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## Meaning in life issues. Sense or inspiring at the limits of thought

**Abstract:** This article introduces a novel aspect of meaning in life issues that bears on the experience of sense that is inspiring at the limits of thought. The author draws on French continental philosophers considering their language an appropriate vehicle to indicate how this experience differs from mainstream theories and what is distinctive about it. Also, because their knowledge and background understanding is shared only by a limited number of specialists, Ayn Rand's notion of "sense in life" is employed as a stepping stone. This approach allows outlining an initial understanding of what is meant by a sense that is inspiring at the limits of thought. Finally, it is suggested to incorporate this new perspective into current theories so as to make for a broader and more in-depth overall comprehension of what constitutes meaning in life.

**Keywords:** meaning/sense in life, sense, inspiring at the limits of thought, Ayn Rand

### I. Introduction

Queries about meaning in life are hard to come to terms with and that is perhaps the reason why in contemporary philosophy the subject has been nearly abandoned, receiving minor, non-systematic attention. And yet, likewise, the past two or three decades have witnessed a renewed and transformed interest in the issue. More particularly, in analytic philosophy a distinct field has arisen that systematically investigates how people's lives can become meaningful.<sup>1</sup> There is a shift from the questions of meaning of life to what makes up meaning in life. Roughly expressed, meaning in life is defined as being distinctive from related sorts of intellectual investigation such as morality as duty and happiness as rational egoism. Frequently heard conditions for a meaningful life are that it should be fulfilling for the subject and that there should be purposeful engagement in an activity, project or

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<sup>1</sup> See T. Metz, *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013; S. Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010; J. Kekes, "The Meaning of Life". in E.D. Klemke and S. M.Cahn, eds., *The Meaning of Life. A Reader*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

relationship that is independently valuable,<sup>2</sup> while independently valuable sources of meaningfulness in turn are considered to be exemplified by the good, the true and the beautiful in its widest sense.<sup>3</sup> Most contemporary philosophers and psychologists agree that a meaningful life may refer both to a whole life and fragments of it, though nearly all tend to assume life as a whole when reflecting on how to come to terms with it. Also, several, if not all, acknowledge that meaningfulness comes in degrees.

This article investigates an aspect so far considered to be neither a part of the domain of meaning of life nor of that of meaning in life. It is about the experience of sense that is inspiring at the limits of thought. This is not an ordinary experience, so that, to deal with it, we will touch on several interrelated phenomena. No doubt, “inspiring” and “at the limits of thought” are pivotal to the experience, almost to the point of constituting a tautology. Sense is “inspiring at the limits of thought”, and “inspiring at the limits of thought,” is sense. However, there are other phenomena that are presupposed or pre-conditional in that they reinforce the experience.

Sense, or inspiring at the limits of thought, is integral to meaning in life issues. This may sound like a bold statement, since structurally there is little to no resemblance between the two. When addressing matters on meaningfulness, we tend to think in terms of sustained duration, taking into consideration or value a whole life, or at least lengthier parts of it. The phrase “inspiring at the limits of thought” includes no obvious semantic reference to any time measurement; if it does at all, it would be that “at the limits of thought” most of all relates to “at the edge of time”. Furthermore, the inspiring experience at the limits of thought does not seem to lead to fulfilment. (Even if philosophers agree that fulfilment – not to be confused with the satisfaction of desire – is not the paramount element of the experience, implicitly, it still has an important constitutive role to play in theories about meaning in life.) Another element of analytic theories is “connecting up to what is outside<sup>4</sup> as well as the perception that meaning in life issues relate to transcending the limits of our value system. Both parameters are also prerequisite to achieving an insight into the element of “inspiring at the limits of thought”. Yet “connecting” and “external” are interpreted in such distinctive ways that any kinship seems to fade. Finally, theories on meaning in life maintain a classic or closed outlook on man, whereas an understanding of sense relies on an open perspective on the subject.

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<sup>2</sup> See S. Wolf, *op. cit.*; J. Kekes, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> See T. Metz, *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013; J. Seachris, “The Meaning of Life: The Analytic Perspective “. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2011. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/mean-ana/>.

<sup>4</sup> R. Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 601.

We claim that the “inspiring at the limits of thought” element is nonetheless a part of the meaning of /in life discussions in philosophy since these are united by a deeper concern to find out if, and how human life can be meaningful<sup>5</sup>. Even though the search for such conditions is implicitly directed towards a significant existence in terms of a whole life, it is by definition a search for underlying structures. In our attempts to understand what provides sense to life, we likewise search for an underlying structure.

