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From *Sacrificium Intellectus* to Excess of Meaning: Contemporary Debates on the Event

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Abstract

This article reconstructs Jean Grondin's critique of the contemporary fascination with the concept of the event, focusing on his warning against a possible *sacrificium intellectus*. It examines whether the incorporation of the event into the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Claude Romano entails a subordination of reason. To this end, the article explicates Grondin's etymological, metaphysical, and transitive arguments, contrasting them with Levinas's evential account of the face as enigma and trace, as well as Romano's evential hermeneutics and conception of the *il y a*. The analysis argues that Grondin's critique exhibits inconsistency, particularly in its transition from the demand for explanation to the understanding of the event. Against this backdrop, the article shows that, rather than sacrificing the intellect, Levinas and Romano move towards realist positions grounded in a defense of cordial reason. It contends that affirming the event entails an excess of meaning—a significance that exceeds purely objectifying or procedural reason—without requiring the renunciation of rationality. Instead, it calls for an expansion of reason's scope, enabling it to respond to what is transcendent or inaugural. Ultimately, the event demands a fuller conception of reason, one capable of engaging with the excess that grounds it.

Keywords: Event, Hermeneutics, Cordial reason, *Sacrificium intellectus*

Introduction

Against modern pretensions to enclose everything within a frame or, as Foucault (2002) puts it, to arrange identities and differences into ordered tables, a reaction emerged appealing to a reason not circumscribed by quantification or verification. Moreover, this reaction called for a reason that was not exhausted by the self-evident, but rather included those qualities that were overlooked or deemed intolerable within the

narrow frameworks of *mathesis* or taxonomy—especially the most obscure, fantastic, and incomprehensible among them. To illustrate this, let us consider two well-known ideas or maxims: on the one hand, Pascal states: "The heart has its reasons which reason itself does not know" (1995, 158); on the other, Saint-Exupéry writes, "One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes" (2000, 63). Both ideas confront versions of reason backed by the logic of thought or dazzled by what is patent—that is, by the manifest or visible. In turn, both promote a logic of the heart or, as Peters (2009) puts it in reference to Pascal, a "wisdom of the heart".

It should be noted that the quotes from Pascal and Saint-Exupéry do not necessarily imply an abandonment of reason as thought or patentness; rather, they speak of a complement or a distinction of functions. There would be reasons known by reason and others known only by the heart; yet, this indicates that *some* are known by reason (thought-patentness), not that *all* reasons are known only by the heart. Nevertheless, and even though there is no logical necessity to reject reason-as-thought-and-patentness, a suspicion remains: this reason would operate at a superficial or apparent level—that is, not at a deep or essential level, which would only be accessible through the heart, or essentially, through a kind of *cordial reason*.[1]

Now, what kind of objects or situations, if any, exceed the field of thought-patentness and are exclusive to cordial reason? If they exist, would these objects or situations be inaccessible *de facto* or *de iure*? Would it be a contradiction in terms to even suggest that such exceptional objects or situations could be accessed via reason-as-thought-and-patentness? If this were so, would it be impossible to think of their intertranslatability?

The purpose of this paper is not to answer these questions directly, but to retrieve a persistent discussion, especially in the hermeneutic context: namely, that some objects or situations are susceptible to rigorous explanation—especially those belonging to the realm of the natural or inanimate—while others, by their very nature, do not yield to causal reasoning and, therefore, require attitudes of

understanding or interpretation, never approachable from a reason-as-thought-and-patentness. Among this latter type of objects or situations are those proper to the human, in its character as *Geist*. In the cases considered so far, we can see that for Pascal, "we know the truth not only by means of the reason but also by means of the heart" (1995, 35), delegating to the latter the knowledge of first principles; for Saint-Exupéry, among other things, these objects or situations would include the act "to create ties" (2000, 59) and the responsibility in the encounter with the other: "You become responsible forever for what you've tamed. You're responsible for your rose…" (Saint-Exupéry 2000, 64).

