

November 9, 1986

Yesterday I was tutoring a young Cambodian refugee who has been in this country for two years. We were balancing chemical equations and then, using Avogadro's number, we were calculating what amount of a product of a chemical process is produced with a given quantity of reactants.

In the middle of this rather technical exercise the Cambodian student turned and asked me: "Is there a difference between information and education?"

We thought about this for a while and then concluded together that yes, there is a difference between information and education. Information consists of facts, whereas education trains one to make use of facts in creative ways to achieve desired ends.

But then we also decided that there was a third level to the process. This consisted not only of gaining the skills to put information to use, but also to know what uses were true and good.

"Will I learn what is good at Brooklyn College?" my student friend asked. I was perplexed about how to respond at this point. Finally I suggested that many of his Professors would probably sketch out a variety of theories for students to consider and would, in a rather neutral way, ask them to make up their own minds. Occasionally, I further thought, he would meet a teacher who was passionately committed to the good, and he would have the benefit of experiencing the power of truth, not as a theory, but as it is genuinely lived.

Yesterday's conversation was called back to mind this morning. Reading the Sunday New York Times while on the Number 7 train, I found an article there which reminded readers of the Socratic idea that the unexamined life is not worth living. The examination which Socrates had in view was presumably based upon some concept of what the good ends and purposes of human existence are.

But the New York Times then went on to compare the Socratic idea with another idea, an idea from Buddhist thought, the idea that "The un-lived life is not worth pondering."

There is much of use to reflect upon in the juxtaposition of these two thoughts from Socrates and from Buddhism, much that they say to us about the relationship among reflection, authentic living, and spiritual growth. But the earlier message we heard this morning brought these ideas together for me in an interesting way. For when our Friend mentioned the silence of our worship and the work of the American Friends Service Committee, I

realized that there is an essential connection between our worship, our service work, and our spiritual growth. For the truth is that no amount of reflecting will aid our spiritual growth if we do not put into practice what we already know. Unless we live the truth to the degree that we have already grasped it, all our pondering will not lead to further growth in our awareness of truth. Authentic living, or service, then, must be coupled with reflection, it must be the very food of our reflection, if we are continue our advance in grace and truth.