Besides, our intuition that the “inspiring at the limits of thought” element is integral to meaning in life issues was confirmed after a pilot study involving in-depth interviews with volunteers. The study was an initiative of the School of Social Work, Centre for Practice-based Research and Services (PRAGODI), Hogeschool-Universiteit-Brussel (HUB) in collaboration with the Free University of Brussels (VUB-CLEA) and aimed to investigate the relation between Volunteering, Meaningfulness and Citizenship. The study assumed that moments of being moved in face-to-face contexts are particularly conducive to experiencing “sense”. Being moved is an encounter with sense, a sense that is always already there but that we especially become “aware” of when being moved. (The reason why we have put “aware” between quotes as well is that the awareness at moments of being moved is never the result of any thematisation). Unlike analytic theories, this study showed that it was not fulfilment that played a principal role but another feature, that we have defined as “wit(h)nessing”.

Being moved was taken in its generic sense, referring both to appealing and appalling situations, but also to moments that at times may seem trivial in themselves. The latter is of importance for that is why, when explained the notion of being moved and asked to reflect on such moments, the interviewees came to grasp only at that particular moment that there was a relation with meaningfulness. Of more significance even: they realised during the interviews that at these instances they experienced meaningfulness the most. The meaningfulness was felt as deeper. Subsequent analysis revealed that the core reason why meaningfulness was experienced deeply was the inspiring trace that the volunteers “wit(h)nessed”.

Clearly, within the domain of meaning in life the inspiring function of meaningful accounts is often alluded to; e.g. Wolf maintains that these may help in directing one’s life, in guiding our children’s lives, and even in shaping political goals.<sup>6</sup> The subject also comes close to “living right and living well”.<sup>7</sup> However, making sense in an inspiring way as noticed in being moved appears to be of another nature, one that can best be described as happening at the limits of thought.

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<sup>5</sup> T. Metz, *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> S. Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> T. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*. USA: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 189.

It is in no simple task to explain what it means that something inspires at the limits of thought, or that it is inspiring beyond any thematisation. How to conceive of that? To better grasp what is at stake at that very moment, the position of French continental philosophers is very useful, more in particular because of the way they handle the age-old topic of how to come to terms with the fact that language or thought cannot grasp all there is, or that there is something ineffably defiant. Emmanuel Levinas for example, is predominantly known for his ethical approach,<sup>8</sup> but for our purpose his far less studied distinction between a multitude of signification or meaning and one inspiring sense defying articulation is thought-provoking, as is his idea of an interruption of signification or meaning in the middle of signification.<sup>9</sup> It is from this background and phenomenological analysis that formulations in terms of “inspiringly making sense at the limits of thought” seems most appropriate.

Yet, since the discussions on meaning in life issues mainly take place in the realm of analytical philosophy, employing French continental language to clarify the above might be less promising. Continental philosophers share a background understanding that is not obviously accessible to a larger public.

To facilitate understanding, we will employ as a stepping stone parts of Ayn Rand’s work. Few authors’ works comply with this mission but surprisingly, some of the phrasings of this (controversial)<sup>10</sup> novelist and philosopher are particular suitable to do so because of her notion of sense in life, making inspiringly sense. While in the entirety of Rand’s work, passages referring to the sense of life are sparse and non-systematic, the line of thought in *The Romantic Manifesto*<sup>11</sup> makes for interesting building blocks as a step towards an understanding of being moved making sense at the limits of thought.

## **II. Sense of life by Ayn Rand**

What is, according to Rand, a sense of life? It is an implicit metaphysics, based on an abstraction and integration of emotions. Starting in our youth we tacitly link the happenings that we lived through in daily life depending

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<sup>8</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2002 (1971); E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2008 (1974).

<sup>9</sup> E. Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*. tr. Nidra Poller. Urbana and Chichago: University of Chicago Press, 2006 (1972).

<sup>10</sup> Rand’s construct of sense of life is lifted out of its proper context in order to come to an understanding of another perspective of meaning in life. There are few similarities between my viewpoints and Rand’s projection of the ideal man.

