

Paul and ἐγώ: Some Comments on Grammar and Style

MICHAEL WINGER

800 West End Avenue, New York, NY 10025, USA. Email: michael1winger@gmail.com

Why does Paul use the pronoun ἐγώ, which usually does not affect sense (adequately indicated by a first person singular verb)? The standard explanation, that ἐγώ supplies emphasis, is incomplete at best. A detailed survey of Paul's usage shows various factors: sometimes ἐγώ helps Paul distinguish himself from others, and other times to align himself with them; sometimes it allows a paradoxical construction in which Paul both admits and denies that he has done something; sometimes it seems linked to certain verbs; sometimes it supplies a kind of rhythm to a passage.

Keywords: ἐγώ, grammar, style, pronouns, emphasis, rhythm, Paul

1. The Grammar of ἐγώ

A minor puzzle is presented by many passages in the Greek New Testament where the pronoun ἐγώ ('I') appears. Why is it there? Usually ἐγώ is not needed for the meaning of the sentences in which it is found; ἐγώ is the first person singular pronoun in the nominative case and, like 'I' in English, it is used for the subject of a verb; but in Greek, the ending of a verb identifies the person and number of the verb's subject, so that no pronoun is needed for this purpose.¹ Thus, for example, εἰ δὲ ὃ οὐ θέλω τοῦτο ποιῶ (Rom 7.16) and εἰ δὲ ὃ οὐ θέλω ἐγώ τοῦτο ποιῶ (Rom 7.20a), the same phrase with ἐγώ added after the first verb, are both translated 'if I do what I do not want ...'² While

- 1 This is true for all nominative pronouns, second and third person as well as first, plural as well as singular. However, apart from some references to ἡμεῖς when found near ἐγώ, this article is limited to the first person singular, which in Paul's letters means Paul (except when he quotes someone else).
- 2 RSV, NRSV; REB: 'if what I do is against my will'. NAB brackets 'I' in verse 20a, even though the English sentence makes no sense without 'I'. Presumably NAB supplies brackets because many manuscripts omit ἐγώ in 7.20a; this scribal disagreement is consistent with the apparent equivalence between the phrase with ἐγώ and the phrase without it, but it also makes one

Greek verbs in the first person singular usually have no separate subject, sometimes they do – in Paul’s letters, about one time in ten on average.³ Sometimes verbs with and without ἐγώ are mixed in a single passage. An example interesting for many reasons is Romans 7.7–25, where Paul discusses the effect (and lack of effect) of the law. This passage has twenty-seven first person singular verbs, of which either six or seven have the express subject ἐγώ, appearing at intervals from verse 9 to verse 25, with an effect which we shall see invites examination.⁴ But other passages in which Paul talks about himself avoid ἐγώ entirely, or almost entirely: for example, 2 Cor 11.1–15 (fourteen first person singular verbs, no ἐγώ); Gal 1.10–2.14 (thirty-two first person singular verbs, one ἐγώ).

2. The Usual Analysis of Nominative Pronouns, and Alternatives

The standard explanation for ἐγώ, as well as other nominative pronouns, is that it is emphatic: roughly, *I* (not you, or he, or they). New Testament commentaries usually ignore ἐγώ, and if they mention it, they typically say simply that it is used for emphasis, but without any attempt to analyse the purpose or effect of the emphasis. New Testament grammars generally say little more: for instance, that nominative pronouns ‘are employed ... for contrast or other emphasis’ or as ‘a

wonder why – as we shall see – in every other case almost all the manuscripts agree on whether ἐγώ is present.

- 3 The figure is for Paul’s seven undisputed letters (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon), where there are approximately 660 first person singular verbs; ἐγώ appears ninety times, but in twenty-two of these cases, as will appear, the pronoun is needed to indicate the subject of the verb, which is implied rather than expressed. The individual letters vary, from ἐγώ one time in four for Philemon and one in six for Romans to one in thirteen for 1 Corinthians. Rough figures for other New Testament books (ignoring how many occurrences of ἐγώ have no corresponding verb) include ἐγώ one time in three for John, one in five for the Pastoral epistles, and one in ten for Revelation. These figures for pronouns are based on NA²⁸, and include κἀγώ, short for καὶ ἐγώ (more or less ‘and I’, or ‘I too’), found twenty-four times in these seven letters. A rough figure for first person singular verbs is taken by counting occurrences of ‘I’ in the King James Version (chosen because it follows Greek syntax more closely than many other versions). The actual number of first person singular verbs will differ somewhat; on the one hand, idiomatic English sometimes uses ‘I’ where Greek employs an oblique case (for example, in Gal 4.18 ‘when I am present’ in the KJV translates Greek ἐν τῷ παρεῖναι με); on the other hand, sometimes the KJV uses a single ‘I’ for more than one verb (for instance, Phil 1.25: ‘I shall abide and continue’). The text base and indexing programme supplied by the Nota Bene word processor were used in counting ‘I’.
- 4 In this count I exclude ἐγώ in 7.24a (ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος), where the verb is understood and the pronoun therefore is not superfluous. In verses 18 and 21, where ‘I’ generally appears in English translations, the Greek text has infinitives or participles rather than finite verbs. As I have noted, manuscripts differ on whether ἐγώ appears once or twice in verse 20.

