Brief Reviews of Books and Products

Athena Unbound: Why and How Scholarly Knowledge Should be Free for All.

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BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS AND PRODUCTS

Book review: Baldwin, Peter. (2023). *Athena Unbound: Why and How Scholarly Knowledge Should be Free for All.* MIT Press. 416 pp. ISBN 9780262048002, 35 USD (hardcover), **https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262373951/athena-unbound/** OA (eBook).

Much has been written about open access (OA), but a relatively small portion of that literature comes from outside of the information science community. Into that space comes *Athena Unbound: Why and How Scholarly Knowledge Should be Free for All* by Peter Baldwin. A comparative historian and OA philanthropist, Baldwin offers a unique, if abrasive, perspective on the future of OA and scholarly communication. Baldwin begins by laying out what he believes are some of the most significant hurdles in the path of a "digital Alexandrian library," by which he means a "single, unified source of all information" (p. 1). The first of these barriers is that not all authors want their work made available without cost to the consumer. Baldwin argues that not only does current United States copyright law prove to be a significant roadblock to OA, but authors, especially those needing to profit from their output, are an additional obstacle. This is to say nothing of the fact that a great deal of knowledge is created by people who do not own, and therefore cannot give away, the intellectual property that they produce. For example, nearly all corporate research and development is governed by work-for-hire legislation. The second, and no less significant, barrier to OA is the need to shift the funding stream from consumer to producer. Baldwin points out that the rise of digital texts has largely surmounted the impossibility, from a physical standpoint, of collecting a copy of every single text. However, it has not, from a production standpoint, reduced the cost of the first copy. Digital duplication may be cheap, but publishing and its attendant expenses remain relatively pricy. If all library budgets were suddenly to be devoted to funding OA, then such a feat may be possible. Baldwin points out at least two barriers to such a scenario: first, libraries still need some of that funding for other reasons; and second, a great deal of scholarly content (especially journals in the sciences) will remain subscription-only for the foreseeable future. In the face of such obstacles, Baldwin insists that, for the most part, only scholarly knowledge has a "moral case" (p. 11) for OA.

Librarians, advocates, and other scholars of OA will find little new in this analysis, nor would most disagree that scholarly literature is best suited to OA. Baldwin asserts that the OA community is dominated by librarians and other "denizens of the academic nimbus emergent in library and information science" who have created a movement in which mastering

the conversation has "become a full-time job" (p. 307–308). Baldwin maintains that much of the conversation, and advocacy, around OA is being driven by "librarians, information- and data-science scholars, [and] media professors" who form something of a "second-order stratum" by their being "scholars of scholarship" (p. 10) and whose efforts, although noble, have confused "process … with progress" (p. 10). Clearly, Baldwin is not preaching to the converted. Rather, his book is for the "stepchildren" (p. 12) of the debates, i.e., those among the professoriate he classifies as "surprisingly ignorant" of and "hostile" (p. 11) toward OA. Into this camp he groups many of his fellow scholars in the humanities, arts, and social sciences who have often ignored (and been ignored by) the prevailing OA currents. Although a book aimed at OA holdouts is a welcome addition to the literature, Baldwin makes an unfortunate choice to avoid the library and information science scholarship around OA and to set up librarians as a sort of foil against which he rails. This formulation means that he often mischaracterizes current OA efforts in libraries and weakens an overall useful work.

As befitting of a historian, Baldwin carefully traces the history and context of information's progress toward openness while keeping a sharp eye on various developments in publishing and copyright law. These parts of the book are among the more useful and are both well-written and well-researched. Here, he continues his work from his earlier monograph, *The Copyright Wars: Three Centuries of Trans-Atlantic Battle*. He also tackles the question of too much information. As the public domain expands, will the volume of freely available content eventually discourage future scholarship? In Chapters 1 through 3, Baldwin explores and expands on the themes of what information can be free, the varieties of creative and scholarly works and authors, and the various ways that OA fits (and does not fit) scholarly and creative work. He is also insightful when describing the various complications of expanding OA for humanities and monograph-driven scholarship. In Chapters 4 and 5, Baldwin lays out a history of OA and how the university professoriate has responded. In Chapters 6 and 7, he examines the role of "digital disseminators" (i.e., libraries, publishers, bookstores, etc.) in the knowledge ecosphere while contextualizing OA in the global publishing and higher education landscape. In Chapters 8 through 10, he tackles findability and the ever-growing amount of scholarly content. Baldwin provides a thorough and useful context for the rapid increase in scholarly outputs but contends that a combination of selection and discovery tools, as well as education (i.e., information literacy), will allow readers to benefit from a "more is … more" (p. 302) approach to the proliferation of scholarly content.

Baldwin concludes his book with a lament that a naïve insistence on pushing for OA among work that will never be free at the expense of work that could be free has stymied real progress in OA and resulted in too much "openwash" and "openwrapping," i.e., the wrapping of open content in proprietary services (e.g., indexing, data analytics) for which publishers charge (p. 323). Instead, Baldwin insists that the way forward is for OA advocates to only focus

on scholarly content and push for work-for-hire clauses in faculty contracts, allowing universities greater say over work outputs and giving them the ability to insist that all scholarly output be made openly available. Additionally, he wants to see more funding for OA systems and presses, alongside ongoing funding of publication fees.

In the end, Baldwin has produced a useful and highly readable book in *Athena Unbound*. Librarians and other information professionals are unlikely to be surprised by his solutions but will benefit from the book's historical and contextual material. Although there is some merit in Baldwin's critique of the ways that libraries have supported "read and publish" agreements, his lack of engagement with practicing librarians and the relevant literature around OA hinders his work from providing more robust solutions beyond touting work-for-hire clauses and continued funding for OA repositories and publishing outlets. For example, the book would have been greatly strengthened by engaging in greater detail with campus OA policies, which are often promoted and championed by libraries. Many universities, for example, have already struck a workable balance between protecting author's rights and allowing their university a nonexclusive license to publish. Although Baldwin is right to say that college and universities have a long way to go in advancing open scholarship, librarians and OA advocates are hardly the group to blame.

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