<sup>11</sup> A. Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto*. New York: Pinguin Group, 1975.

on the emotion they evoke, e.g. classifying such happenings together that relate to fear, anger, contentment or any other emotion. However, she argues, rather than taking into account all that happens to them, people tend to form emotional abstractions from a personal perspective of what is important to their lives, and what is to be evaded, and this will form an implicit metaphysics. Now, the notion “importance” is to be understood, not in a superficial manner but in its essential way, as deeper than moral values, as a very facet of metaphysics allowing a “bridge between metaphysics and ethics”.<sup>12</sup> What is decisive about these fundamental aspects or qualities in life is that they deserve consideration. My life is important. Love is important. Art is important. It is important to behave well. This notion of importance has a function on an existential level, allowing us to sense what is the right world we want to live in. The integrated sum of answers to fundamental questions about life and living provide us with metaphysical value-judgments and forms the backbone of ethics. Indeed, a sense of life reflects the deepest values that we feel we identify with, and these seem unquestionable. The thought of questioning simply never arises because the sense of life – the implicit values we find important – is what we are and what we implicitly recognize in one another in all aspects of life; in the way people walk, talk, and act. Since our sense of life feels like certainty it might be considered a lead.

Rand brings in a sense of life that is as an implicit value-judgement. We could say that it inspires at the limits of thought in that these values are not yet part of an explicit integrating frame. For Rand this implicit value-judgement forms the base of ethics, yet since she also claims that its meaning is different from that of moral values, and examining her concept in this article from a perspective of meaning in life, one may wonder whether it would not be more revealing to consider sense of life as the backbone of a general comprehension of what meaning-in- life entails, expressed in its widest possible way in terms of ethics, beauty, truth.

Rand pairs her sense of life, defined as an emotional integration, to a process of cognitive integration since she considers sense of life incoherent as long as there is no full conceptual control. Even though it is a lead, to Rand, if not buttressed by full judgment it might be “a very deceptive lead”.<sup>13</sup>

That is why sense of life should always be accompanied by an intellectual exercise, as a way to convert inarticulate feelings into lucid principles, well-framed codes of conduct, ideals and values or in sum, a conscious philosophy of life. Rand reckons that this will lead to “a fully integrated

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

personality”,<sup>14</sup> with emotion and mind in harmony and “his sense of life match(ing) his conscious convictions”.<sup>15</sup>

Also, even if a person’s sense of life is not replaced by his convictions, there is nevertheless a shift in lead from emotion to cognition, for once we have reached a certain age we long for a clear metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. We need this as a kind of horizon – providing answers to what and where we are on the map of life – to be able to know the nature of reality and of ourselves and orient us consciously through life from youth to our final death bed. As Charles Taylor also reminds us of, frameworks are inescapable to underpin our notions of a full life. Only through expression will we find the meaning of life, which is always the object of a quest.<sup>16</sup> To Rand, from adolescence on, it is our mind that consciously sets the standards. We no longer derive an implicit metaphysics from deep-seated subconscious value judgments rather, emotions proceed from a consistent philosophical and rational view of reality.<sup>17</sup>

Now, Rand clearly distinguishes between ideas existing in a broad sense – a collective worldview – and a personal integrated view of life. She also demonstrates that the ideal of integration is not so easily reached, pleading to assist adolescents in their intellectual maturing process, while also pointing to dangers of the often incomplete transition, e.g. a man’s sense of life making more sense than the diversity of ideas he agrees with. Rand’s deep concern is that since we cannot escape from the need of a philosophy, of integration, our comprehensive view of reality needs to be directed by reflecting on fundamental issues, otherwise this view will be guided by what comes our way non-systematically, and whereas this can turn out well, it usually does not, for often the comprehensive view is based on ill-founded pseudo-philosophical claptrap we have never questioned.

From the perspective of meaning in life, Rand provides interesting material, emphasising how an implicit sense of life can only fully inspire if reinforced by a clear intellectual horizon orienting people to what kind of life is worth living. As such she is a forerunner of existing theories on meaning in life that see life and actions as meaningful when rationally directed to contributing to what is considered important. We could consider Metz’s definition of his Fundamental Theory on meaning in life as at least partly sharing the same implicit reasoning. To him, “a human person’s life is more meaningful, the more that she employs her reason and in ways that

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> Ch. Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Although Rand may seem to be valuing rationality over emotions, she is also able to relativize it as is clear from her comments on philosophy, where she says “if and to the extent that a philosophy is rational” (*Ibidem*, p. 19).

positively orient rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence”<sup>18</sup>. Reason, or rationality, is understood in a broad way “to signify not merely cognition and intentional action, but also any “judgement-sensitive attitude”<sup>19</sup>. Hence, to Metz, both implicit and explicit horizons seem to matter. Meaning in life then comes about through emotional and rational integration, providing full control or appropriation of reality. As a process of transition it is inspiring.