Hebraism or a scribal addition'; or 'in most cases' for 'emphasis or contrast', although 'this is not quite true of all examples'.⁵ In Paul's letters, I find more complicated patterns. To summarise:

- (1) While Paul sometimes wishes to emphasise that he is the one making a particular statement – for instance, when he draws on his authority as founder of the church to which he writes, or on his past experience as a law-observant Jew – in such cases he does not rely on the pronoun ἐγώ; he rather adds αὐτός ('myself'), or Παῦλος ('Paul'), or some other sign of emphasis. Evidently, if ἐγώ itself is emphatic, it is not very emphatic – a conclusion reinforced by cases in which ἐγώ is not emphatic at all.
- (2) In other cases, Paul uses ἐγώ for the opposite purpose, saying 'I too' (καίγω, with adverbial καί) to indicate that his experience is the *same* as other people's.
- (3) Sometimes ἐγώ allows Paul to take advantage of a verb in another person or number, or a participle, without repeating it in first person singular.
- (4) Using ἐγώ permits an unusual construction in which a subject is denied, but not the verb of which the pronoun is the subject, as in Gal 2.20, 'I live, but no longer I'; Paul uses this construction in five places, which we will look at.
- (5) Sometimes ἐγώ signals a change in subject.
- (6) Sometimes ἐγώ is parallel to another person, or occasionally a concept.
- (7) Sometimes the placement of ἐγώ supplies a kind of rhythm to passages in which Paul discusses himself.

These are not all of Paul's reasons for using ἐγώ, but they are the clearest and the most general ones; I will also suggest a few others that may operate occasionally. I do not claim to have identified all of the reasons; I suspect that if we could ask Paul why he used ἐγώ at some particular point, in many cases he would say simply that it seemed to him the way to say what he wanted to say. This is the sort of thing that one is likely to say or write without conscious thought, and the manuscript evidence suggests that scribes, too, did not give much thought to ἐγώ; the

⁵ Respectively, BDF §277 (noting exceptions, but only in the gospels) and A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934²) 676 (as an example of the difficulty, Robertson offers 2 Cor 11.29a, without ἐγώ, compared with 11.29b, parallel but with ἐγώ). According to M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Institutii Biblici, 1963) §198, nominative pronouns provide 'grounds for suspecting a certain emphasis, but even here the emphasis should not be too readily insisted upon, where the context does not favor it'. J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908) 86 observes that 'generally the pronoun is unmistakably emphatic in nom., from Mt 1.21 onwards; but occasionally the force of the emphasis is not obvious – cf Luke 19²⁷'. Except for BDF's question-begging appeal to 'Hebraism or scribal addition', these grammarians offer no explanation for the non-emphatic uses they identify.

NA²⁸ apparatus reports only one variation in the presence of ἐγώ, at Rom 7.20a.⁶ Looking a little deeper, and setting aside Rom 7.20a, Reuben Swanson's synopses of variants in approximately eighty manuscripts of the four major Pauline letters identify just fourteen places in which any manuscript (usually only one) omits ἐγώ or κἀγώ; even rarer is the addition of ἐγώ, found in only two places, one of which seems to be a clear error.⁷ This pattern may be compared with manuscript evidence for variations between κἀγώ and καὶ ἐγώ, which so far as I can see affect neither meaning nor emphasis, and yet are more common than variations in ἐγώ: out of twenty-one occurrences of κἀγώ in Paul's four major letters, in nine the alternative reading καὶ ἐγώ is found in various manuscripts, including some or all of papyri P³⁴ or P⁴⁶, uncials D, F, G, L or Ψ, and as many as forty minuscules.⁸

The analysis of ἐγώ which I have just outlined, and will elaborate below, is not a semantic analysis: the semantics of ἐγώ are simple and invariant. Rather, my subject is the use of ἐγώ as a feature of Paul's style. We expect style to vary from author to author, and perhaps also according to occasion or genre; direct address to a familiar congregation is not (for example) a report of an address to followers on a mountain or a plain. Thus, while I will sometimes note uses of ἐγώ elsewhere in the New Testament that are similar to Paul's, I have not tried to reach any conclusions about the style of anyone but Paul.⁹

6 Ἐγώ in Rom 7.20 is bracketed in NA²⁸, and according to B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1994²) 455, 'the external evidence [is] rather evenly balanced', including for example ⱼ, A and Ψ with ἐγώ, and B, C, D, F and G without it. I discuss the textual issue further below. (NA²⁸ also shows variations in 1 Cor 16.10 among ἐγώ, κἀγώ and καὶ ἐγώ.)