Retrieving this discussion involves reviewing a recent critique by Jean Grondin (2014) regarding the concept of event (*événement*), particularly within contemporary French hermeneutic philosophy. The aim is, first, to present the central elements of Grondin's critique. Subsequently, I examine two proposals that, while not mentioned by this author, could be targets of his criticism—that is, they might adopt a certain version of the event: those of Emmanuel Levinas and Claude Romano. The purpose is to evaluate whether these criticisms are applicable to them and, if so, whether they are vulnerable to the reasons Grondin exposes—namely, whether they imply a *sacrificium intellectus*. I argue that Grondin's critique suffers from shortcomings in its formulation, while simultaneously defending that not every adoption of the concept of event entails a subordination of reason. In the terms in which I have framed the debate, I will defend the legitimacy of a *cordial reason* and its resistance to being subsumed under reason-as-thought-and-patentness.

Grondin's Critiques of the Notion of Event

Although his name may not be as widely recognized in certain hermeneutic circles as those of Gadamer or Ricoeur, the philosopher Jean Grondin possesses an extensive trajectory in this field. Indeed, the critique analyzed in this text is not marginal to his work but is part of a broader project: to defend a realist perspective of hermeneutics or, rather, the introduction of metaphysical (realist) elements into this

philosophical discipline. In Grondin's case, Vattimo's critique, for whom the recent "temptation of realism" should be understood as "a new way of doing philosophy" (2016, 77), would not apply. On the contrary, even before the boom of New Realism, Grondin (2003) rightly confronted constructivism. Recently, he has stated: "If hermeneutics defines itself by its method -namely, an interpretation of the real that lies in wait for its meaning- metaphysics is characterized by what concerns its object" (Grondin 2013, vi). The critique presented here, then, subscribes to a realist hermeneutic perspective.

The text under consideration in this section is "In any event? Critical remarks on the recent fascination with the notion of event" (2014). Grondin first asserts that one can distinguish between a "trivial" and a "common" sense of the event. According to the former, "every occurrence is an event" (Grondin 2014, 63); for example, the fact that I am sitting in front of the computer writing this text, insofar as it is something happening, is an event. The latter—perhaps the one that comes to mind when we hear the word—is used to designate "a significant, impacting, often surprising and unforeseeable phenomenon" (Grondin 2014, 63); an example of this would be the invasion of one country by another and the destruction and death it generates. In this type of event, there is what Grondin calls "a 'wow' factor working for it" (Grondin 2014, 63). The discussion will obviously revolve around this second sense.

Now, the central idea Grondin defends is that "contrary to popular belief, events can be *explained*" (2014, 64 [emphasis added]). The first argument to support his view is etymological: "*eventum* comes from *evenire*, which means 'to come out of' (*venire ex* [*aliquo*]). An event thus never comes from nowhere […] It comes from something out of which it can be explained. An inexplicable event would not be an event" (Grondin 2014, 64). Grondin is aware that we cannot explain all events; nevertheless, he nuances his argument by opening the possibility that they may be explained in the future or *a posteriori*. His critique targets those who confuse what is inexplicable in the present with what is inexplicable absolutely. The conclusion of this *etymological argument* is: "If words have

meaning, events are not inexplicable, and the fact that we at times feel 'events' leave us dumbfounded confirms that we are always on the lookout for reasons for the events of the world and our lives" (Grondin 2014, 65).

We might call the second argument the *metaphysical argument*. Grondin assumes that the current era is nominalist and characterized by the view that "the only existing entities are deemed to be individual, material things, which empirical science, and it alone, can grasp and explain" (2014, 65). This situation is complicated for philosophy and related disciplines, as concepts such as spirit or meaning "are explained away in this positivistic view of things" (Grondin 2014, 65). According to this view, one either renounces supramundane entities, clinging to what shows itself—albeit with the pretension of going beyond what is given (an anti-metaphysical perspective)—or adopts a naturalism that is confused with positivism; both options would be two sides of the same coin. Here, an alternative arises that appeals to a good number of recent "Parisian phenomenologists": "the notion of event comes in handy: it has its roots in what is happening (and thus sounds thoroughly phenomenological) but transcends it in a way by demonstrating (!) that not everything is understandable, rational, or explicable" (Grondin 2014, 65). It is in this context that the expression *sacrificium intellectus* emerges: "The rational will to understand has also been indiscriminately branded as metaphysical (as we saw, the notion that everything comes out of something does not entail that we can actually offer an explanation for it)" (Grondin 2014, 66). Grondin's conclusion is that this "fascination with the notion of event" is nothing more than "a bad form of metaphysics" (Grondin 2014, 66), according to which "Metaphysics is identified with reason (true enough) so that everything which helps us escape this realm of boring and suffocating rationality is praised as a saving 'event'" (Grondin 2014, 67).

