When we consider what might contribute to helping people to live morally upright lives, does it make any difference whether people think that the sun revolves around the earth, or that the earth revolves around the sun? No, it probably does not. But does it make any difference if people believe in an atheistic version of evolutionary theory, or believe that God somehow created the cosmos? Once again, it probably does not. Ah, but what about social policy? Yes, there are social-policy implications in the sense of the social policies about what we teach in schools regarding these two respective issues. However, unless we subscribe to so-called social Darwinism, we are not likely to contend that either issue has serious implications for social justice.

But Walter J. Ong, S.J. (1912-2003) was an American cultural historian and philosopher. He formulated a philosophy of cultural history that does have serious implications for social justice, most notably for promoting literacy education and functional literacy not only in the United States but also around the world, where an estimated one billion people do not know how to read and write any language. Those one billion people will not be using computers and the Internet. In the United States, people who are not functionally literate with respect to their reading ability are usually socially disadvantaged, unless they happen to be extraordinary athletes or entertainers. For all practical purposes, people in the United States who are not functionally literate live in a residual form of oral culture. Thus functional literacy with respect to reading ability should be a social-policy goal in the United States.