

Freedom of Information

July 11, 2008

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"They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." - Benjamin Franklin

"To be, or not to be, that is the question."

Things have changed a lot since Hamlet wrote the above line. We today know that thinking is good, it's actually necessary for you to be recognized as 'intelligent'. But for any human to start thinking about something, we need 'something' to think upon, and this is exactly what we call information. Now the time has come to change the Hamlets famous line to:

"To know, or not to know, that is the question."

"Nosce te ipsum" means "Know thyself". The tough guy who said it is Socrates.

What defines us is what we are, it constitutes of what we think, what we have done so far, what we want to do and most of all, in what kind of situation we want it to be done. Knowing your own self is harder than it seems at first glance. We have a body, a mind and a soul and knowing all three of them is difficult without having adequate knowledge.

At some point in life, every one of us gives time to the information about what we actually are and what our goal in life is. It doesn't matter if you are a geek, a girl, a guy or yet another professional busy in your work. In the movie "The Matrix", our hero, Neo is shown the line "Know thyself" in the Oracle's kitchen when he was trying to find out his purpose of existence.

Sad but true, there are no Oracles or magical kitchens in real life. You need information on what you have to be. It doesn't matter if you want to be a hippy, go and save the world, or if you want to be the next Hitler, you need information for doing just anything you can imagine.

Because of the fact that Oracles don't exist in the physical world, science was invented to help us find some answers. And for those people who cannot understand math, someone came up with Arts. Now, we have some answers. If you want to be the next greatest scientist, or cure all disease in the world or commit suicide so that you have to endure the least amount of pain, you need information. Need for information is nature, and of course it's free. So should be its availability, but mostly it is not. This is the exact point where the hacker culture defects from the main stream society.

The nature of information is to be free but those in power do not want it to be. Information has been the most valuable commodity for all times in history. Selling information is equivalent to censoring it, to render it

in some other way.

There are people who cannot accept the idea of 'unconditionally available information', and of course the thing that keeps them away from such an idea is based on a business and profit agenda. A politician might announce that literature about explosives has been banned. It clearly suggests that he is afraid that someone might use the same information against him, inflicting terror upon his domain and thus reducing his power. Wars in the recorded history have been fought for power and glory, many times on pity issues, sometimes on the bases of principle. And if the principle of freedom is worth it, then all of the hackers are soldiers in this battle and the cost for the battle is relatively a minor one.

The whole world should feel the same way. There is no such thing as evil knowledge, evil information. These things only become dangerous when used irresponsibly. And in today's world of globalization it has become even harder to censor information. Its time for people to understand what 'information' really is.

There is a war being waged, every now and then, around you and me, every second of the day, but most people do not realize it. Some people sense that there is something wrong going on but they do not get an impression that it's a war. Its not a war where guns and explosives are being used, but still the lives of people are at stake, in a very serious and tangible way.

People often try to censor information, because they think that this information is the commodity that keeps a persons edge over the other. There is a difference in a business secret and information that can be shared in a community. The difference between the two must be well understood. Most of the times, people try to censor such information that really isn't their business secret and something that earns them a living. The point to be realized is that your knowledge might take another person one step ahead but it cant make you what you are. Millions of research papers are online, technical information on different subjects available on the internet, billions of lines of open source code available for free, but we do not see every one of us a rapid developer, or a medical genius, or a nuclear physicist – just because free information is available. There are always people on the base of the pyramid and only one on the top, that I often call "Top of the Pyramid". Many students do group studies, study the same course in the same way, solve same problems and literally have same preparation for the examination, but all of them never score the same grades, some even top and others fail. It's where your own body and mind plays the part. It really doesn't matter teaching a problem to your friend, than censoring it, just because you think he might get batter grades.

Always remember that if you a Ferrari yourself, you don't need to win every race, you have your grandeur and respect even if you go at 10 miles an hour. People will follow you, for all ages to come.

Wars have been fought over information, in fact, in the end, all wars have been. Ignorance has been used as a tool to make populations responsive to a certain point of view. If different information if fed to different sectors of the population, contention arises and that leads to war. However, if there is total freedom of information, unaltered, such a situation would not be created, but the point is, will those in power ever want such thing to happen?

There are people around who say that "ignorance is bliss." I am not one of those people.

Its time when world governments are abusing their power. It's the time when Patriot Act is being enforced and people still do not understand that horror. Those who understand it say "This is old news." or "We can't do anything about it, it's done already." – Don't already does not mean we should sit in a row and watch the show as it proceeds.

It is the time when machines are hiding data deliberately, people turning data away from you. For their own benefit. It is even more important to see what's happening outside the operating systems, the IRC drama, XSS vulnerabilities and buffer overflows. What have they changed while we weren't looking?

According to the Patriot Act, Section 212, emergency disclosure of information is possible by your communications provider. Your communications provider is expected to provide any law enforcement agent your private records and data if they believed it was a life or death emergency.

It was made even more flexible by the Cyber Security Enhancement Act, through which it no more has to be a life and death situation.

People think that they are free because they don't know what acts are imposed on them even in 'democratic' countries. Sections 216 and 217 of the Patriot Act allows the federal government to practically spy on your computer. Without informing you, they can own all your data, all your privacy. They can sniff your traffic, everything that is not encrypted. Governments try to write their statements with 'pen traps', to show people that they have the least rights on your data, but in actual, giving them the flexibility to do anything they want to.

It is important to understand that as a hacker one has to oblige himself to safeguard the ideals that make this sub-culture different and great. They include the freedom of expression, the free and open propagation of information, and the protection of privacy.

In the 21st Century, the more "freedom of information" is becoming the talk of the day, the more it is being abused. It is true that attacks on the Internet have increased and this has led some people to doubt if information should be free at all. My response is that people who really want to abuse any existing system in the world for their own benefit will continue to do it, no matter if they have to pay for it. Good and evil, both have good reasons to exist, and both put their resources to achieve their goals. Committing crimes in the name of freedom is "Cyber Terrorism". Let us not drop a great idea because there are some people who want to abuse it. If we fight freedom, we can only lose. Let's not fight freedom, but those who want to use it for their own sake.

It is important to technically describe what is otherwise a loosely stated term that goes by the name 'free' information. Free information means the 'liberty to information'. It means that nobody owns information. Now the question arises that if all information is free, how can we survive. It's a fact that all of us need cash to live. It works in the same way a teacher earns money for his living. He gets paid to teach his pupil. This is the same way the open source community works. They get paid for the services they provide, not for the number of lines of code their consumer is using.

Many people are being deprived of critical information that they need, but they can't afford to buy. For students, sometimes even universities can't afford those subscription fees. What are we going to do? Are we going to crack those servers that hold that information. No, because two wrongs never make a right. This is something that is the cry of the day, cry of hacker community, and the concept behind free software.

Now specifically for the software industry, hackers suggest working with the Free Software Foundation. Write code under the GNU General Public License (GPL) which guarantees the following freedoms.

The freedom to run the program, for any purpose.

The freedom to study how the program works, and adapt it to your needs.

The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor.

The freedom to improve the program, and release your improvements to the public, so that the whole community benefits.