7 R. J. Swanson, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines Against Codex Vaticanus (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians)* (Wheaton, IL/Pasadena, CA: Tyndale House/William Carey International University Press, 1999–2005). Besides manuscripts, Swanson also tabulates readings in Clement of Alexandria and some editions, but I have ignored those here. According to Swanson, ἐγώ is omitted by one to three manuscripts in Rom 7.17, 20b (preceding καταργήσομαι); 9.3; 11.1; 16.22; 2 Cor 2.10 (one eliminating ἐγώ, one κἀγώ); 11.16; 12.16; Gal 1.12; 5.2, 10, 11; 6.14 (κἀγώ); thirteen manuscripts (including A) omit ἐγώ in Rom 11.13. Three manuscripts add ἐγώ following ὅστε in Gal 4.16; a single manuscript's additional ἐγώ following ἐγώ μόνος in Rom 16.4 (literally, 'I only I') is an obvious mistake, corrected along with two other errors in the same verse (both unique to this manuscript) by a later reviser.

8 Rom 11.13; 1 Cor 2.1, 3; 3.1; 7.8; 16.10; 2 Cor 2.10; 12.20; Gal 4.12. In addition, three manuscripts have ἐγώ without καὶ in place of κἀγώ in 1 Cor 10.33. NA²⁸ never has καὶ ἐγώ in Paul's letters, although καὶ γὰρ ἐγώ appears in Rom 11.1 and 2 Cor 2.10 and καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγώ in Rom 15.14.

9 The reluctance of scribes to alter Paul's usage with ἐγώ may be related to a perception by scribes that this is a matter of style. On the other hand, the manuscript variations in Rom 7.20a may result from attempts to conform that verse to Paul's usual style; see section 4.3 below.

3. Emphasis Examined

Let us now look at the texts themselves. Emphasis is a natural place to begin; an unusual expression draws attention to itself (the amount of attention depending on the expression and the context), and ἐγώ is generally an unusual expression. Thus we can read the attention it draws as emphasis on the first person singular. But this does not advance us very far. Since the expression is not very unusual, emphasis on that basis need not be very noticeable. In some passages it is difficult to see any emphasis at all, as in Rom 7.9–10, ‘I (ἐγώ) was once alive apart from the law ... I (ἐγώ) died ...’; however one resolves the much-disputed question of whether Paul refers to himself in these verses, it seems unlikely that he wants to emphasise that this was *especially* the experience of the person (whether or not Paul) identified as ‘I’. Moreover, as Paul proceeds, we find nearly thirty first person singular verbs, the great majority without ἐγώ, scattered throughout 7.7–25; if the purpose of ἐγώ is emphasis, why is this emphasis so intermittent?

Part of the problem is that ‘emphasis’ is vague, and rarely explained. A natural understanding of emphasis on ‘I’ is that it means emphasis on ‘I’ as opposed to someone else – *I not you*, or *not someone*, or perhaps *not anyone*. However, one of the common uses of ἐγώ is the opposite; this is the case with καὶ ἐγώ, contracted to κἀγώ, when it has the sense ‘I too’ rather than ‘and I’ (a usage I will examine further below).

If the context in which ἐγώ appears does not suggest a contrast, as it seems to me Rom 7.9–10 does not, then there is nothing to be emphasised; if ἐγώ is not always associated with emphasis, but only in cases where emphasis is suggested by the passage in which ἐγώ appears, it follows that ἐγώ in itself does not suggest emphasis. When Paul wishes to emphasise that he refers to himself, he has better ways: he can say ‘I alone’, ἐγὼ μόνος (Rom 11.3; 1 Cor 9.6), or ‘I myself’, αὐτὸς ἐγώ (Rom 7.25; 9.3; 15.14; 2 Cor 12.13), or ‘I, Paul’, ἐγὼ Παῦλος (Gal 5.2; 1 Thess 2.18; Phlm 19), or even ‘I myself, Paul’, αὐτὸς ἐγὼ Παῦλος (2 Cor 10.1).¹⁰ He can also use αὐτὸς without ἐγώ (1 Cor 9.27; Phil 2.24). He can add ἰδέ: ‘Look, I, Paul, tell you ...’ (Gal 5.2), where Paul has something important to emphasise: his personal knowledge and experience, as a Jew, of Jewish law, which his Gentile audience lacks.¹¹ Elsewhere, with less dramatic effect, Paul can place ἐγώ at the head of a sentence or clause (for instance, 1 Cor 2.1; 3.1, 6; 2 Cor 1.23; Gal 2.19), even in a sentence by itself (2 Cor 11.22 (κἀγώ, 3x)). In all of these cases (which amount to

¹⁰ In the disputed Pauline letters, see ἐγὼ Παῦλος in Eph 3.1; Col 1.23. Αὐτὸς ἐγώ is rare outside Paul’s letters, although found at Acts 10.26.

