

Thomas Arthur Ryan

September 15, 1911 — June 16, 1996

“Art” Ryan was continuously associated with Cornell and its Department of Psychology since he arrived as a freshman in 1929. He was an undergraduate until 1933, then a graduate student until he completed his Ph.D. degree in 1937, then an Instructor until 1942, then an Assistant Professor until 1946, then an Associate Professor until 1949, then a Professor until his retirement in 1977, and finally an Emeritus Professor. He chaired the department 1953-61. He also taught in Administrative Engineering 1939-46 and in Mathematics 1943-45.

Art consistently pressed for connecting the Psychology Department to the real world. This interest was reflected in his teaching, which at various times included courses in industrial psychology, personnel management, occupational analysis, and fatigue and efficiency, in addition to less applied courses in experimental psychology, perception, statistics, and introductory psychology. Reflecting this wide range of interests, Art was Book Review editor of the *American Journal of Psychology*, 1957-67.

Art was in many ways an ideal model of a scientist—he worked on problems he considered important, his judgments in that respect were generally ahead of their time, and his work was of consistently high quality. His early work on the interrelations of sensory systems, on symbolizing, and (with Mary Ryan) on geographical orientation, all stand out as excellent pioneering work in areas still considered important. Similarly, his continuing attention to how statistics are used to draw conclusions from data anticipated more recent developments in that field. He recognized that artificially devised research problems could very likely lead to dead ends, or even misleading conclusions. He brought scientific concerns to the applied settings (effort and work) that guarantee what is now called ecological validity, well before there was a discipline of ergonomics. In all of these, he was extraordinarily open to new ideas, while soberly checking consistency and implications. Art was generally indifferent to the spotlight. Though well-known in his fields of interest, he never sought out the media.

During his career, Art published three books: *Work and Effort: the Psychology of Production* (1947), *Principles of Industrial Psychology* (1954) with Patricia Cain Smith, and *Intentional Behavior: an Approach to Human Motivation* (1970). He also was long interested in the problem of “multiple comparisons”—the fact that in a long series of significance tests, one expects some of the results to appear significant just by chance. In 1960, he developed a new method for handling such problems, which is still used and accepted. This interest in multiple comparisons

continued into his retirement, and in later years he ran numerous analyses on his personal computer, completing a manuscript on the topic in 1990.

As Chair of Psychology, 1953-61, Art was again thought of as a near-perfect role model for that position—not a manipulative or self-aggrandizing “Head,” but a considerate, thoughtful and fair chair of peers, each with his or her own agenda. He was known for his ability to minimize onerous and contentious faculty meetings by distributing memos in advance that laid out the major issues and alternative solutions. Under his chairmanship, the department built up a small but internationally known program in industrial psychology, with effective research connections to various firms around central New York.

Art consistently urged the department to trust its own judgments in hiring, promotions, and in decisions on new research directions, rather than seeking the advice of the same small cadre of outside psychologists whose views were simultaneously influencing many other departments. He was inspired more by the chance to be unique than by the fear of being thought out of fashion.

Art was truly a pioneer concerning women in academia. Under his leadership, Patricia Cain Smith became the first tenured woman, and later (1963) the first female full professor, in the College of Arts and Sciences—all years before this issue became important politically at Cornell and across the nation.

His students and colleagues also remember the conscientiousness with which he acted as a statistical consultant on numerous research projects. He once told a colleague that he avoided leaving Ithaca for sabbatic leaves, because he felt a responsibility to remain available for students. With his own graduate students, he felt it important to allow them freedom to choose their own research problems within a broad area; he felt that learning to select problems was perhaps the most important skill a student could gain in graduate school.

One of Art’s favorite activities was playing chamber music on his viola. For most of his adult life he played in various chamber music groups and attended string quartet workshops.

Art and his wife, Mary, lived for many years in a comfortable house on Linden Avenue, a short walk from campus, and spent their summers in a lakeshore cottage they built themselves near King Ferry, where they often invited students and colleagues. They also often invited new faculty and others to stay at their home while searching for permanent housing. After retirement, Art and Mary lived for many years in Ithaca, but later moved to the Foxdale retirement community in State College, Pennsylvania, where their son, Tom, served on the Board of Directors.

As a friend, Art was honest, fair, and unobtrusively and unaggressively upright and straightforward on all occasions. His politics were humane but subject to debate, and his assistance always available and generous.

Art's interest in statistics was picked up by his son, Thomas Arthur Ryan Jr., who created the popular Minitab statistical package. Besides Mary and Tom, Art is also survived by a daughter, Adelaide Lyon of Canandaigua, New York.

Elizabeth Adkins-Regan, Julian Hochberg, William Lambert, Richard Darlington