Topic: "A happy life is a meaningful life." Do you agree? Why/Why not?
Critically examine the view that life can be meaningful only if it is in a relation of faith to some transcendent ultimate.

Is a happy life a meaningful life or is a meaningful life a happy life? Can life only be meaningful if it is in a relation of faith to some transcendent ultimate? These are two of the main questions we will focus on in this essay. In analysing the above questions we will try to expand on and explain the following points and concepts: What *true* happiness is; Does happiness provide meaning or does meaning provide happiness; How we can become *truly* happy; and various other points. We will also talk about / mention 'Aristotles list', objectiveness and subjectiveness, faith and evidence, among other points. We will focus on the essays by Swenson and Klemke to analyse the above questions.

If all we are looking for in our lives is meaning then happiness can certainly provide that for us. But what is *true* happiness. Swenson claims that "... happiness is not [true] happiness unless it can be justified"[1], however i beg to differ from this view. When a person is happy, he does not care about if his happiness is justifiable. It is only when a person is not happy that a person generally wishes that the only kind of happiness he desires is happiness that can be justified. For example, if someone cracks a joke that makes fun of someone's inabilities, a person might laugh, and when a person laughs, he is at least momentarily happy. At the moment when the person laughs, the person does not care about if the joke was justifiable, all he knows is that he found it funny! Only later, might that person feel that he shouldn't have laughed at the joke, because he feels that laughter at mockery is not justified. Happiness is happiness regardless of whether it can be justified or not.

I feel happiness is only true happiness when it is eternal. It is not simple laughter at a joke or momentary pleasure, its more a sense of eternal inner peace and joy. Its a feeling that never goes away. Its a feeling that can't go away. True happiness (i might refer to true happiness as *bliss* from now on) is an *inner peace* that remains unchanged regardless of external conditions. For example, a person might lose a loved one, and obviously this person will feel sad, yet if this person has *true happiness*, he will have a sense of understanding, understanding that it is the nature of the external world to change and hence even at such a sad time, he will be *internally peaceful*. This inner peace is a very metaphysical attribute, and it is definitely transcendental, and has sometimes been called ultimate.

I will now try to explain *true happiness* (bliss) via a different analogy. Let us assume that Jack was born in a prison and has not seen the light of day or rather anything other than the inside walls of a prison cell for 22 years (all his life). Now one day the king of the state has mercy on Jack and tells his soldiers to take Jack out of prison but place him under house arrest in someone's house. Let us try to analyse this from Jacks perspective. Jack had neither seen nor heard of anything greater/bigger than his cell. To him the *whole world* was basically his cell. Now when he is put under house arrest, for the first time he sees something much bigger than his cell. For the first time he can walk straight 10 steps without having to turn. To him this is possibly ultimate freedom. He believes that now he knows what it is to be truly free! From our perspective however, his sense of freedom is hardly true ultimate freedom because he is still confined to the house whereas we are free to roam where we wish. Happiness is similar to freedom in this respect. Some people think they are absolutely happy, but little do they realise what true ultimate happiness is.

As clearly can be seen from the above example, happiness comes in gradations. Also we can see from the earlier example that happiness is not *bliss* unless it is everlasting. Hence, we can see that to be truly and absolutely happy, we must be in a *deep* state of peace that is eternal.

If we can be truly happy, it can never be by satisfying 'Aristotles list', as his list seems to consist mainly of external entities. As mentioned above, external entities can give us fleeting joys and pleasures but since the basic nature of external and material entities is *change*, one day they are bound to change and the more *dependent* we are on those external entities or rather the more happiness the external entities caused us, we will *have to* suffer just as much sorrow once they do change.

Swenson claims that in order for happiness to be "[true] happiness it requires to be interpenetrated with a sense of *meaning, reason* and *worth*"[2]. What he seems to be claiming is that a meaningful life is a happy life, and life can only be meaningful if it is in a relation of faith to some transcendent ultimate. However, i think that it is happiness that gives meaning to life (and not the other way around) but true happiness (bliss) cannot be achieved unless it is in a relation of faith to some transcendent ultimate.

Klemke, of course, would differ from this view as he claims that there is no such thing as *objective reality*, only subjectiveness exists. My main question to his views would be, "Does Klemke thing that 'everything is subjective' is an *objective* truth?". It certainly seems so! Another point of Klemke that i can't quite grasp is, if Klemke says that all meaning is subjective and *we* must/can "forge our own meaning"[3], then why does he find it so hard to understand/apply his own beliefs. "Fragmentary and imperfect as these [he is referring to friendship and love here] often are, they nevertheless provide us with some of our most heightened moments of joy and value."[4] Why is Klemke dubbing friendship and love as "often imperfect", is he not being able to apply his own beliefs?, because according to his beliefs, everything is subjective, so it is he who is imperfect for not being able to give "love and friendship" perfect ground to stand upon. He portrays love and friendship above, as if they were objective entities? Furthermore, he later stated, "My doom is inevitable and swiftly approaching ... if i can in these last moments respond to a rose ..."[5] Once again i would like to point out, firstly Klemke says that he believes everything is subjective, but his (especially some sentences such as "my doom is inevitable ...") seem to portray that only suffering and doom are objective! Also, he stated, "... if i can respond to a rose...", i ask, why is he trying to *respond* to anything, should he not be "forging his own meaning".[6]

Many of Klemke's replies on questions about the transcendent have been along the following lines. "This generalisation is also false. I know of many humans who have found a meaning existence without faith in the transcendent"[7] However, i feel Klemke's judgement is hardly proof for what he claims because he himself seems so muddled up about what is objective and transcendental and what is subjective.