We call the third argument the *argument from transitivity*, condensed in the statement: "The event is always the event of something (or of being), which can be *understood*" (2014, 67 [emphasis added]). Based on examples of authors who have employed the notion of event (Gadamer, Heidegger,

Bultmann), Grondin asserts that it is not possible—as the "Parisian phenomenologists" intend—to expand the notion to general or indeterminate spheres, due to the transitive character of the event; that is "The event is always the event of something" (Grondin 2014, 68). Likewise, even in spheres so prone to the Parisian version of the event, such as the theological, Grondin recognizes in Bultmann a commitment to the possibility of understanding events like redemption. Through these three arguments, Grondin concludes that "events can be understood, at least to a degree. Of course, they can" (Grondin 2014, 68).

Grondin's approach has clarified certain ideas: (1) by nature, the event does not arise *ex nihilo*; it comes from something and, therefore, is susceptible to explanation; (2) the naturalist challenge—for which all explanation depends on the factuality of what is explained or, at least, on not appealing to supramundane criteria—does not commit philosophical thought to adopting a rationality reduced to such a conception of the world, nor to renouncing rationality; finally, (3) the fact that an event always has content—that is, it is an event *of* something—reduces the possibilities of applying the concept to spheres beyond specific ones; furthermore, even in these specific 'somethings', it is possible to achieve a certain degree of understanding. The greatest gain of Grondin's discussion is that, even while recognizing the presence of events, there are no reasons to renounce understanding (or rationality). In the following section, we will explore two proposals that defend a robust perspective of the event, seeking elements that enter into dialogue with Grondin and challenge some of his arguments.

Emmanuel Levinas and Claude Romano: Two Possible Targets of Grondin's Critique

It is unclear whom Grondin has in mind when he refers to certain "Parisian phenomenologists"; in his essay, he mentions only Jean-Luc Marion. This section will consider two philosophers who could possibly fit that description. Given that we might unfairly construct the targets Grondin has in mind, we consider it necessary to provide minimal grounds for taking

them as relevant cases. Following this, the basic theses of each author will be exposed, concluding the section by pointing out how they seemingly succumb to Grondin's critiques.

The first philosopher is Emmanuel Levinas. At the end of his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (2012), Grondin dedicates a section to Levinas titled: "The Rediscovery of the Metaphysics of Transcendence: Levinas." There, he expounds on certain ideas of Levinas, particularly his engagement with ontology in its attempt to reduce all alterity to possession, understood as knowledge. Faced with this, Levinas proposes a metaphysics more akin to his proposal on alterity: "metaphysical thought is one that discovers the transcendence of the 'Other', which exceeds all my efforts to understand it" (Grondin 2012, 244). Certainly, the event that exceeds all meaning would be, as is well known, the face of the other. This perspective allows for the assumption of a metaphysics with very special characteristics, especially because it involves "thinking the radical transcendence of the Other in relation with me" (Grondin 2012, 245). Now, Grondin asks: "Does the Other not want to be understood in its own Being? If I am to answer the call of the Other, am I not to distinguish its face from the one embodying the violence I must resist?" (Grondin 2012, 246). Grondin's exposition of Levinas's philosophy would give rise to the suspicion that he could be included among the philosophers fascinated by the event, at least in the following aspects: he rejects the possibility of understanding-possession of a certain phenomenon; he proclaims a transcendence that exceeds all meaning; and finally, that event would be the face of the other person. Furthermore, the questions formulated would call into question the apparent rejection of understanding that seemingly permeates Levinas's ideas.

But there are also internal reasons within Levinas's work. Pirktina, after exposing Levinas's strongest ideas—some already pointed out by Grondin— concludes that Levinas is a "thinker of the event" [*Ereignisdenker*], insofar as "thought can be a relation with the other, but cannot reach it intellectually" (2019, 71). For our present purpose, we will refer exclusively to the article "Enigma and Phenomenon" (1996).

The second philosopher is Claude Romano. Unlike Levinas, Romano would have no major difficulty fitting the mold of Grondin's critique, especially because his ideas configure what the author himself has termed *evential hermeneutics* (*herméneutique événementiale*); moreover, he is a "Parisian phenomenologist." We assume, then, that in this second case we are not overreaching in choosing him to confront Grondin's ideas.

