation of the ἐγώ must demonstrate a literary coherence if it is also to lay claim to theological plausibility.

Paying close, sustained attention to the literary-argumentative context not only makes one aware of the scale of the challenge; it also presents opportunities for fresh discovery. N. T. Wright reminds us that with the interpretation of Paul it is quite often the 'casual remark' or 'the throw-away line on the edge of something else' that stops us in our tracks and causes us to re-examine our hypotheses and cherished traditions.[55] In this study, we will pay attention to a few such easily missed or previously ignored statements that call into question prior assumptions and light the way towards a more contextually informed hearing of the ἐγώ's voice in Rom 7.[56] That said, the challenge remains that of producing an integrative, constructive interpretation of Rom 7 which pays due attention to all of the important textual data and which demonstrates both a literary coherence and theological plausibility. That is what we are attempting in this study.

We will proceed as follows. As already noted, in the next chapter, we will look closely at the arguments of Stanley Stowers for reading the speech of the ἐγώ as an example of speech-in-character. The importance of engaging closely with Stowers is clear. Not only does he offer a new, or rather renewed, way out of the difficulties associated with personal and typical readings of the ἐγώ, but he does so with a concern for the ἐγώ's literary-argumentative context. We will carefully consider Stowers' argument that the ἐγώ is the same character as Paul's interlocutor in 2:1–16, whom he understands to be an akratic Gentile. We will find his argument wanting in a number of respects, but agree on the importance of the interlocutor for fully appreciating the nature of Paul's characterisation in Rom 7. In Chapter 3, we give our attention to 3:7, the only other verse in the letter that contains ambiguous first-person singular forms. This verse, surprisingly, has not previously been considered significant for the interpretation of the ἐγώ in Rom 7. Since it appears within a passage that is full of its own interpretive difficulties, these are tackled with a view to understanding 3:7 within its context. In Chapter 4, we turn to the more immediate context for understanding the ἐγώ's speech, viz.

[54] Moo, 1996, 445.
[55] Wright, 2013, 466–467.
[56] What these are, and why they are important, will become clear as we proceed, but they include the use of the first-person singular in 3:7, the interjection regarding the law in 5:13, the statements regarding the mortal body and the flesh in 6:12 and 6:19, and the impotency of Abraham's body in 4:19.