Klemke also *always* seems to be asking for evidence of the fact that faith in something transcendental can make life meaningful. Firstly, if his search for evidence was an *honest unbiased* search, he could have found evidence just studying the mystics, or someone's simple claim can be evidence enough. However, he stated "many being like myself (perhaps most of you), have not been favoured with such experiences..."[8], and hence he dismisses the mystics as *evidence*. If he does want to go down the road of scepticism, then what does he take as evidence i ask? Does he *believe* his own eyes? Does he accept the word of the scientists and the masses and *believe* that the earth is round and not flat? I suspect he does accept the word of the scientists as evidence for surely he has not *experienced* the roundness of the earth or the existence of the atom and yet i think that he would believe in them. Secondly, Klemke also seems to have the concepts of faith and trust completely muddled up.

“Why do I have faith in Smith, but not in Jones? Obviously because of *reasons*” I do not have faith in people haphazardly and without evidence.”[9] Doesn’t Klemke mean “why do i have *trust* in Smith and not in Jones...”. Also, Klemke later states, “In fact, it appears that most people who have faith in the transcendent have not had such experiences. This is precisely *why* they have faith. If they had complete certainty, no faith would be needed”[10]. Here Klemke seems to understand that faith is something that transcends reasons and evidence, and yet as quotes earlier, he is asking for evidence on why he should have faith!

So how can i achieve a blissful state, one might ask? Well firstly we would have to let go of the concept that our happiness is dependent upon a material world. This does not mean that we completely neglect all material entities, but rather that we do not become attached to them. That is “We should live in this world and yet we should not be of this world”, “The boat should remain in the water but the water should not come in the boat”. One way to attain this is by achieving freedom, freedom from desire! We should not let our desires dictate our lives to us! We must “liberate ourselves from slavery to finite ends; have the courage to substitute the only thing needful for the many things wished for, and perhaps desirable...”[11]. We must also “expose, the illusion, to win free from it while still retaining ones disguise”[12]. That is, we must realise [and faith in the fact that] we are actors playing our part in this world. This faith/wisdom/knowledge can and does help us play our part better in this world, it enables us to put on any emotional, material or any other garment necessary for this scene, and yet helps us remain in a state of peaceful blissful joy because of our faith in a transcendent ultimate.

What would life be like if we didn’t have faith in some transcendent ultimate? Well, firstly, our happiness would either be dependent upon the external/material world or else we would “forge our own meanings” onto things in order to make us happy. There would in effect be no *reason* for living other than the reason we would ourselves (knowingly) make. And of course, since we create this reason, if we felt like it, we could ‘take it away’, and then there would be no reason for living! Once a person has no reason for living, then life does not have much meaning for him. He might believe he is happy but this happiness is rather empty and transient. Such a person will generally *flicker* between beliefs that ‘life is worthwhile’ and ‘life is worthless’, and also, he will often go through states of happiness *and* sadness. However like i stated before, happiness is not true happiness (bliss) unless it is a deep understanding that is everlasting. Klemke might disagree with this, but from what i gather from his essay, he is an almost perfect example of the things i've tried to describe above. Time and again he makes statements such as "We are all men hanging on the thread of a rapidly vanishing years over the bottomless pit of death, destruction, and nothingness"[13], later again he states "... I am hanging over the pit. My doom is inevitable and swiftly approaching ..."[14]; "... I shall moan and curse my fate with a howl of bitter agony".[15] It is obvious by such statements that Klemke does not understand or has not achieved true happiness due to a lack of faith in a transcendent ultimate.

Klemke, does try to draw an analogy which he hopes will go in his favour, "The fact that a believer is happier and that a sceptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one."[16] I feel he has only dug his grave deeper by such a statement because to me, he seems like the *drunk one* who is seeing his doom everywhere he looks, furthermore, the drink (ie. his scepticism) has overwhelmed him to the point where he is *blind* to the happiness and meaning, the faith in some transcendent ultimate can provide him! "Such scepticism is a cheap and dangerous quality indeed!"[17]

A happy life is a meaningful life, and the happier we are the more meaningful our life becomes, but we can only be *truly happy* (blissful) if it is in relation to faith of some transcendent ultimate. If we did not have faith in some transcendent ultimate, we would be rather unstable and would jump between happiness and sadness many times. Overall i think it is impossible not to have faith in a transcendent ultimate, it is only possible to be under the illusion that you do not have faith in some transcendent ultimate!

<u>Notes</u>

Please note that an "-S" is referring to Swenson's article and all other references are referring to Klemke's article.

1. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.598 - S
2. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.598 - S
3. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.612
4. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.613

5. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.614
6. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.612
7. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.610
8. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.611-12
9. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.609
10. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.612
11. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.601-S
12. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.603-S
13. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.613
14. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.614
15. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.614
16. Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.611
17. In reference to the last sentence of the first paragraph on page 611.