Let us consider some central lines from Levinas in "Enigma and Phenomenon." From the outset, the juxtaposition of terms exposes their distance. On the one hand, the *phenomenon*, characterized by Levinas as the reasonable, the evident, that which is present to an intentional consciousness—that is, what synchronizes the past and the future in the *now*, gathered in the idea, grouped in discourse; or rather, ordered. Hence, he asserts: "As a speech directed upon the present, philosophy is an understanding of being, or an ontology, or a phenomenology" (1996, 66). However, what happens with phenomena that, at first glance, are not situated within the order of discourse (for example, the Platonic ideas of the Good, or the One, and the idea of God)? According to Levinas, when one of these phenomena enters the flow of correlation —that is, when it has been illuminated by conscious experience—it loses its peculiarity: "All that could have attested to his holiness, that is, to his transcendence, in the light of experience would immediately belie its own witness already by its very presence and intelligibility" (Levinas 1996, 67).

On the other hand, the *enigma*, whose features are "a diachrony which maddens" (Levinas 1996, 67), is the impossibility of bringing all moments together in a *now*; the transcendence that is not synchronized in any order of being or discourse; a significance that overflows all signification, an excess of meaning, a disturbance that would alter everything considered up to that point: "If a formal description of such a disturbance could be attempted, it would have us speak of a time, a plot, and norms that are not reducible to the understanding of being, which is allegedly the alpha and the omega of philosophy" (Levinas 1996, 67-68). It is the face of the other that produces such a disturbance. Here it is necessary to

consider one of the central concepts of the transition between Levinas's two fundamental works, *Totality and Infinity* (1991a) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1991b): the concept of the *trace*. The importance of mentioning it lies in the fact that, since the expression does not participate in "the order from which it tears itself," it would seem to lose all contact, and consequently, the face (which expresses) would be inaccessible, for there would be no sign to signify it. However, Levinas does not rule out the possibility of contact: "A trace can, to be sure, become a sign" (1996, 70). The issue is that, unlike a sign referring to an object, in the face, the trace "is the very emptiness of an irrecuperable absence. The gaping open of emptiness is not only the sign of an absence. A mark traced on sand is not a part of a path, but the very emptiness of a passage" (Levinas 1996, 70). With the trace, Levinas breaks the primacy of presence and posits the possibility of a phenomenon that cannot be evoked—if to evoke is to bring to presence. With this, he guarantees the radical alterity of the face which, although a trace, is never presence; it has *always-already-been*. That is why he will say that "In an enigma the exorbitant meaning is already effaced in its apparition" (Levinas 1996, 71).

We might conclude that the exposition on the enigma with an idea that allows us to discuss Grondin, which has to do with the place of knowledge in the approach to the enigma. For Levinas, the enigma is foreign to knowledge; but this strangeness is not because the subject is not sufficiently prepared to understand it, but because, as stated, it is prior to the intentional exercise of consciousness: "it is already too old for the game of cognition […], it does not lend itself to the contemporaneousness that constitutes the force of the time tied in the present […], it imposes a completely different version of time" (Levinas 1996, 75). Likewise, the enigma does not authorize us to embrace irrationalism, for as Callin and Sebbah state, "Levinas would not want us to deduce that the witness of the enigma is simply an apology for irrationalism; on the contrary, the enigma is par excellence the place of signification" (2002, 21).

Let us now consider Romano's ideas. In an interview with Kadir Filiz, Romano plays with the distinction we raised

in the introduction. According to him, he takes from Husserl the opposition between an *engherzige Rationalität* or "narrow-hearted rationality," limited to logic, mathematics, and the methods that function in empirical sciences, and a "large-hearted" rationality "that extends to the sensible world itself and to the experience we make of it" (Romano and Filiz 2021, 191). In fact, in one of his most relevant phenomenological works, *At the Heart of Reason* (2015), he had already deployed this distinction; and the fact that he includes the heart in the title announces a rejection of adopting a reduced or narrow reason. In this type of reason, which we have called *cordial*, as evential hermeneutics would operate.

