After several years of declining health, Father William (Augustine) Wallace, O.P., died on March 3, 2015. From 1970 to 1988 an ordinary professor in the School of Philosophy with a cross-appointment in the Department of History, Father Wallace was named emeritus professor on retiring from CUA.

William Wallace was born in New York City on May 11, 1918. His first degree was in electrical engineering, earned from Manhattan College in 1940. Degree in hand, he spent a year working in the Test Laboratories of Consolidated Edison Company of New York before joining the U.S. Navy, in 1941, which led to an assignment to the research staff of the Naval Ordnance Laboratory. These experiences at the lab-bench undoubtedly contributed significantly to his conviction, animating his scholarly work in the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of science, that it is within human power to grasp the natures of things. In 1943, Wallace was reassigned to the Pacific fleet, where he served, as an operations officer specializing in underwater ordinance and mine water, until the close of the war. His final assignment was to the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington, D.C., from which he retired in 1946 at the rank of Lieutenant Commander. He was awarded a Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit for distinguished service.

That same year, Wallace entered the Dominican Order. He was solemnly professed in 1950. Conjointly with his theological studies at the Dominican House of Studies, he earned an M.S. in Physics from CUA in 1952. After ordination to the priesthood in the following year, and completion of the S.T.L. in 1954, he undertook further studies at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), earning first a Ph.D. in philosophy in 1959 (with a dissertation entitled “The Scientific Methodology of Theodoric of Freiberg: A Case Study of the Relationship Between Science and Philosophy”) and then, in 1962, an S.T.D. in moral theology (for a dissertation on “The Role of Demonstration in Moral Theology: A Study of Methodology in St. Thomas Aquinas”).

Father Wallace’s next several decades of scholarly activity were remarkably productive. He published well over a hundred journal articles and book chapters, and was author or editor of some fifteen books. The theme of almost all of Wallace’s teaching, research and writing was nature, and our knowledge of it. His many publications (some fifteen books and well over a hundred articles and book chapters) fall into two broad types: theoretical and historical.

Drawing chiefly upon principles articulated by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, and spelled out by him in his 1977 work The Elements of Philosophy: A Compendium for Philosophers and Theologians, Wallace sought to provide a speculative description of the nature of nature as disclosed by modern physics, to which he joined an account, again developed along broadly Aristotelian lines, of the nature of scientific reasoning. The double-focus of his philosophical approach to the natural order is apparent from the title of his 1996 work, The Modeling of Nature: Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Nature in Synthesis. Notwithstanding its appeal to the word “model,” however, Wallace’s philosophical commitments were decidedly those of a “realist.” Hence his From a Realist Point of View: Essays on the Philosophy of Science, first published in 1979, and issued in a second edition in 1983.

In keeping with its realism, Wallace’s philosophizing was steeped in his appreciation of the actual practice of natural science over the centuries. He was, in other words, a formidable historian of science, and one whose range was truly encyclopedic. The breadth of his knowledge was available for all to see in his two-volume, Causality and Scientific Explanation, published by University of Michigan Press in 1972 and reprinted in 1981. The first volume is dedicated to Medieval and Early Classical Science, whereas the second concerns Classical and Contemporary Science.
As a historian of science, Wallace was not merely content, however, to paint grand tableaus with a large brush in broad strokes. He established himself as one of the world’s leading authorities on Galileo. Thanks to his detailed knowledge of the medieval background, and by dint of protracted study of Galileo’s manuscripts, Wallace showed that Galileo’s break with Aristotelianism was not absolute and entire, that the scientist Galileo depended in significant respects upon the antecedent philosophical tradition that his new “system” would do much to eclipse. An early fruit of this work was the 1977 translation, with historical and paleographical commentary, of Galileo’s Early Notebooks: The Physical Questions. In 1988, he published an edition of Galileo’s Tractatio de praecognitionibus et praecognitis and Tractatio de demonstratione, with introduction, notes and commentary, and in 1992, he published Galileo’s Logical Treatises. A Translation, With Notes and Commentary, of His Appropriated Latin Questions on Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics.