¹¹ Cf. Matt 10.16; 11.10; Luke 23.14; 24.49; Acts 10.25 (ἰδοὺ ἐγώ); Mark 6.31 (ὁμοίως αὐτοὶ κατ’ ἰδίαν).

half of Paul's uses of ἐγώ), ἐγώ assists in emphasis, but it supplies little or no emphasis in itself.¹²

As I have noted, one sense of κἀγώ points in the opposite direction: 'I too', not *especially*. See, for example, Rom 11.1 (καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ Ἰσραηλίτης εἰμί, 'I too am an Israelite'); 1 Cor 16.10 (τὸ γὰρ ἔργον κυρίου ἐργάζεται ὡς κἀγώ, 'he does the work of the Lord, as I do'); 2 Cor 2.10 (ὧ δέ τι χαρίζεσθε, κἀγώ, 'anyone you forgive, I too forgive'); 11.16 (ὡς ἄφρονα δέξασθε με, ἵνα κἀγὼ μικρόν τι καυχῆσωμαι, 'accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little'); 11.18, 21, 22 (similar). These are instances where καί is adverbial, rather than conjunctive ('and'), a use that is often difficult to interpret.¹³ J. D. Denniston, in his thirty-five pages on adverbial καί, says that it can relate to either the preceding or the following term, and can mean 'even' or 'actually' rather than 'also'.¹⁴ Whatever the intended sense, when the καί incorporated in κἀγώ is adverbial, that can account for the presence of ἐγώ, which καί modifies.¹⁵

4. Other Reasons for ἐγώ

4.1 Attribution of Some Quality

In other similar cases ἐγώ is needed because it is not only the subject of a verb: something is attributed to ἐγώ. There is the formulation that someone or

¹² Besides the eight passages with ἀντός or Παῦλος, ἐγώ or κἀγώ appears at the beginning of a sentence twenty-two times, and of a clause sixteen times. These total forty-six out of ninety occurrences in Paul's seven undisputed letters.

¹³ The sense 'I too' could also be indicated by context, without καί. Rom 11.19 and 16.22 might be examples.

¹⁴ J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934²) 293–327 (Denniston calls this sense 'responsive'). H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, rev. edn 1956) §§2881–91 is similar.

¹⁵ Although not necessarily; according to C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959²) 167, καί (even in κἀγώ) may belong not to ἐγώ but to the clause's verb; Moule gives κἀγώ in 1 Thess 3.5 as an example (διὰ τοῦτο κἀγὼ μηκέτι στέγων ἔπεμψα εἰς τὸ γνῶναι τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν, 'I **actually sent** ...'; emphasis original). E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 78 takes the same view of Rom 3.7, τί ἔτι κἀγὼ ἁμαρτωλὸς κρίνομαι; which he translates 'why should I still be condemned as a sinner?'; likewise C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 185, see also 183; similarly Moule, *Idiom Book*, 167 (as in 1 Thess 3.5, 'actually'). However, the basis for these interpretations is not clear. When Paul has bound καί and ἐγώ into κἀγώ, it seems to me that καί should not be taken as belonging to something other than ἐγώ unless there is a compelling reason. I see no compulsion in these verses. For Rom 3.7, compare the readings 'I too', W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901⁵) 73–4; 'I of all people', R. Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 249; 'gerade ich', U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer (Röm 1–5)* (EKK 6/1; Düsseldorf/Zurich: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1997³) 166 n. 445. For 1 Thess 3.5, compare 'I for my part', A. J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 195.

something is (or should be) like Paul: ‘as I’, ὡς or κάθως ἐγώ or κἀγώ (1 Cor 7.8; 10.33; 11.1; 16.10; Gal 4.12a). Or Paul describes himself as alone or not alone, μόνος (Rom 11.3; 16.4; 1 Cor 9.6), or he expressly relates himself to others, ‘whether it was I or they’, εἴτε οὖν ἐγὼ εἴτε ἐκεῖνοι (1 Cor 15.11). All of these expressions require ἐγώ. That may also be true for οὐδὲ ... ἐγώ in Gal 1.12, which could mean ‘not even I’, in contrast to someone else (rather than, with the following οὐδέ or οὐτέ, ‘I neither ... nor ...’); if so, this helps to explain why Gal 1.10–2.14, an account of Paul’s personal history, has only this single ἐγώ among thirty-two first person singular verbs.¹⁶

4.2 *Borrowing a Verb of Different Person or Number*

In a number of places Paul borrows for himself a verb he has just used in a different number or person; instead of repeating the verb in first person singular, he uses ἐγώ to show that he too is a subject of the verb. Thus, 2 Cor 2.10, ᾧ δὲ τι χαρίζεσθε, κἀγώ (see above); 11.22, Ἑβραῖοί εἰσιν; κἀγώ, κ.τ.λ. (‘Are they Hebrews? So am I’); Gal 4.12, Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ, ὅτι κἀγώ ὡς ὑμεῖς (‘Become as I am, for I became as you’), 6.14, ἐμοὶ κόσμος ἐσταύρωται κἀγὼ κόσμῳ (‘the cosmos is crucified to me and I to the cosmos’).¹⁷ Sometimes the verb (usually εἰμί or γίνομαι) is not borrowed but understood, as in Rom 7.24, ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος, or 1 Cor 1.12, ἕκαστος ὑμῶν λέγει, ... Ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ, Ἐγὼ δὲ Κηφᾶ, Ἐγὼ δὲ Χριστοῦ; 3.4, λέγει τις ... Ἐγὼ Ἀπολλῶ, or Phil 3.4, ἐγὼ ἔχων πεποιθήσιν ... ἐγὼ μᾶλλον. (But note that this does not mean that ἐγώ was necessary in these verses; εἰμί could have been used instead.)¹⁸