### III. Inspiring at the limits of thought

To Rand a sense of life is an early value-integration, needing conceptual control to drive this internal mechanism. The concept of sense (of life) taken from French continental philosophy is less easily confinable precisely because it is conceived to fall outside the possibility of representation, or outside signification. It defies articulation, making sense to us beyond signification. While from such a perspective sense cannot have any semantic content, strictly speaking, French philosophers nonetheless articulate it, having sense speak for itself. In more general terms sense is presumed to be both the interruption of signification (of all meaning-making) and the possibility to come to grasp, in a way we cannot articulate, our a priori condition of being-with. Both assumptions on making sense are inherently interrelated, for an a priori condition is revealed the moment all signification is disrupted.

Next to an overall convergence on (making) sense, French philosophers each provide a particular context and way of elaborating this presumed non-concept anyway. Levinas conceives of sense (in terms of disruption and as the *il y a*<sup>20</sup>) as a “unique sense”, an “absolute orientation”, a “pure movement”<sup>21</sup>. Yet sense plays a central role in his notion of irreducible otherness as well, one that is probably not fully recognised by Levinas scholars. When all signification is interrupted – and only then – we find ourselves in the a-priori condition of being-with, without however being able to signify this being-with to the irreducible otherness of the other (2002)<sup>22</sup>. The other person’s making sense to us surpasses all meaning

<sup>18</sup> T. Metz, *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 222.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 223.

<sup>20</sup> Levinas confers different meanings to the *il y a* in his writings, I refer her to his use in *Otherwise than Being*.

<sup>21</sup> E. Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, ed. cit., p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Levinas calls this religion, “We propose to call “religion” the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality” (*Ibidem*, p. 40). Religion and the Latin term *religare* (to bind) are closely related, and in this sentence Levinas refers to a bond prior to or beyond any signification. Nancy employs the term “being-with” (rather than “bond”) and I use his term to cover both.

(signification) endowed upon him. A sense past any representation (signification) can thus be revealed to us and recognized, as Levinas claims. Manifesting itself as surplus of content, it is received from the other outside our own capacity to comprehend, prior to and independent of our own initiative. It is this sense that sense (here by means of being moved by the irreducibility of the other) inspires at the limits of thought.

Jean-Luc Nancy addresses sense in a similar and yet very distinct way, connecting it mainly but not exclusively to the realm of community.<sup>23</sup> Community is often considered to come into existence – into being – because of shared values, shared history, shared language and culture. Community is defined in terms of essences and meaning in all their possible interpretations, from social bonds to family to nation. Without such commonality between autonomous citizens, no community will continue to exist, so it is believed. Against this perception of community in terms of signification or adhered meaning shared by individuals, Nancy puts sense, as “commonality”; a sense of commonality we receive from one another. It would take us too far to go into detail here but the general idea can be illustrated by the crucial human condition of finitude, mostly clearly expressed in birth and death. Each person’s birth and mortality are unavoidably embedded in community and cannot be expressed but by others. Herein lies the very–irreducible–sense of community: community–us–is what the “I”, the subject cannot show of itself.<sup>24</sup> Community thus exists not (only) because of autonomous subjects appearing in a society sharing a common substance or essence (community as signification), but (also) because of a way of being with each other beyond the level of subjects as pure closed individuals. It is this sense that makes sense to us in an unarticulated way, inspiring at the limits of thought.

#### **IV. Subject**

We can see how another subject-idea is at stake in the above, one that is open rather than self-enclosed. The conception of personality as formulated by Rand and by analytic philosophers such as Metz, converge in that they both have a fully integrated personality in mind. To Rand, a total integration of personality is intrinsically related to a synthesis of somebody’s sense of life and rational mind; the conscious directed synthesis is the very transformation towards a fully harmonized personality from which henceforth they will act on the basis of conscious deliberation, choices and judgments.

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<sup>23</sup> J.L. Nancy, *The inoperative community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991 (1990).

<sup>24</sup> I am indebted to Pieter Meurs for his interesting and challenging conversations on Nancy. See also his doctoral thesis (unpublished), 2013. *The Myths of Globalization. Thinking the limits of world-forming*. Free University of Brussels, 2013.



