## **Point of View**

Isaac Asimov

Roger came looking for his father, partly because it was Sunday, and by rights his father shouldn’t have been at work, and Roger wanted to be sure that everything was all right.

Roger’s father wasn’t hard to ﬁnd, because all the people who worked with Multivac, the giant computer, lived with their families right on the grounds. They made up a little city by themselves, a city of people that solved all the world’s problems.

The Sunday receptionist knew Roger. “If you’re after your father,” she said, “he’s down Corridor L, but he may be too busy to see you. Roger tried anyway, poking his head past one of the doors where he heard the noise of men and women. The corridors were a lot emptier than on weekdays, so it was easy to ﬁnd where the people were working.

He saw his father at once, and his father saw him. His father didn’t look happy and Roger decided at once that everything wasn’t all right.

“Well, Roger,” said his father. “I’m busy, I’m afraid.” Roger’s father’s boss was there, too, and he said, “Come on, Atkins, take a break.

You’ve been at this thing for nine hours and you’re not doing us any good anymore. Take the kid for a bite at the commissary. Take a nap and then come back.”

Roger’s father didn’t look as if he wanted to. He had an instrument in his hand that Roger knew was a current-pattern analyzer, though he didn’t know how it worked. Roger could hear Multivac chuckling and whirring all about.

But then Roger’s father put down the analyzer. “Okay. Come on, Roger. I’ll race you for a hamburger and we’ll let these wise guys here try and ﬁnd out what’s wrong without me.”

He stopped a while to wash up and then they were in the commissary with big hamburgers in front of them and french fries and soda pop.

Roger said, “Is Multivac out of order still, Dad?” His father said gloomily, “We’re not getting anywhere, I’ll tell you that.”

“It seemed to be working. I mean, I could hear it.”

“Oh, sure, it’s working. It just doesn’t always give the right answers.”

Roger was thirteen and he’d been taking computer-programming since the fourth grade. He hated it sometimes and wished he lived back in the 20th Century, when kids didn’t use to take it—but it was helpful sometimes in talking to his father.

Roger said, “How can you tell it doesn’t always give the right answers, if only Multivac knows the answers?”

His father shrugged and for a minute Roger was afraid he would just say it was too hard to explain and not talk about it—but he almost never did that.

His father said, “Son, Multivac may have a brain as large as a big factory, but it still isn’t as complicated as the one we have here,” and he tapped his head. “Sometimes, Multivac gives us an answer we couldn’t calculate for ourselves in a thousand years, but just the same something clicks in our brains and we say, ‘Whoa! Something’s wrong here!’ Then we ask Multivac again and we get a *diﬀerent* answer. If Multivac were right, you see, we should always get the same answer to the same question. When we get diﬀerent answers, one of them is wrong.

“ And the thing is, son, how do we know we always catch Multivac? How do we know that some of the wrong answers don’t get past us? We may rely on some answer and do something that may turn out disastrously ﬁve years from now. Something’s wrong inside Multivac and we can’t ﬁnd out what. And whatever is wrong is getting worse.”

“Why should it be getting worse?”‘ asked Roger. His father had ﬁnished his hamburger and was eating the french fries one by one. “My feeling is. Son,’ he said, thoughtfully, “that we’ve made Multivac the wrong smartness.”

“Huh?”

“You see, Roger, if Multivac were as smart as a man, we could talk to it and ﬁnd out what was wrong no matter how complicated it was. If it were as dumb as a machine, it would go wrong in simple ways that we could catch easily. The trouble is, it’s *half-smart,* like an idiot. It’s smart enough to go wrong in very complicated ways, but not smart enough to help *us* ﬁnd out what’s wrong.—And that’s the wrong smartness.”

He looked very gloomy. “But what can we do? We don’t know how to make it smarter—not yet. And we don’t dare make it dumber either, because the world’s problems have become so serious and the questions we ask are so complicated that it takes all Multivac’s smartness to answer them. It would be a disaster to have him dumber.’”

“If you shut down Multivac,” said Roger, “and went over him really carefully—”

“We can’t do that, son,” said his father. “I’m afraid Multivac must be in operation every minute of the day and night. We’ve got a big back- log of problems.”

“But if Multivac continues to make mistakes. Dad, won’t it *have* to be shut down? If you can’t trust what it says—”

“Well,” Roger’s father ruﬄed Roger’s hair, “we’ll ﬁnd out what’s wrong, old sport, don’t worry.” But his eyes looked worried just the same. “Come on, let’s ﬁnish and we’ll get out of here.”

“But Dad,” said Roger, “listen. If Multivac is half-smart, why does that mean it’s an idiot?”

“If you knew the way we have to give it directions, son, you wouldn’t ask.”

“Just the same, Dad, maybe it’s not the way to look at it. I’m not as smart as you; I don’t know as much; but *I’m* not an idiot. Maybe Multivac isn’t like an idiot, maybe it’s like a kid.”

Roger’s father laughed. “That’s an interesting point of view, but what diﬀerence does it make?”

“It could make a lot of diﬀerence,” said Roger. “You’re not an idiot, so you don’t see how an idiot’s mind would work; but I’m a kid, and maybe I would know how a kid’s mind would work.”

“Oh? And how would a kid’s mind work?”

“Well, you say you’ve got to keep Multivac busy day and night. A machine can do that. But if you give a kid homework and told him to do it for hours and hours, he’d get pretty tired and feel rotten enough to make mistakes, maybe even on purpose.—So why not let Multivac take an hour or two oﬀ every day with no problem-solving—just letting it chuckle and whir by itself any way it wants to.”

Roger’s father looked as if he were thinking very hard. He took out his pocket-computer and tried some combinations on it. He tried some more combinations. Then he said, “You know, Roger, if I take what you said and turn it into Platt-integrals, it makes a kind of sense. And twenty-two hours we can be sure of is better than twenty-four that might be all wrong.”

He nodded his head, but then he looked up from his pocket-computer and suddenly asked, as though Roger were the expert, “Roger, are you sure?”

Roger was sure. He said, “Dad, a kid’s got to *play*, too.”