Legendary Aaron Swartz – three things to learn from him

In this article we commemorate Aaron Swartz who was a computer programmer and entrepreneur. He took part in the development of the social news site Reddit, the web feed format RSS, the Creative Commons and the Markdown publishing format. Aaron also was a political organizer and Internet activist. By establishing the online group Demand Progress, Aaron spoke out against Protect IP Act and Stop Online Piracy Act which created all conditions to prevent freedom on the Internet. He always wanted to learn more and decided to devote himself to research activity in Harvard University Safra Research Lab on Institutional Corruption under the supervision of Lawrence Lessig.

1. **Democratization of information**

In 2008, Swartz co-authored the Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto, which called on activists to "release" information shut down by corporations or publishers.

Information is power. But like all power, there are those who want to keep it for themselves.

The Open Access Movement has fought valiantly to ensure that scientists do not sign their copyrights away but instead ensure their work is published on the Internet, under terms that allow anyone to access it.

Aaron Swartz wanted that users would have less restrictions to access information and saw the purpose of his live in "liberating" the Internet. He believed that on the one hand, the Internet gives you a wealth of free information, and is a symbol of freedom; on the other hand, it can be used to monitor your every step and interfere with your privacy. He believed that the Internet is both good and evil, and only people themselves have the right to decide how they will use it. Swartz built his short life on everything good that the Internet can offer, realizing the potential of the power of storing and disseminating knowledge, and trying to make it easier, cheaper and safer for people to receive this knowledge.

2. **Decentralization of scientific knowledge**

Those with access to these resources — students, librarians, scientists — you have been given a privilege. You get to feed at this banquet of knowledge while the rest of the world is locked out. But you need not — indeed, morally, you cannot — keep this privilege for yourselves. You have a duty to share it with the world. And you have: trading passwords with colleagues, filling download requests for friends.

One of the issues that Aaron was particularly interested in was the provision of open access to public information. He considered it unfair that not all people have access, for example, to scientific articles,

and that these studies in scientific journals are made for people and should belong to the people, especially since many of them were paid for from the pocket of taxpayers or state subsidies.

He called for elimination of the problem of "digital inequality". Only students and university staff could get free access to the archival information of libraries, which means that only higher education allowed people to improve themselves using scientific articles. This destroyed the possibility of self-education, which Swartz considered the most productive. Aaron was confident that the world would be smarter and better if people could use the limitless possibilities of the network in full and he fought for it. He absorbed information with incredible speed, could read dozens of books a month, but always wanted to bring the rest of the people to this closed space of endless digital information.

3. **Corrupted chain of command**

The world's entire scientific and cultural heritage, published over centuries in books and journals, is increasingly being digitized and locked up by a handful of private corporations. ... That is too high a price to pay. Forcing academics to pay money to read the work of their colleagues?

In 2008, Aaron Swartz created the Watchdog.net to collect and visualize all available information about politicians. Then he became a co-founder of the advocacy group Demand Progress, which focused on analysing government reforms and seeking methods for legal counteraction to laws that violate civil liberties.

These three things from Aaron's political activism are far from being consensual amongst the society. However, some points are widely accepted. In fact, information is power and often the system of sharing knowledge seems rigged. The ideas of democratization of information, ease of access and a corrupted chain of command are valid arguments for the defence of the freedom of internet. The restrictions that have been recently adopted in respect to the principle of Net Neutrality bring exactly the same issues on the table that are presented by Aaron regarding the sharing of academic knowledge to the general access of information on the Internet. The chain of command is once again corrupted if it is allowed for the internet service providers to change the speed of access or block certain content or website solely depending on their will.

Tragically, Aaron ended his own life in 2013 after being prosecuted in court and threatened with a 1 million USD fine and more than 30 years in prison for standing up for the value of sharing knowledge on the Internet.

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