In this sense, we could call this subject a closed subject, finding truth through conceptual control.<sup>25</sup>

To Levinas, the picture of a fully integrated and autonomous subject as conceived of by Rand is not a false one; yet is only part of the picture. It is the one we are most aware of, because the notion of a stable and detached conscious subject “fits” with the idea of clear signification and meaning, able to design its world. The two go hand in hand. However, in moments of being appealed, this stable subject is disrupted, making it sense a being-with beyond any signification. In his later work<sup>26</sup>, Levinas becomes more radical, the integrated stable subject is not simply disrupted when being appealed, rather, from the very start of life subjects are oriented towards the other, despite themselves. A person’s inclination or impulse to continue to exist and enhance himself is already hampered from within. There is an uneasiness with the own perseverance of being, breaking the *conatus essendi* open from within, towards the other. In this sense, the subject is inextricably linked to the other, in spite of the assumption that one is an autonomous self-agency.

As indicated, Nancy distinguishes between community in terms of signification and community as unarticulated sense.<sup>27</sup> This sense of community invites a different reading of “subject”, one that draws on this a priori condition of being-with as singularized “us”. There is “us” because, as indicated, only the others can refer to our finitude, and in that sense the finitude is always deeply shared, yet “singularized” because our utmost singularity is exposed precisely through others and their reference to our own particularity of being born or being dead .

It is interesting to note with regard to our discourse on sense that Nancy in particular can point to the distinction between community as signification

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<sup>25</sup> One could argue that such a picture of Rand’s view is too narrow, because it fails to take into account that its conception genuinely starts from an openness towards, or rather, a reception of that world through sense of life that is an intuition of what is important existentially. While this is indeed Rand’s starting point, she seems to overlook this condition, focusing on the subject’s emotional abstraction and clustering capabilities rather than to this openness.

As for Metz, his thinking appears to be more apt to integrate the subject’s openness as oriented toward society. Having feminist and communitarian discourses in mind, he is keen to add that meaningfulness is not just about internal deliberations and decisions but also about sharing common language and culture in which one is embedded (T. Metz, *op. cit.*, p. 227), describing a subject as oriented toward a meaningful horizon or signification. Metz mentioned this sharing briefly, yet it is the radical nature of this opening-toward as an ontological human condition that continental philosophers fully embrace, and that opens likewise the possibility to understand the sense of being moved.

<sup>26</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. ed. cit.

<sup>27</sup> J.L. Nancy, *The inoperative community*. ed. cit.; Idem, “La comparution/le compearance: From the existence of «communism» to the community of «existence»”. In *Political Theory* 20(3), 1992, pp. 371-398.

and community as making sense beyond any signification. This distinction coincides with that between a subject that is autonomous and a self in its condition of a priori being-with.

Levinas conceives of the distinction between sense and signification in a same vein, one could claim, for the innate impulse to enhance ourselves on the one hand and the internalized scruple hampering this impulse on the other can be conceived as an infinitesimal distinction between the two. Interestingly, Levinas claims that this difference is not neutral: it remains precisely as a non-indifference.<sup>28</sup>

Following these authors to a large extent, we can observe that being moved, making sense at the limits of signification or thought, is inspiring because at that moment meaning-making is interrupted and with it, the disruption of the integrated subject is manifested. This reveals our a priori human condition of being-with, as being with the irreducibility of the other. It is irreducible, because it is not expressible in terms of essence or substance or thematization, in sum: in terms of signification.<sup>29</sup>

It will be clear by now that being-with is not simply being together as independent–closed–subjects. Being-with takes place at the limits of thought because meaning is interrupted. Nancy’s way of putting this is even more transparent: there is “un pas de la pensée” involved. “Pas” has a double meaning in French, it is likewise a “not” and a “step”. For Nancy, they occur simultaneously. Thought is precisely doing this: it is not thinking (or not thematising), which, to thought, is always to take a step (we could say, a step aside). At that moment, our being-with is revealed. Being-with thus “presupposes” the “pas” of thinking; both are indissoluble in the instant.

## **V. Sense as a non-deceptive lead**

One last point needs to be addressed. In line with continental philosophy, and more in particular following Levinas, this one sense appealing as non-indifference cannot be deceptive. We cannot be indifferent to it, because we are being moved – and being moved can be understood in an almost mechanistic way here: we experience the gap between the “pas” and the being-with, between a coming closer to what we cannot grasp, as a tension that literally vibrates and moves us, and does not leave us indifferent. It is

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<sup>28</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. ed. cit., p. 139. To Levinas non-indifference is related to proximity and that is responsibility. Proximity is being-with.