We take as a reference the Preface to *There is: The Event and the Finitude of Appearing* (2016a). There, Romano points out his relationship with Husserl's phenomenology while simultaneously showing his discrepancies. As the title announces, the confrontation occurs between *event* and *appearing*. Regarding the latter, the author reconstructs the Husserlian project of phenomenology as a descriptive science, in which one must take appearing as a source of right to investigate its meaning. According to Husserl, this investigation means returning what appears to the functions of the subject: "All phenomena are phenomena for a consciousness, which means that consciousness, interpreted as a transcendental instance [*instance*], is the condition of possibility of the phenomenalization of phenomena" (Romano 2016a, xi). Romano refers here to the constitutive phase of transcendental phenomenology. Since its inception, phenomenology deals with the subjective conditions of appearing, although in its historical developments (Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Gadamer) relevant adjustments have been made to understand this situation.

Now, the other Janus face has to do with the event. Before *There is*, Romano's research had revolved around establishing, starting from the event, an inquiry into its phenomenological meaning and questioning its very existence—that is, its structures and status. In *There is*, Romano carries out a more radical inquiry into "the very appearing of the event, that is, of specifying what it means for it to 'come about,'

'happen,' or 'occur'" (2016a, xvi). Being radical, it distances itself from previous versions of time, for example, the Aristotelian version of change. In the case of the event, it is no longer a matter of "to become something by something from something; it is neither to modify itself nor to modify its temporal situation" (Romano 2016a, xvi); rather, when the event occurs, a transformation of the world also occurs: "the critical upheaval of the event does not leave its context unchanged, but rather shows it in a new light. The world and the event suddenly burst forth together; they are cosmogenetically one in that mutation of the appearing" (Romano 2016a, xvi).

We speak, in effect, of an exorbitant situation, of an excess of meaning (of the "wow" factor mentioned by Grondin), which requires a consideration of language, since it seems that common speech cannot account for this. For Romano, "One cannot attempt to describe this sort of change without resorting to paradoxical expressions: 'change without anything having changed' (Bergson), change from nothing to something, absolute change [*changement du tout au tout*]" (2016a, xvi). In fact, the term Romano prefers to designate this change is *there is* (*il-y-a*), as he makes patent in the book's title. If we wished to glimpse the meaning of this term, we would have to say that the *there is* is "that immobile mutation […] since it lacks any substratum that could be said to 'change,' this 'change,' if you will, by which the event does not change into something else but changes into itself, advenes or supervenes" (Romano 2016a, xvii).

In a sense similar to Levinas's (indeed, Levinas also broadly thematizes the concept of *il-y-a*), Romano suggests an approach, *via negative*, to the possibility of a phenomenology of the event: it does not submit to previously established conditions of possibility; it is not produced within an open horizon that completely conditions its meaning; it is not possible before it happens to the person to whom it happens; it does not let itself be pigeonholed into the dichotomies of appearing/what appears, being/beings, donation/given. Here Romano asserts that, in the event, "Its phenomenological 'syntax' is different" (2016a, xvii).

It remains to consider one last important aspect in the discussion with Grondin: the understanding of the appearing of the event. It has been posited that the appearing of the event differs from appearing to an intentional consciousness—that is, from the apparition of any phenomenon. Certainly, the concept of *there is* (a sophisticated way of approaching nothingness) gainsays any attempt to situate the event within a prior horizon of meaning. For Romano, "The opening of appearing […] takes place at the same level as that which appears, and as that appearing itself" (2016a, xvii). According to this, the apparition [of the event] inaugurates its own comprehensive framework; that is, it is not reduced to prior understandings. That is why Romano says that the event "is itself the opener and initiator of its own meaning" (Romano 2016a, xviii). This poses a challenge to hermeneutics, as it calls into question the idea that all understanding occurs within a network of pre-understandings that, to a certain extent, condition its meaning. In this case, the event breaks its bond with an infinite subjective time, in which present, past, and protention are linked in the flow of consciousness, to confront me with my finite character: "The world and the event are suspended in nothingness; they co-articulate the finitude of appearing" (Romano 2016a, xviii); for this reason, Romano concludes, the event "is irreducible to every interpretative approach in terms of inner-temporality" (Romano 2016a, xviii).

The proposals of Levinas and Romano seemingly succumb to Grondin's critiques. First, both redefine the concept of event; that is, they do not adhere to the etymology of the word. In both cases (the face and the event), they challenge the character of "coming from," proper to the term event; both disturb presence and announce a coming not circumscribed to the immanence of time, making it impossible to determine where they come from. In Levinas's particular case, as he will show in *Totality and Infinity* (1991a), the other has no beginning (*an-arché*); its presence installs its signification determined by the word of the one who speaks, not by sedimented signs. The same occurs for Romano: "To think events before anything: Isn't this an impossible challenge? As soon as we attempt to grasp an event as it happens in itself, we

are almost immediately absorbed by other things, by 'things' precisely, frozen before our eyes by a Medusa's gaze" (2009, 2). This being so, neither Levinas nor Romano would agree with Grondin that "events can be explained."

