



Obituary: Dr. Brian Francis Scarlett

(14 December 1941 – 23 May 2022)

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Dr Brian Scarlett was both a referee of papers for *Sophia* and a valued contributor to the journal.

Having been a student at a Catholic seminary, he had a sound knowledge of Scholastic philosophy. A Latinist, as seminarians had to become, Scarlett taught himself Greek. He did this by using bi-lingual Bibles comparing passages of the New Testament in the two ancient languages he had a way into — some — Classical Greek.

He took his BA and MA with first class honours at the University of Melbourne, and his PhD at the University of Toronto as a Canadian Commonwealth scholar (1971–1974). His thesis was on materialist theories of mind. He was well at home with analytic philosophy.

He had a wide range of interests, refereeing for the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* and the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* as well as *Sophia*.

Scarlett published widely throughout his career. He was a popular and generous teacher and supervisor for generations of students, many of whom graciously acknowledge his influence and who went on to important roles in universities and beyond throughout the world. Scarlett served a number of terms as Head of Philosophy and Associate Dean, undergraduate studies, Arts. He was Head in the five years in which I was an invited sessional lecturer. In my time, the Department seemed well run, collegiate and content. At the same time as I joined the Department, Scarlett asked the editor-at-large of *Sophia*, Purushottama Bilimoria, to run courses on Indian Philosophy. Brian knew full well that the limits of geography are not the limits of philosophy.

Brian was a large man. His physique and beard would have suited him for the role of Father Christmas. He was serious, but laughed a lot. He enjoyed food, wine, and lively conversation. Melbourne, as Victoria's oldest University, had an abundance of all three.

Scarlett had the hobbies of a gentleman: fly fishing with his colleague, the late Barry Taylor and pistol shooting at a local club. He was as at home in the bush as in

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his study. He delighted in music and poetry. In the new corporate-style university, we would be lucky to see his like again.

Apropos Brian's outdoor and shooting skills, Tony Coady recalls Brian dropping in on a Coady and in-laws family gathering on the farmland outskirts of Wedderburn in Northern Victoria in the 1980s replete with a shotgun and an offer to shoot wild rabbits for lunch. Tony accompanied him (unweaponed), but after a successful hunt, they returned to find a great lack of enthusiasm for rabbit fare, and so they were banished to barbecue rabbit for themselves under a splendid eucalyptus tree. The meal was good if somewhat slow-paced and hazardous since constant vigilant scrutiny was required for the numerous shotgun pellets concealed within the meat.

Scarlett very much enjoyed poetry and music. He often quoted Gerard Manley Hopkins, and got the stresses exactly right. He confided that he brushed up his German for his PhD viva by listening to and memorising vocal passages in the symphonies of Gustav Mahler.

When I once asked Scarlett why he had not gone into the priesthood, he replied 'I felt it an industry I did not altogether see myself called to spend my life in.'

Brian Scarlett is mourned by a wide and varied set of friends. And by his two sons and his wife, Margaret. She is a woman of determination, with a true Irish wit. Like Brian, she hates pretentiousness. Brian and Margaret were a matching pair, Catholics but not clericalists, with minds of their own.

Patrick Hutchings,
1 November 2022

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