



Book Review of *Athena Unbound: Why and How Scholarly Knowledge Should be Free for All*

DAVID CHUN YIN LI 

BOOK REVIEW



ABSTRACT

Athena Unbound: Why and How Scholarly Knowledge Should be Free for All, by Peter Baldwin, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2023, 360 pp., US\$35.00 (hardcover), also available as open access eBook <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/14887.001.0001>, ISBN 978-0-2620-4800-2 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-2623-7395-1 (EPUB), ISBN 978-0-2623-7396-8 (PDF).

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

David Chun Yin Li

Harvard University, MA, United States

davidcy3@me.com

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Open access, the movement for free and unrestricted online access to scholarly research, educational information, and archival materials, is receiving increasing recognition as more and more researchers, educators and institutions are willing to support and promote the idea that knowledge should be free and accessible. As a result, many in the field of open and distance education and independent researchers would be interested in Baldwin's (2023) latest book, in which he investigates the landscape and prospects of universal open access to knowledge in our digitally driven era.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

In the first chapter, Baldwin discusses the importance of making knowledge more widely available to everyone. Baldwin argues that because interest in knowledge creation is accelerating, the number of individuals who are interested in research has never been greater. As a result, obstacles to accessing information have become a bigger problem than at any previous time. Additionally, he accuses the actions of those who put up these barriers of being incompatible with social fairness. Baldwin compares the expansion of scientific research output caused by transformative technology to the invention of the printing press. In a similar manner, the traditional publishing and library systems now warrant significant reforms to create a new model of scholarly communication. A good start, of course, would be the shifting of funding from readers to the institutions of authors in order to facilitate the availability of free content. In the next chapter, Baldwin explores the complex connection between the protection of copyright and the interests of authors. By connecting copyright problems with the broader idea of open access, Baldwin helps us better understand the difficult issues authors face in a changing publishing world. Chapter 3 goes deeper into the real-life problems and different methods in the area of open access and examines the differences between gold and green open-access models. Baldwin discusses a disparity between different academic researchers toward open access. Most natural and social scientists are generally supportive of open access as they do not need to write or sell any books. Humanities researchers, on the other hand, have more concerns about the loss of licensing control and financial revenue. Matters like funding, differences in workflow, and the part played by embargoes in the open-access environment are discussed.

Moving on, in Chapter 4, Baldwin discusses the impact digital tools and the internet have on obtaining academic knowledge. He examines new issues that arise due to digitalization, such as imagining a future where mega digital stores of knowledge are available free to any members of the public without jeopardizing the quality of its content. In Chapter 5, the author confronts the eventual singularity of continuously increasing output. At this point, there will be too much information, and Baldwin envisions that it would be necessary to implement a better search system in order to filter this information. He suggests changes in the peer review system, the start of reviews after publication, and how recommendation systems guide readers through the huge amount of knowledge. He compares traditional ways of organizing information with the new opportunities given by digital tools, encouraging a better understanding of how to judge the quality and relevance of content in the age of open access. In Chapter 6, the author probes into the changing role of institutions within the open-access context. The chapter examines the implications of digital technologies on traditional knowledge purveyors such as bookstores, libraries, and publishers. Baldwin considers the challenges of the digital revolution, especially in terms of preservation and archiving of digital content. The chapter brings into focus the role of libraries as pivotal players in the dissemination of knowledge, particularly through collective digital repositories.

Additionally, in Chapter 7, Baldwin celebrates the synergetic effects on the intelligence and productivity of more people working together as a result of open access. He makes a case for how open access could encourage even more people to participate in research in a manner that improves rather than diminishes the quality of academic work after critically examining the pros and cons of democratic collective collaboration. Finally, in Chapter 8, the author investigates the financial aspects of open access and the different ways it can be funded. Baldwin carefully considers other funding strategies like crowdfunding and library groups, pointing out the problems of keeping open access going, especially compared to traditional publishing models.

When it comes to open-access implementation, Chapter 9 moves to the legal and political aspects influencing open-access implementation. The author predicts copyright laws becoming a significant hurdle while mentioning that the discretion of policymakers could decisively affect the future trajectory of open access. He also examines the legislative changes needed in order to allow controlled digital lending to play a greater role in overcoming publishers' copyright, which hinders open access. Baldwin makes a thorough analysis that highlights the importance for open access activists to seize the initiative by actively approaching and dealing with the legal and policy issues to make open access more realizable. In the final chapter, the author shares an optimistic vision for digital technology's potential to create a global board for knowledge that allows everyone to access academic work. In his concluding remarks, the author concedes the existence of practical initiatives, championing "good enough" proposed solutions.

OVERALL IMPRESSION AND RELEVANCE TO THE FIELD

While Baldwin is successful at presenting a compelling case for open access, the governance and financial challenges that could lead to the realization of an ideal vision of open access that is fair to both publishers and authors are not addressed in detail. However, the book provides important insights into the opportunities and challenges of open access that are highly relevant for independent researcher, educators and institutions involved in or required to have access to open knowledge distance learning, and flexible education. Overall, by taking the view that the interests and motivations of different stakeholders should be carefully considered, this book can inform practical perspectives on how universal open access to information can transform and improve open research and distance education.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

David Chun Yin Li: Conceptualization, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing. The author, being the sole author of this article, has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

David Chun Yin Li  orcid.org/0000-0002-0675-0107
Harvard University, MA, United States

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