Second, Grondin's characterization of a bad metaphysics—one anchored in what appears (face, event) but transcending it in some way—seems to leave traces in Levinas and Romano. In Levinas's case, this transcendence only has meaning when it goes beyond appearing. Thus it can be read in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*: "If transcendence has meaning, it can only signify the fact that the event of being, the *esse*, the essence, passes over to what is other than being" (Levinas 1991b, 3); furthermore, the Other is not assumed as something that can be known, at least not in the first instance, but as something that instructs me and to whom I must respond: "The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us. And it is only man who could be absolutely foreign to me—refractory to every typology, to every genus, to every characterology, to every classification" (Levinas 1991a, 73)—that is, to all knowledge, in the usual sense of the term.

Romano pronounces himself in a similar sense; drawing on his interpretation of Bergson, he considers that metaphysics lacks the understanding to grasp the radical novelty of the unforeseeable nature of reality. For Romano, in this negative Bergsonian sense, "Metaphysics replaces immediate experience with a 'system of abstract general ideas,' a theoretical scaffolding all the more fragile and shaky since it follows 'the natural bent of the intellect,' and distances itself from intuition" (2016a, 68). Now, there also exists in Bergson an affirmative sense of metaphysics; in this other sense, "Metaphysics […] must rather return to experience; it is that experience itself in its original form. Metaphysics must be experimental because experience is metaphysical: it is duration" (Romano 2016a, 68). Romano asks what obfuscates the intellect when this duration is replaced by a convenient or everyday representation adapted to the needs of action, and his answer is forceful: "the unforeseeable. The genealogy of metaphysics is the genealogy of the obfuscation of the absolutely new" (Romano 2016a, 68).

Thus, the consideration made under what we have called the *metaphysical argument* aligns well with the approaches of Levinas and Romano, both in the ambiguity between objectual presence and its non-reduction to it, and in the recurrence to transcendent factors that would prevent an explanation of the event, at least in rational terms. It would be a matter of a metaphysics in which the real seems to take a back seat, and with it, reality and the possibility of accessing it.

Finally, it remains to explore the *argument from transitivity*. The relationship Grondin establishes is that, since the event is always an event *of* something (underpinned by his etymological argument), it can be understood. At first glance, the critique would not apply to Levinas, for it is clear that the phenomenon he would be safeguarding from an objectual approach would be the face, insofar as, more than a phenomenon or apparition, it is an enigma; if this is so, he would agree with Grondin that "the event is always the event of something"—that is, it would not be applicable in a general way. However, the consequent of the conditional would not be fulfilled, for although it is an event of something (in this case, of the face), Levinas does not seem to guarantee its understanding, at least not in the sense of "boring and suffocating rationality" mentioned by Grondin and celebrated by the philosophers he criticizes.

Romanos's case is more vulnerable on this point. It is not clear, as in Levinas, whether the event has that "wow" factor or if it is a general worldly condition. From a simple statement like "it's raining" or "the moon 'moons'," Romano infers an impersonal form: "Acting without agent, pure efficacy, change without anything that changes, pure flash of a time without duration, resonating in a verb from which the noun itself appears derived" (Romano 2009, 3). According to this, it is not known what the 'something' is of which the event is, precisely, an event; consequently, there is no guarantee of its understanding. This would be a paradigmatic case of those Grondin has in mind when proposing his critique.

The purpose of this section was to evaluate whether Levinas and Romano are vulnerable to Grondin's critique. The review allows us to conclude that, certainly, both philosophers

defend a type of philosophy that challenges the notion of event, adopts a metaphysics ambiguous regarding facts or reality—suggesting the need for transcendence—and breaks the transitivity proposed by Grondin to safeguard understanding. The challenge now will be to show that, despite this, the proposals of Levinas and Romano do not succumb to the *sacrificium intellectus*. That will be the purpose of the following concluding section.

