

Caltech Associates Celebrate the Holidays at the Athenaeum with Dr. Philip Hoffman

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Pasadena, Calif.—With every room decorated for the holidays with wreaths, garlands, Christmas trees, and lights, Caltech’s Athenaeum, in Pasadena, was the perfect backdrop for the Caltech Associates holiday luncheon.

The guests at the Caltech Associates luncheon were also dressed for the holidays with red jackets, Christmas broaches, and holiday ties. They enjoyed a reception followed by a luncheon and a talk by Dr. Philip Hoffman, the Rea A. and Lela G. Axline Professor of Business Economics and Professor of History at Caltech.

Hoffman shared with the Associates his interest in how Europe developed and used weaponry more successfully than countries like China and Japan, where many of the weapons were invented. European states conquered 84 percent of the globe between 1500 and 1914, and Hoffman believes that they were able to do this because of their tradition of “tournaments” created by the rulers to develop bigger and better weaponry for war.

Caltech Alumnus Howard Marshall (BS '57 PhD '65) said that Hoffman’s theory, that “advances in European military technology were driven by an arms race—in his words, 'a tournament'—between numerous nearly equal European states that continually competed with each other militarily without much downside to the rulers, seems plausible.” He added, “This new paradigm led to the Reformation, the Age of Reason, the industrial revolution, and ultimately to the scientific method.”

“Europe conquered large parts of the world for a relatively brief period, but its new way of pragmatic thinking is still found in most cultures, even in those in Asia that otherwise are distinctly non-European,” said Marshall. “This event, like most Associate events, provided food for thought that extended well beyond the particular topic of the lecture.”

To learn more about the Caltech Associates, and how you can attend an event or lecture please visit associates.caltech.edu/ or contact at 626-395-3919.

About the Associates: Founded in 1926, the Associates is a support organization for the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) with over 1,475 members throughout the United States and abroad - a diverse cross section of members of the local & business community, Caltech alumni and faculty, and philanthropists.

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