4.3 *I/Not I*

One striking and characteristic Pauline usage does require ἐγώ, a usage we might call *I/not I*, in which, paradoxically, Paul denies the subject of a verb rather than the verb itself; thus 1 Cor 7.10, τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν παραγγέλλω, οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλὰ ὁ κύριος, ‘to the married I give this instruction – not I but the Lord ...’; similarly, 1 Cor 15.10, περισσώτερον αὐτῶν πάντων ἐκοπίασα, οὐκ ἐγὼ δὲ ἀλλὰ ἡ

16 If the text of Gal 1.12 is οὐδέ ... οὔτε ... rather than οὐδέ ... οὐδέ (so NA²⁸; see E. D. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1920) 40–1), that suggests that οὐδέ γὰρ ἐγὼ stands by itself, with the sense it has elsewhere in the New Testament, ‘neither do [will] I ...’ (= ‘not even I’); see Matt 21.27; Mark 11.33; Luke 20.8; John 8.11. Burton, *Galatians*, 38–9 takes Gal. 1.12 to compare Paul to the Twelve; that is, neither they nor he received the gospel from a human. On οὐδέ as ‘not even’, see Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §2931; he adds (§2937), ‘οὐδέ ... οὐδέ is not correlative ... and hence never means neither ... nor.’ For ‘neither ... nor’ Paul uses either οὐκ ... οὐδέ (Gal 3.28; 1 Thess 2.3) or οὔτε ... οὔτε (for example, Rom 8.38–9; Gal 5.6; 6.15).

17 Cf. John 10.30 (ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἐσμεν).

18 Sometimes ἐγώ serves more than one of these purposes, as in 2 Cor 2.10 (both ‘I too,’ and a borrowed verb),

χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ [ἢ] σὺν ἐμοί, ‘I worked harder than any of them – not I, but the grace of God which is with me.’ Here Paul does not wish to negate the verb, for the instruction was given and the work was done, and in both cases by Paul; only not exactly. Paul might have said, ‘I did not do these things, the Lord did them’, but he chooses instead a paradoxical formulation which ties himself (if somewhat indistinctly) to what the Lord has done. This formulation depends on οὐκ ἐγώ.

Gal 2.20 is similar:

ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει
ζῶ τῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ κτλ.

Translators struggle with the opening *I/not I* phrase: ‘nevertheless I live; yet not I’ (KJV); ‘yet I live; and yet no longer I’ (RV); ‘it is no longer I who live’ (RSV, NRSV); ‘the life I now live is not my life’ (REB); ‘yet I live, no longer I’ (NAB); ‘yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I’ (NJB). All accept that ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ is different from οὐ ζῶ, and that Paul intended both affirmation and denial.¹⁹

Two other *I/not I* passages in Romans differ in one obvious respect from the three we have looked at; in Rom 7.16–17 and 20, what Paul links to himself is not God or Christ, but *sin*:

εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω τοῦτο ποιῶ, σύμφημι τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι καλός. νυνὶ δὲ οὐκέτι
ἐγώ καταργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία (7.16–17)

and:

εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω [ἐγώ] τοῦτο ποιῶ, οὐκέτι ἐγώ καταργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ
οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία (7.20).

‘I do this/no longer is it I who do it.’ The two passages differ from each other only in the phrases σύμφημι τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι καλός and νυνὶ δέ, which are in the first passage but not the second, and in the additional ἐγώ (bracketed in NA²⁸) in the second, none of which alters the basic sense. As in the passages from 1 Corinthians and Galatians, Paul both admits and denies what he does, and he uses ἐγώ to do this.

This depiction in Romans 7 of a conflict between Paul and sin resembles what Paul presents in Gal 5.17 as a conflict between spirit and flesh. But while in Galatians 5 both spirit and flesh are presented as though they are external forces or entities, in Romans 7 flesh is said to be ‘mine’ (7.18; cf. ‘my members’, 7.23), and spirit is replaced by *mind* – also ‘mine’ (7.23). The

¹⁹ ‘The negative as a rule stands before that which is to be negated’ (BDF §433) – here, the subject, not the verb.

paradoxical *I/not I* formulation of 7.17, 20, not found in Galatians, underscores the internal torment implied by this account.

