

# Re: Torkel Franzén is dead

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*Source:* <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.logic/2006-06/msg00522.html>

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- *From:* "George Dance" <[georgedance04@xxxxxxxx](mailto:georgedance04@xxxxxxxx)>
  - *Date:* 22 Jun 2006 02:16:02 -0700
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<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/prior.1.i.html>

<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/interpretation.html>

MoeBlee wrote:

George Dance wrote:

All right; that's a good place to begin by introducing evidence. So I'd like to introduce the following link, which I'll label Exhibit B (Exhibit A was the quote from his exchange with xyz):

<http://tinyurl.com/lmyxl>

Read it and make your own judgement. I would make two claims about that thread: :

1) In it, Torkel advances his thesis that there are some people who are incapable of understanding symbolic logic; and that for them to try use it would only muddle their thinking. (For convenience, I will call those "Submathematical" humans, or SMs.)

Until I have time to respond to the rest of George Dance's posts, I want to catch the above comment.

What Franzen actually wrote in that thread is:

[B.86]

"Formal logic is essentially a mathematical subject, and experience supports neither the idea that people who reason well in non-mathematical contexts should have an aptitude for formal logic, nor the idea that a study of formal logic will help people reason well in non-mathematical contexts."

What Torkel actually wrote in that thread was more than one paragraph.

## Re: Torkel Franzén is dead

While each paragraph has to be looked at individually, that is no excuse for forgetting its context – in particular, the disagreement the argument concerns:

[B.10]

"> It would be a good thing for people in general to know logic,  
" Why? As you yourself have demonstrated, an exposure to formal logic can cause people to make all sorts of absurd assertions that they wouldn't otherwise make."

Torkel is arguing against the proposition that it would be good for people in general to know logic, and for the proposition that it would not be good for some people to know logic. B.86 has to be read in context of, as support for, B.10.

Maybe elsewhere Franzen claimed that there are people incapable of understanding symbolic logic

He says [B.10] that even exposure to formal logic 'can cause' some people to make 'absurd assertions' – presumably even after they know the subject, as he is denying that it would be good for those people not know it, and if their knowing it prevented those absurd assertions it would not be a reason.

(well, there are people who are incapable, so what is at stake is a claim that some people who are otherwise fairly intelligent are incapable of understanding symbolic logic). But in the very thread that George Dance cites, Franzen did NOT mention incapability but rather that certain people who are otherwise logical don't have an APTITUDE for symbolic logic. To say that someone does not have an aptitude (in the sense of a talent or special inclination) for something isn't a claim that he or she is incapable of understanding it.

Aptitude. "An individual's ability to learn or to develop proficiency in an area if provided with appropriate education or training. Aptitude tests include tests of general academic (scholastic) ability; tests of special abilities (ie, verbal, numerical, mechanical); tests that assess "readiness" for learning; and tests that measure ability and previous learning that are used to predict future performance."  
[www.wrightslaw.com/links/glossary.assessment.htm](http://www.wrightslaw.com/links/glossary.assessment.htm)

Though English was not Franzen's first language, he used it better than many native English-speakers. There is no reason to think that he was unaware of the definition, or that he was using the word in a special sense.

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I don't have an aptitude for car mechanics, but I am capable of understanding it if I choose to concentrate upon it.

So you are unable to learn car mechanics, regardless of education or training, because you don't choose to concentrate upon it? Does the fact that you don't choose to concentrate upon car mechanics falsify the idea that it would be good for you to know car mechanics? I don't think so; so I don't think it was reasonable to take the people Franzen was talking about, for whom it would not be good to know logic, as being those who don't choose to concentrate upon logic.

Nor does Franzen argue that the fact that some people who lack aptitude get muddled with symbolic logic entails that they must always be muddled by it.

He says [B.1] that exposure to logic can cause those people to make 'absurd' or contradictory assertions, which knowing the subject will not prevent – as his worries about these absurdities are his reason for denying that it would be good for those people to know logic. (Which could only be if the absurdities persisted even in those who knew the subject.)

But most important here is that Dance goes on to call such people "submathematical humans".

We have to call them something; it makes more sense than referring to them as 'some,' 'those,' or 'such' people.

But that is entirely unsuitable if we are discussing Franzen's, not Dance's, views on this matter, since Franzen never devised such a rubric, which as it is devised by Dance, carries truly terrible connotations such as 'sub-human' and other rubrics of horrible ideologies.

What term would suit you better? I don't mind being labelled a Submathematical, but I don't want to use a term if you're horrified by it.

There is nothing gained in evaluating Franzen's views by tainting them with such horrible connotations; I suggest that Dance let Franzen's remarks speak for themselves and that Dance not burden Franzen with rubrics that Franzen did not himself propose.

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So find a rubric that Franzen used. The only one I could find was 'logic students', which I find unsuitable because it is misleading; it leads to the absurdity that Franzen didn't think it was good for students to know what they were learning.

Until you can suggest a more a suitable term, 'Submathematical' will have to do.

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