<sup>29</sup> It should not be forgotten that continental philosophy, at least its French representatives, does not provide arguments in a way analytic philosophy does. Rather do these philosophers describe reality as it appears to them: the very phenomena they study take them paradoxically to the edge of phenomenology.

inspiring because, as an experience, it cannot be deceptive. Our non-indifference to it makes it non-deceptive.

And yet there is a deceptive element involved, but it is related to the way sense as direction (toward) is articulated (or ignored). The experience of sense can become deceptive when words (significations) are put onto it. That the experience matters cannot be questioned, but how it matters – how to articulate it – will very probably be interrogated and reformulated endlessly.

In ending, we will now turn once more to Rand's vision, for the above contradicts her vision. As mentioned, according to her, we need a conscious mind to steer unconsciously integrating processes, because otherwise sense of life as a lead may become deceptive. Nonetheless, Rand's stance has an ambiguous flavour, perceptible when we consider her thoughts about art, developed in the *Romantic Manifesto*, and visible throughout her literary work *Atlas Shrugged*.<sup>30</sup> Here, Rand seems to come very close to a conception of sense as inspiring beyond signification.

Rand estimates that achieving and pursuing emotional and rational integration of values is a lifelong struggle, demanding constant creative processes. Even if he never fully accomplishes this, through art at least man can experience a sense of what completion could mean. However, this is not on the level of a teaching. Rand carefully differentiates between a person experiencing a concrete and immediate reality of how the world could possibly (not ideally) be, and a didactic "message" taught by art. The fuel the very experience provides, she says, cannot be transmitted as theoretical knowledge. Rather, it is expressed as "the life-giving fact of experiencing a moment of metaphysical joy – a moment of love for existence".<sup>31</sup> This experience "is not a way station one passes, but a stop, a value in itself". Apparently, the very concrete experience of art to Rand can in no way be deceptive. It is a value, but one that is precisely not transformed into a conceptual code (in our terms, signification).

Rand provides an exemplum of being moved by art; Levinas refers to being appealed by the irreducible other. In each case, the non-difference is not a fact in the air but makes sense in a context. In an aesthetical context, it makes sense as beauty; in an ethical context, as non-coded moral values; in the context of community, as a deep inarticulate sharing of "us". These make sense in a non-deceptive way.

The objective of this article has been to introduce a novel aspect of meaning in life issues. As we have seen, the experience of sense that is inspiring at the limits of thought is distinctive from current theories because

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<sup>30</sup> A. Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto*. New York: Pinguin Group, 1975; Idem, *Atlas Shrugged*. New York: Pinguin Group, 1999 (1957).

<sup>31</sup> Idem, *The Romantic Manifesto*. ed. cit., p. 163.

it does not comply with the set and implicit delineations. It can nevertheless be considered a part of this field since it shares its main concern – to find out what makes life meaningful – and because in-depth interviews reveal that moments of being moved (in which sense is encountered most clearly) provide instants of meaningfulness, experienced as depth.

To reveal what it means that it inspires, and that it inspires at the edge of thought, we employed Ayn Rand's insights as a stepping stone. Rand uses the phrase "sense in life", coming close to "meaning in life" but differing from it in that sense of life is a pre-conceptual or implicit value-integration. This was the building block we made use of. Sense differs from meaning in that it is not a part of a meaningful system, if meaningful system refers to thematisation. True, in Rand's reasoning, in order for it not to be a deceptive lead, sense of life needs to be paired with conceptual control (or thematisation), with the exception of art.

Rand provided a stepping stone but we had to bring in French continental philosophers to indicate how in the context of meaningfulness sense (in life) should be thought of in a more radical way: as an encounter that transcends thematisation, revealing our inherent condition of being connected to, directed toward or being-with.

Making inspiringly sense at the limits of thought is thus not just a secondary phenomenon for meaning in life issues. It is worth investigating the cluster of phenomena in order to develop a well-established perspective. The phenomenon invites us to combine both analytical and continental perspectives (regardless of the difficulty that this entails). Precisely because sense or inspiring at the limits of thought does not fit into existing theories can it question settled delineations and contribute to a reconsideration of these, adding to a fuller comprehension of what constitutes meaning in life.