Textual Note (Rom 7.20)

Looking at all of these passages helps us to decide on whether the correct text for Rom 7.20 includes or excludes the first ἐγώ. Metzger says that ‘from the point of view of transcriptional probability ἐγώ might have been either accidentally omitted through parablepsis or deliberately added for emphasis in conformity with the following ἐγώ’.²⁰ Both of these suggestions are unlikely. Parablepsis (‘the eye of the copyist ... inadvertently pass[ing] from one word to another having a similar sequence of letters’) would be surprising, when the words θέλω ἐγώ share only a final ω.²¹ As I have noted, outside this passage scribes almost never omit ἐγώ; moreover, none of the manuscripts surveyed by Swanson lacks ἐγώ in either 1 Cor 7.12 or Phil 4.11, where one would expect λέγω ἐγώ to make parablepsis much more likely than in Rom 7.20. On the other hand, the deliberate addition of ἐγώ would be highly unusual, and if scribes were moved to add ἐγώ in 7.20, why not at the identical place in 7.16? And not only there: first person verbs with and without ἐγώ alternate throughout 7.7–25, as well as in many other places in Paul’s letters, without any variation among manuscripts.²² It is much more likely that scribes omitted the first ἐγώ in 7.20 so that the text conforms not only to 7.16, close at hand, but also to Paul’s three other *I/not I* passages, in which the positive statement is made with the verb alone, and ἐγώ appears only in ‘not I’, where it is required for the meaning. Apart from this verse, ἐγώ is found twice in a single sentence only five times anywhere in Paul’s undisputed letters.²³ For all of these reasons, an extra ἐγώ in 7.20 is the more difficult reading, and given also the general reluctance of scribes to add ἐγώ to a text that lacked it, ἐγώ in 7.20a should be considered original.

4.4 Other Factors: New Topic; Balance; Particular Verbs

There are some other apparent patterns in Paul’s use of ἐγώ. Sometimes ἐγώ begins a sentence when Paul switches the subject to himself (1 Cor 2.1; 3.1; 5.3; 9.15, 26; perhaps 15.9; Gal 5.2, 11).²⁴

20 Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 455. Jewett, *Romans*, 454–5 n. i also suggests parablepsis.

21 I quote Metzger’s explanation of parablepsis from *Textual Commentary*, 13*.

22 Elsewhere in Paul’s letters, first person verbs with and without ἐγώ are found seventeen times in the same verse: Rom 11.1; 1 Cor 7.8 (κἀγώ); 9.15, 26; 11.23; 15.9, 10; 2 Cor 10.1; 11.29; 12.15, 16, 20 (κἀγώ); Gal 2.19, 20; 4.12; 5.11; Phil 4.11 (κἀγώ).

23 1 Cor 1.12, 3.4, 10.30; Phil 3.4; Phlm 19. (I omit κἀγώ and καί ... ἐγώ, since καί may affect the meaning.) Of these passages, 1 Cor 1.12 and 3.4 both quote different people, each using ἐγώ of themselves, and in Phil 3.4 there is no finite verb to make ἐγώ superfluous.

24 Paul does not always mark such a switch in this way. In Gal 1.10–2.14, ἐγώ appears only as the third word of verse 12, after four first person singular verbs in verses 11–12 (however, verse 12

Sometimes ἐγώ assists a parallel or balanced structure: in Rom 7.14, ἐγώ is opposed to νόμος; in 1 Cor 1.12 and 3.4, ἐγώ εἰμι is parallel to ἐγώ with εἰμι understood; in 1 Cor 3.6, ἐγώ is parallel to Ἀπολλῶς and θεός; in 1 Cor 7.12, λέγω ἐγὼ οὐχ ὁ κύριος balances οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλὰ ὁ κύριος (an *I/not I* construction) in 7.10; 1 Cor 15.11, we have εἴτε οὖν ἐγὼ εἴτε ἐκεῖνοι.²⁵ In 1 Cor 2.3; 4.15; 2 Cor 12.11, 13, 15, 16, 20, ἐγώ balances ὑμῶν, ὑμᾶς or ὑμῖν; in Gal 4.12, ἐγώ balances ὑμεῖς.²⁶

Paul tends to use ἐγώ as subject of the verbs ζῶω and ἀποθνήσκω, as in Rom 7.9.10; 14.11 (borrowing a phrase from LXX Isa 49.18; Jer 22.24; Ezek 5.11); Gal 2.19, 20. If there is emphasis in these passages, it does not fall on the subject alone, or as opposed to the verb, but on both together: *I lived; I died.*²⁷

4.5 Additional Suggestions

Other meanings have been associated with ἐγώ, based on particular passages. If these meanings are present they are not part of ἐγώ, but rather derive from the context. At least some of these meanings are doubtful in any case. For example, Jewett says that with ἐγώ in Romans 7.9 ‘Paul points explicitly to his own personal experience’.²⁸ Paul may or may not actually refer to his own experience in this passage, but that must be resolved on other grounds; a pronoun is no more or less ‘personal’ than a verb without a pronoun. Burton, similarly, says of ἐγώ in Galatians 2.19 (ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον) that ‘the apostle is now speaking of his personal experience’, while 2.18 (ἃ κατέλυσα κτλ.) ‘would be equally true of any Christian’.²⁹ This is unlikely, both because ‘what I destroyed’ seems as personal as ‘I died to law’, and because there is no reason to think that a subject changes its meaning simply because it is marked by a pronoun. Betz, in contrast, takes both verses 18 and 19 to be paradigmatic rather than personal.³⁰

