

How to be a Good Haacker

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Haackers are a rare breed. It is much easier to encounter a hacker than a Haacker, but that extra vowel makes a considerable difference. For instance, the former tends to stick rigidly to only one perspective—in particular, a chosen conceptual scheme. Typical hacking may also include an overreliance on science and the unique viewpoint that comes with it. But Haackers are not like that. When they Haack, they are ready to change perspectives, take advantage of various tools and tackle quite different problems. They pay attention to the technical language they use, but without fetishizing it. They cherish science, but within reason. They do not stick to one logic only, since they know very well that any logic, even a deviant one, may prove useful.

The most impressive trait in Haackers is their devotion to the discussion and solution of genuine problems. They never seek to show the fatal flaw in one system or another, a strategy which may be easily exploited to gain fame, money or merely ridicule one's adversary. They do not compile long lists of the errors that plague the programs developed by their colleagues. They do not seek out a back door, but march right up to the front, armed only with a smile tinged with a hint of irony.

They despise all kinds of fundamentalism. An unshakable belief in a theory or a method is as alien to them as embracing various fashionable 'isms'. Yet they also know that nothing can be built without being somehow anchored, however provisionally. The most coherent construct just hanging there in the air has as much connection to reality as campaign promises to real commitments. There is no evidence for either. And evidence matters.

A Haacker's favorite desktop application is *defrag.exe*. But the point is not only to keep one's files in order. It is much more important to have a general overview of the available applications, helping to see how they may interlock and cooperate with one another more clearly. For a Haacker, fragmentation is a symptom of a dysfunctional mind, not merely of a disarrayed and underperforming hard drive.

There are times when the attitude of a Haacker may seem painfully pragmatic, almost akin to old-fashioned priggery. Yet at its heart is a pragmatism of the best sort, as it used to be long time ago. It is the rejection of dogmatism and false dichotomies, coupled with a healthy distrust of *a priori* considerations and the belief that we are tasked with ensuring a constant growth of meaning. A Haacker seeks answers by carefully identifying the practical consequences of his or her views, not by looking into the (allegedly broken) mirror of nature.

Haackers prefer cats over dogs. Some people claim that this is connected with the fact that Jean Jacques Rousseau, no hero to the Haacker, had been unable to survive without the company of his dog. However, this seems to be a far-fetched explanation and it seems much more likely that cats are so cherished by Haackers because they symbolize character traits which are dear to any Haacker: autonomy, independence and the tendency to hunt alone. Like cats, Haackers are not pack animals.

Another mystery surrounding Haackers is their love of crossword puzzles. Not the love of such puzzles in itself but rather that Haackers are not particularly interested in solving them successfully. Instead, they are fascinated by the very mechanism behind crossword puzzles, as if it were capable of illustrating some eternal truth. Fortunately, this little quirk is quite innocent. It only gives them an edge in *Jeopardy!* when the clue reads 'Arthur Wynne'.

I do not want to leave the Reader with the impression that to be a good Haacker means only caring about genuine problems, steering the middle way between the Scylla of foundationalism and the Charybdis of coherentism, opposing fragmentary worldviews and highly specialized nonsense, and solving crossword puzzles under the baleful supervision of one's cat. Haacking is much more than that. It is about passion: for the serious exercises of the mind rather than the frivolous, for the truth—however weird or innocent it may turn out to be—and most of all for moderation in all things intellectual. When you choose to be passionately moderate, you take the first step to becoming a Haacker.