Excess of Meaning Does Not Necessarily Imply a Sacrifice of the Intellect

Up to this point, Grondin's critique seems to find solid backing: Levinas and Romano appear to be cases of philosophers who, adhering to the notion of the event, reject the possibility of explanation, as they run counter to all the arguments exposed by Grondin. The purpose of this final section is to question the relationship established by this author between the adoption of the event and the subordination of reason. In conditional terms, the statement would be: "If a philosopher adopts the notion of event, he commits a *sacrificium intellectus*." We see, from the outset, that the antecedent is weakened by Grondin, for he does not believe there are events other than those allowed by the etymology of the term—which, in any case, are always explicable (even in causal terms, since one can determine where they come from, insofar as they do not come from nothing). To achieve this objective, I will first raise some objections to Grondin's critique; subsequently, I will show how Levinas and Romano are not so far removed from Grondin—indeed, they coincide with him in substance.

Grondin's first argument, which we have called *etymological*, sets a framework that is too restrictive for the discussion. Appealing to the etymology of the term proves weak, as concepts—especially in philosophy—are redefined in the light of new ideas or the expository aims of philosophers. Let us take a case: the Greek term *epoché*, so present in discussions between Stoics and Skeptics, was used by the philosopher Edmund Husserl, giving it a methodological sense that, unless one performs many *conceptual gymnastics*, does not preserve

the essence of the Greek meaning of the term. To argue from etymology would be to deny the evolution of meanings or to arbitrarily opt for one of them (the one that best suits our argument).

At risk of being accused of a *tu quoque*, I could also take as an example the article's most resonant expression: *sacrificium intellectus*. A simple definition of this would be: "subordination of reason to faith, particularly in Christian contexts, emphasizing obedience and devotion." Strictly speaking, it seems that an expression with a specific context is being extrapolated to another where it would not literally apply. Moreover, as shown by Speer's rigorous etymological work, in one of its more recent senses, obedience to an authority, rather than a rejection of reason, implies the recognition of the need for an orientation that "with its insight into the limitations of human reason, attempts at the same time to conceive an integral convergence of human knowledge" (2008, 69). According to this interpretation, the *sacrificium intellectus* complements reason; it does not impoverish it.

A second difficulty in Grondin's argumentation is the variation in the meaning of what he intends to defend. In the strongest sense of his statement, "contrary to popular belief, events can be *explained*," the author uses the verb *to explain*; however, in his concluding remarks, Grondin asserts that "the event is always the event of something (or of being), which can be *understood*." It is natural for the verb *to explain* to be enunciated in the context of the etymological argument, as it is convenient to show that something comes from (*ex*) something—that is, a causal relationship can be established, which is the strongest sense of explaining. The use of *to understand* undoubtedly weakens the pretension of the first statement, since understanding does not imply explanation based on causes. In this sense, while Levinas and Romano might not agree with the first affirmation, they would not radically dissent from the second —only they would not consider that understanding to be full, and that for a fuller understanding, what we have called *cordial reason* is required. Both caveats would not enter into contradiction with what Grondin proposes, for by pointing out that "events can be understood, at least to a

degree," he would accept that they are not given fully and that their truth is not guaranteed once and for all.

The most challenging idea has to do with the *metaphysical argument*, as the discussion centers on the adoption of a metaphysics that is not naturalist, but returns to supramundane entities, shrugging off the commitments that reality demands; likewise, by abandoning reality, there is also an emancipation from the criteria of rationality proper to all investigative exercise. I share Grondin's concern regarding certain contemporary hermeneutic tendencies, especially those of a relativist nature. Grondin asserts that one of the possible meanings of hermeneutics is "to designate an intellectual and cultural space where there is no truth, since everything is a matter of interpretation" (2008, 14). But the path would not be to equate philosophies of the event with this species of "farewell to reason."

In Levinas's case, for example, although the face challenges the hermeneutic exercise due to its infinity, Levinas—through concepts such as the "trace" (*la trace*), the "third party" (*le tiers*), or the "Said" (*le Dit*, which is inevitable)—allows us to glimpse a realist perspective in his philosophy. In fact, Braver (2019) undertakes an interesting exploration of Levinasian realism, especially as a rejoinder to the critiques of correlationism coming from Meillassoux. Likewise, it is not possible to see Levinas as a philosopher who succumbs to reason or promotes a lazy, disenchanted reason (boring or suffocating, in Grondin's terms); rather, he posits more rigorous standards of reason (in this regard, see De Boer 1997 or Aguirre 2019). The scarcity of works on these issues is due more to the disinterest of the author's scholars than to the impossibility of exploring him from a realist perspective.