Another reading of Gal 2.19–20 takes ἐγώ in both of these verses to mean not ‘I’ but ‘the ἐγώ’ or ‘the “I”’. Thus Schlier, on 2.20: ‘The existence of one who has been baptised is no longer through his ἐγώ, that is, grounded in what had

does mark the introduction of personal history). See also 2 Cor 11.1–15, without any ἐγώ. Initial ἐγώ marking a change in subject is not common elsewhere in the New Testament, but note Matt 5.22; John 5.34; Rev 1.9.

25 Cf. John 15.16 (οὐχ ὑμεῖς ... ἀλλ’ ἐγώ ... ἵνα ὑμεῖς).

26 Ἐγώ is not always used in comparable clauses, such as 1 Cor 1.10, παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ‘I appeal to you’; 1.14, οὐδένα ὑμῶν ἐβάπτισα, ‘I baptised none of you.’ In such cases the express or implied contrast between I and you may be less than when ἐγώ is used.

27 Note, however, 1 Cor 15.31, καθ’ ἡμέραν ἀποθνήσκω without ἐγώ.

28 Jewett, *Romans*, 450.

29 Burton, *Galatians*, 132.

30 H. D. Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 122.

previously been the “natural” human ...³¹ This objectification of ἐγώ, which after all simply means *I*, is dubious; one wonders whether it is influenced at some level by Freud’s use of *ich*, in English customarily rendered as ‘ego’. While it may be that Paul has a doctrine of personal identity (or of different or alternative identities), this doctrine is not expressed, if it is expressed at all, merely by the use of ἐγώ. Ἐγώ is found hundreds of times in the New Testament, in virtually every book, and more than a thousand times in the Septuagint, again in virtually every book; it is a familiar term with a familiar meaning.³² Would anyone explain the difference between ἐγώ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν in Matthew 5.22 and Λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν in 5.20 by saying that in 5.22 Jesus says, ‘The “I” tells you’?

4.6 Patterns of Distribution

In passages other than the ones I have noted I do not see a pattern, but, as I have remarked, these are matters of style, which do not depend on rules. When a grammarian remarks that ἐγώ in 2 Cor 11.29 (τίς σκανδαλίζεται καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ πυροῦμαι;) is ‘gratuitous and meaningless’, he has confused the issue; such terms are inappropriate in matters of style.³³

Beyond individual verses, the distribution of ἐγώ in extended passages presents certain patterns. Rom 7.7–25 illustrates. In this passage we have twenty-seven verbs in the first person singular, while ἐγώ appears eight times, once with the verb understood; thus most of these verbs lack an express subject, as is true of first person verbs throughout Paul’s letters, but still this is the greatest concentration of ἐγώ anywhere in Paul’s letters. Most of the individual pronouns in this passage can be accounted for in one of the various ways I have noted, but I want to call attention now to the overall distribution of first person verbs and pronouns.³⁴ This can be illustrated graphically, using the following signs:

31 ‘Die Existenz des Getauften ist nicht mehr durch sein ἐγώ, d.h. den bisherigen “natürlichen” Menschen begründet ...’; H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (Meyers Kommentar; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965⁴) 101; cf. p. 98 on 2.19 (‘ein Ereignis, das den ἐγώ betrifft’). See also Burton, *Galatians*, 137 on 2.20 (‘under law it was the “I” that lived’); Betz, *Galatians*, 123 (‘Paul declares the “I” to be dead’); M. de Boer, *Galatians* (New Testament Library; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011) 159, on 2.19 (‘With respect to this law, Paul’s “I” (*egō*) has ceased to exist; it is thus his nomistic “I” – the “I” that finds its identity and its hope of justification (5:5) in (the observance of) the law – that has died’).

32 Using the text base and indexing programme supplied by the Nota Bene word processor, ἐγώ and κἀγώ appear 403 times in the New Testament and 1,396 times in the Septuagint (deducting for duplicate texts of Judges, Tobit and Daniel).

33 J. H. Moulton and N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. III: *Syntax* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1963) 38.

34 Ἐγώ is emphatic by association with αὐτός in 7.25 and by its initial position in Rom 7.9, 10, 14; in 7.9, 10 it is the subject of ‘lived’ or ‘died’, and in 7.14 it is contrasted to νόμος. In 7.17 and 20b it is in the *I/not I* formulation (7.17, 20b); once it is with an understood verb (7.24), and only once does it not fall into any of the patterns I have identified (the disputed ἐγώ of 7.20a).

5. Conclusions: ἐγώ and Style

What conclusions may now be drawn? The points made here may be thought not to be substantive, save perhaps for those related to the *I/not I* construction, especially Gal 2.20; although the paradoxical formulation there resists translation into a proposition, I take this to be part of the point of a paradox: that the categories in which we are accustomed to think are not entirely adequate, even those so apparently fundamental, and easily distinguishable, as life and death. The point is better made by a paradox than by a description of the paradox.

