It may be foolish to consider Eric Raymond’s recent collection of essays, The Cathedral and the Bazaar, the most important computer programming thinking to follow the Internet revolution. But it would be more unfortunate to overlook the implications and long-term benefits of his fastidious description of open-source software development considering the growing dependence businesses and economies have on emerging computer technologies. The Cathedral and the Bazaar takes its title from an essay Raymond read at the 1997 Linux Kongress. The essay documents Raymond’s acquisition, re-creation, and numerous revisions of an e-mail utility known as fetchmail. Raymond engagingly narrates the fetchmail development process while elaborating on the ongoing bazaar development method he uses with the help of volunteer programmers. The essay smartly spares the reader from the technical morass that could easily detract from the text’s goal of demonstrating the efficacy of the open-source, or bazaar, method in creating robust, usable software. Once Raymond has established the components and players necessary for an optimally running open-source model, he sets out to counter the conventional wisdom of private, closed-source software development. Like superbly written code, the authors arguments systematically anticipate their rebuttals. For programmers who worry that the transition to open source will abolish or devalue their jobs, Raymond adeptly and factually counters that most developers’ salaries don’t depend on software sale value. Raymond’s uncanny ability to convince is as unrestrained as his capacity for extrapolating upon the promise of open-source development. In addition to outlining the open-source methodology and its benefits, Raymond also sets out to salvage the hacker moniker from the nefarious connotations typically associated with it in his essay, A Brief History of Hackerdom (not surprisingly, he is also the compiler of The New Hackers
Dictionary). Recasting hackerdom in a more positive light may be a heroic undertaking in itself, but considering the Herculean efforts and perfectionist motivations of Raymond and his fellow open-source developers, that light will shine brightly. --Ryan Kuykendall

My Personal Review:
This statement above is the fundamental premise for open source software development. Basically, open communications work better than closed, limited ones. So why is this book worth reading? Essentially, because it explains why people are willing to volunteer their time and talents to improve open source code. That characteristic of the open source movement will be the main puzzlement to nondevelopers. But beyond that, this book also provides the basis of an important paradigm for accelerating and improving knowledge development generally that will be its more lasting and important contribution.

Mr. Raymond is a very good thinker from an economic, sociological, and anthropological level, and applies these perspectives well in the essays in this book. Because he assumes you may not know about the development of the open source movement, his essay, A Brief History of Hackerdom, fills in the gaps. By the way, he defines a hacker as a capable software developer who loves his or her work rather than someone who breaks into other peoples computer systems.

The centerpiece of the book is the essay with the books title. This essay describes his own experiences in developing an open source e-mail utility, draws lessons from that experience, and compares it to the development of Linux (the primary open source operating system). I knew the Linux story well (if you dont, you should, and this essay will be valuable to you), so I was primarily drawn to the discussion of the authors own experiences. Clearly, the appeal of open software is a chance to work in depth on something that has compelling interest to the free source developer, receive help in getting a better result, get to use the improved software oneself, and recognition for the effort from highly talented people you respect. In other words, assuming your day job still pays the bills, your open source software work will provide for most of your psychic needs. Thats pretty neat! I couldnt help but think about the analogies to people writing book reviews on Amazon.com as I read this section. As a result of reading this essay, Netscape chose to open up its software and escaped oblivion in the process while undergoing the assault from Microsofts Explorer program.

The key limitation of open software is noted on page 57, Its fairly clear that one cannot code from the ground up in bazaar style. This sentence refers to the theme of the essay. A bazaar is an open market where everyone is free to evaluate software and decide to use or improve it. A cathedral refers to closed, proprietary programming where the software is kept pure of outside influences and is developed in a small team, usually with a hierarchical organizational structure. The choice of comparisons is interesting, because the internalized rewards of working on open software are more akin to building a cathedral than to bustling in a bazaar. In a
sense, Mr. Raymonds bazaar is also very cathedral-like in the best sense of that concept.
The next essay, Homesteading the Noosphere, looks at the motivations of the developers and why open source development works. His basic analogy is to gift cultures where people compete for status by the size and value of the gifts they can give others. This has long been true of elites. Since software developers are and feel like they are part of an elite, this is not surprising. His test of the concept is that credit for the work done is jealousy respected. Although Mr. Raymond doesnt say much about it, I suspect that the academic tradition of scholarly papers to advance knowledge is a fundamental experience and construct familiar to many hackers. Naturally, much knowledge advancement has failed to have immediate economic consequences in the past, and knowledge development occurred anyway. Anyone who has read the creativity literature knows that creativity is primarily its own reward for the joy of the task. That research is not referenced here. Mr. Raymond is not an academic, even though he thinks like one in many ways.
The next essay, The Magic Cauldron, takes a look at the long-term economic consequences of the open software movement, and its implications for developing future software. His fundamental point is that 95 percent of all software has use value, rather than value as code that can be sold to someone else. Because of this, any software developer of code that has only use value would be foolish to give up the open source code benefits. He proceeds to provide very helpful examples, and posits future models for this. I suspect that in ten years, this essay will be considered the most important one in the book, while today the title one is. Share this essay with every executive and software development person you know!
The final essay, The Revenge of the Hackers, is a brief memoir about the authors experiences since publication of his essay, The Cathedral & The Bazaar, and helps put his ideas into better context for their impact on others.
If you are interested in becoming a top hacker, be sure to look in the appendix for the essay, How To Become a Hacker.
This book raises many other fundamental questions that the author is unprepared to address at this time. Perhaps one of the most obvious is that with embedded microprocessors headed for virtually every product, should the designers of the products that will employ these microprocessors also use the open design scheme structure? I suspect that they should. It is natural to go from there to consider business model development as another place where this structure would work. Im sure you will come up with your own, better examples.
Basically, what is described here is the paradigm for how to create better results by harnessing more minds. Normally, development results have been reduced and time to completion has been stretched out by increasing involvement. We seem now to have moved past that fundamental barrier. . . much like when we first passed the sound barrier with airplanes. Where can we go next? I think the answer is anywhere we want.
After you read this book, please ask yourself how you could apply this development model to important aspects of your working and personal lives. You will have to become more open about sharing your ideas and concerns, but the payoffs should be tremendous!

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