The Voice of Objectivity
In Memory of Charles Coulston Gillispie
by Michael B. Decker

Outside, late leaves try on Fauvist paints, the geese turn restless and honk like the traffic passing by, playing the music of noise, while the quiet here, your absence, Charles, changes into presence, your voice remains with us, remembered as that voice of certainty, yes, yet certainly open-minded, entirely free and there’s this joyousness that carries slightly higher –ah- as if some sixth sense hits, some epiphany is on the way. “Professore” I imagine Galileo at your welcome party “what’s this thing Relativity? What have they done with my universe, my rectangles?” then your spirited repartee, those end-stopped sentences let fly, sharply fencing thought with thought; as you battle, the mystery of science deepens: the more we know the more mysterious the questions grow, “glimpses of great order and altogether inhuman high beauty” (I’m quoting you) flicker like heavenly auroras many low clouds quickly refuse, resuming their disguise as so much overcast. We overhear your bow-tied bons mots, the knowing aside on Montgolfier’s trial balloons above Paris, or Sadi Carnot fitting energetics to a T, even voicing reason to Patton, up in his jeep, arms akimbo, shouting madly for more artillery. And what is the sound of your higher judgment being quietly withheld when you sensed more promise gained for us, scholars, ephebes, by silence? Silence, thus, becomes a form of love. “Professore” – Imagine a sound like applause, murmurings; the Host invisible, waiting; the receiving line extends all the way to Pythagorus who just has to ask you about the square root of two – so Charles we must let you go – let your bright angel, memory, light within us now; and make us all, all carriers of your voice.