



SPEAKER: Philip Ball  
TITLE: **Utopia Theory: the physics of society**  
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## ABSTRACT

Human society is arguably the most complex system we know of – populated by entities that can adapt, learn, self-organize and show completely different responses to apparently identical stimuli. One might reasonably wonder whether society exhibits a qualitatively different kind of complexity from that found in inanimate matter. Yet there is a long history of faith in the notion that parallels do exist, and work in recent decades has confirmed that groups of many interacting social agents show collective modes of behaviour analogous to, and sometimes formally equivalent to, those seen in traditional statistical physics, such as phase transitions, phase separation and power-law fluctuations. I will examine this idea, and ask the question whether the physics of complex systems can truly tell us anything about sociology, history, economics and politics.