But for the most part, I think Paul's use of ἐγώ can be described as stylistic. The rhythmic patterns in passages where Paul uses ἐγώ are an element of his style, but there are other pertinent elements. Usually not much is made of style in commenting on biblical texts, although in translation it certainly has an impact on readers or hearers. Everyone has favourite passages, and style is important to such choices. Consider 1 Corinthians 13; many striking features have made this a familiar passage, including the metaphors of tongue and cymbal, mirror and sight, but one feature is easily overlooked because it cannot be translated into English, German or most modern languages: the chapter's twenty first person singular verbs without any ἐγώ.

To this we may compare another striking passage that we have already touched on (see sections 4.3 and 4.5 above): Gal 2.15–21, especially verses 19 and 20: ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον, ἵνα θεῶ ζήσω ... ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ... 'For I through law died to law, that I might live to God ... I live, no longer I, lives within me Christ, in faith I live in the Son of God ...' – five first person singular verbs, two first person nominative pronouns, one first person oblique pronoun, every verb meaning living or dying. Paul's death to law is a striking metaphor for one who had been taught that the law is life, and is writing now to congregations in Galatia which are apparently inclined to the same view. Exactly how this 'death' has come 'through law' has puzzled many readers; Paul has sacrificed precision to concision, a stylistic choice. He suggests a kind of twisting of law upon itself, which, however it is understood in detail, necessarily discharges law from its accustomed place at the heart of life. This sets up his account of how he lives but does not live, which we have already looked at.

In contrast to the absence of ἐγώ in 1 Corinthians 13, Gal 2.19–20 has ἐγώ at or near the head of each sentence; absent in one passage, ἐγώ saturates the other. What is the impact of this feature? If we think the point is emphasis, we might explain 1 Corinthians 13 by observing that what Paul says there is true not only of himself, but of everyone; there is no contrast between Paul and others, and hence no emphasis. True; but this might also be said of Gal 2.15–21, a passage beginning in the first person plural, including Peter and all Jews who, like Paul and Peter, have learned that 'one is not justified by works of law, but by faith' (2.16).

Moreover, 2 Cor 12.1–10 and Gal 1.10–2.14, just as ἐγώ-less as 1 Corinthians 3, are certainly personal accounts.

But since the absence of ἐγώ is more or less normal, as Gal 1.12–2.14 illustrates, probably no explanation is needed for its absence in 1 Cor 13. Turning then to Gal 2.19–20, we have already noted that the *I/not I* formulation of verse 20 (ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ) requires ἐγώ. For 2.19 (ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ὀπέθανον), several possibilities present themselves. One is that Paul wanted to use the particle γάρ ('for') to connect 2.19 to the preceding sentence, and he preferred ἐγὼ γάρ to the available alternatives.³⁵ Or perhaps ἐγώ is related to the shift from the first person plural in 2.15–17 to the singular in 2.18–21: the focus narrows, the intensity increases, and ἐγώ here may be a marker of this increased intensity (not using ἐγώ for this purpose in 2.18 because there Paul wanted a conditional sentence, beginning with εἰ ('if')). Part of this intensification is the language of life and death which emerges in verse 19; as I have noted, Paul often uses ἐγώ with such language. Or perhaps when Paul employed the *I/not I* form, as he does in verse 20, he liked to have a preceding ἐγώ as a sort of preamble (see 1 Cor 7.9; 15.9; Rom 7.9, 10, 14).

As I have suggested, in Romans 7.7–25, beyond the overall rhythm of ἐγώ, individual occurrences can be explained in various ways: in 7.9 and 10, as part of the emphatic phrases 'I lived' and 'I died'; in 7.14, balanced against νόμος; in 7.17 and 20b, as part of an *I/not I* formulation; in 7.24, with an understood verb; in 7.25, with an emphatic αὐτός. Ἐγώ in 7.20a remains a puzzle, as it evidently was to the many scribes who omitted it; perhaps it has something to do with this verse recapitulating verses 16 and 17. (See also the discussions of Romans 7 in sections 3, 4.3, 4.5 and 4.6 above.)

I leave it to readers to consider alternative possibilities for these passages, and for others. There is no definitive explanation for stylistic choices, but that does not make them unimportant. They hold clues to the thought of the writer, even as they help to mould the responses of the reader.

³⁵ Γάρ is ordinarily the second word in a clause; sometimes it comes later, but it is never the first word. Διὰ γὰρ νόμου would separate the preposition and the noun, which Paul usually avoids, as in Rom 2.1; 14.9; 1 Cor 9.10; 12.9; 2 Cor 2.9; 5.7; 10.3; Gal 2.12; 1 Thess 1.8 (but contrast Rom 3.20; 1 Cor 4.15; 9.9; 2 Cor 1.24; 2.4). Διὰ νόμου γὰρ νόμῳ would separate νόμου and νόμῳ.