Romano, for his part, openly acknowledges himself as a realist philosopher (see Romano 2016b, 2018, 2020). In the aforementioned interview with Filiz, Romano asserts that realism is not new to phenomenology, although he finds it strange that the contemporary reception of Husserl, especially in France, has overlooked this fact. According to Romano, there are two perspectives regarding realism: the first is based on a critique of the representational image of the mind, inherited

from modern philosophy, whose conclusions are achieved by criticizing the dichotomies that govern that model: internal-external, primary vs. secondary qualities, phenomena-things in themselves. The second "keeps this representative model of the mind in place, but claims to have found a way to bridge the chasm established by modern philosophy and accordingly to reach the absolute or 'in itself' beyond our representations" (Romano and Filiz 2021, 189). And further down he adds: "I feel myself indisputably much closer to the first path" (Romano and Filiz 2021, 189). In fact, his work aligns more with what is termed descriptive realism.

Now, regarding rationality, we have already stated that it is inscribed in a perspective of *cordial reason*, which opposes the conception predominating in certain schools of philosophy, characterized by him as one "which tends to reduce rationality *grosso modo* to valid schemata of inference and to the methods of empirical knowledge" (Romano and Filiz 2021, 190). In this, he would agree with Levinas, but also with Grondin, who in a clarifying essay on the meaning of (truth as) *adaequatio*, highlights the importance of the notion of the *thing*, even in the empiricist perspective: "we understand by this a conception of the thing that we quickly identify […] as the observable, measurable thing, thought in the manner of a *res extensa*" (2016, 39); however, the paragraph concludes by stating that "we do not live only in the order of quantifiable things; we also live, if not primarily, in the realm of meaningful things" (Grondin 2016, 40).

Thus, the metaphysics assumed by Levinas and Romano, philosophers of the event, does not distance itself substantially from that defended by Grondin, so the *metaphysical argument* would not affect these authors. Similarly, since no desire was seen in Levinas or Romano to deny the general possibility of understanding—but rather, at least, they limited it to some cases—and given that they did not deny that these exceptional cases were hermetic to *some* type of rationality, neither does the *argument from transitivity* affect their philosophical programs.

In this section, we have considered some critiques of Grondin's perspective on the event; as can be seen, the author's own approach succumbs to some difficulties regarding its

consistency, especially in the use of the etymological argument and in the shift from *explaining* to *understanding*—a substantial change, for while not everything can be explained, there would be modes of understanding. No *sacrificium intellectus* is perceived in the analyzed cases, although there is an interest in expanding the margins of rationality so that it can be taken in a more inclusive way. Ultimately, Grondin's claim is extremely valuable due to the irresponsibility that, especially in the field of hermeneutics, tends to be assumed regarding the discourses proclaimed. The issue is that the critique cannot be directed so much at the philosophers of the event (or, at least, not at all of them in general), but at those who adopt irrational or neo-cynical postures.

Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that the adoption of a philosophy of the event, represented here by Levinas or Romano, does not imply the subordination of reason or a *sacrificium intellectus*. Although pertinent, Grondin's critique proved untenable when confronting its presuppositions. This was evidenced in the weakness of the etymological argument, since Grondin's own oscillation between the demand for explanation and the recognition of the understanding of the event dilutes the force of his objection. More fundamentally, it was established that neither Levinas's ethical transcendence nor Romanos's evential hermeneutics renounce realism. Consequently, the slope leading from the defense of the event to the sacrifice of the intellect is not clear.

NOTES

[1] At the time of writing this text, I was unaware that the term "cordial reason" had already undergone extensive development, I encountered, for instance, Cortina's text (2007), which precisely posits the dichotomy I outline: "It is demonstrative reason, productive reason that does not understand the reasons of the heart, but not cordial reason: alongside the 'geometric spirit' beats the 'spirit of finesse', which makes us know in a different way" (pp. 126-127). Despite this, I opt to retain the concepts of *thought* or *patentness*, rather than those of *demonstration* or *production*, insofar as the former do not possess the ideological connotations that could be attributed to the latter (at least, not as many).

[2] As the purpose of this paper is not to analyze the concept of the event (*événement*) in Levinas, suffice is to refer to the cited work by Pirktina, where its presence throughout his oeuvre is sufficiently demonstrated.

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