Wallace was also responsible for a string of studies of Galileo’s early work, and its sources, which constitute a major contribution in their own right. In 1981, he published Prelude to Galileo: Essays on Medieval and Sixteenth-Century Sources of Galileo’s Thought. This was followed by Galileo and His Sources: The Heritage of the Collegio Romano in Galileo’s Science (1984), Galileo, the Jesuits and the Medieval Aristotle (1991), Galileo’s Logic of Discovery and Proof. The Background, Content, and Use of His Appropriated Treatises on Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics (1992), Domingo de Soto and the Early Galileo: Essays in Intellectual History (2004), and, with Jean Dientz Moss, Rhetoric & Dialectic in the Time Of Galileo (2003).

As though he did not already have enough on his research agenda, Wallace also collaborated extensively on several large-scale publication projects over the years. From 1961 to 1966, he was staff editor for the New Catholic Encyclopedia, a task that involved him in editing some 900 entries in philosophy, and supplying an additional 31 of his own (he also later served as consultant for the 3 supplementary volumes that were published). He edited, translated and provided commentary for volume 10 (Ia, qq. 65-74) of the multi-volume “New Blackfriars” edition of the Summa Theologiae, issued in 1967. In his later years, he also served as philosophy and science editor of the Encyclopedia of the Renaissance, published in 6 volumes by Charles Scribner’s Sons in 1999, which includes 26 articles contributed by him, and some 150 entries in philosophy, science, technology, and medicine for which he had complete editorial responsibility. Of still more lasting significance was his service, from 1976 to 1987, as Director General of the Leonine Commission, during which time he oversaw publication of five folio volumes of critical editions of works by Aquinas.

Wallace’s career as a teacher was long and distinguished. Even before completing his two doctorates, he was assigned teaching responsibilities in the Dominican Order. These culminated in his being named “Master of Theology” by the Order in 1967, and in his serving, from 1967 to 1970, as Regent of Studies for its Eastern Province. From 1962-1970 he was also a Lecturer in CUA’s School of Philosophy. During the period that he was Ordinary Professor in the School, he twice held a visiting professorship elsewhere: at West Virginia University in the spring of 1980, and at the University of Padua in 1983-1984. And after his retirement from CUA, he taught in and was a member of the Committee on the History and Philosophy of Science in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Maryland, College Park, stepping down from the podium only in 2003.

His high standing in the scholarly community also led to a number of other appointments: as a Research Associate in the Department of the History of Science, Harvard University (1965-1967), as Senior Fellow of the Folger Institute, in Washington, D.C. (1975-1976), as a Member of Princeton University’s Institute for Advanced Study (1976-1977), and as a Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. (1984). His research on Galileo was funded by four grants from the National Science Foundation. Wallace was also the recipient of four honorary doctorates: from
Providence College (1973), from Molloy College (1974), from Manhattan College (1975) and from Fairfield University (1986). In 1969-1970, he was elected President of the American Catholic Philosophical Association. And in 1983, the Association bestowed upon him its highest honor, the Aquinas Medal; he was the first Dominican to be so honored.

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In the “Preface” to his Prelude to Galileo, the cofounders of Boston University’s Center for Philosophy and History of Science, Professors Robert S. Cohen and Marx W. Wartofsky report that Wallace had been one of the “founders” of the Boston Colloquium for the Philosophy of Science (he resided, during the period 1954-1962, at the Dominican House of Studies then in Dover, Massachusetts). Wallace belonged, in other words, to the generation of scholars who established the field of the history and philosophy of science in this country. Cohen and Wartofsky say of him that he “moves easily and with justified confidence among medieval, renaissance, classical and modern physics, as philosopher, historian, and philologist.” This was very high praise from scholars with very high standards. Like Cohen and Wartofsky, Wallace admired profoundly the scientists and the science of the modern era. Unlike them, he also held that the scientists and the philosophers of the ancient and medieval period had not been given the honor that was due them. And with unflagging energy, he sought for over a half a century to set the historical record straight. What animated him, however, was not chiefly the desire to give ancient and medieval thinkers their due. He was driven, rather, by the conviction that it was only in recovering what they had known, but we have long since forgotten, that we can fully appreciate the true ambition of men and women in every age who have aspired to know the natural order, and therewith, its ultimate origin and end.

Father William Wallace, O.P., former electrical engineer and naval officer, teacher, philospher of science, historian, editor and paleographer, was buried from Saint Dominic’s Church, in Washington D.C., on March 7, 2015. His mortal remains lie were consigned to the Dominican plot at Mount Olivet Cemetery.

Requiescat in pace et lux aeterna ei luceat.