



## LECTURE

# Using Complexity to Help Understand and Manage Public Policy

HPS Visiting Scholar Series - Department of History  
Co-sponsored by the Department of Public Policy and Administration

Robert Geyer, Ph.D.  
University of Lancaster

### CPNS SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOWS

#### Michael Epperson

Research Professor,  
Director, CPNS  
California State University  
Sacramento

#### Elias Zafiris

Quantum Theorist and  
Mathematician  
Institute of Mathematics  
University of Athens

#### Timothy E. Eastman

Senior Physicist  
NASA Goddard

#### Stuart Kauffman

Depts. of Biochemistry and  
Mathematics and Complex  
Systems Center  
University of Vermont

#### Roland Omnès

Quantum Theorist  
University of Paris, CNRS

For much of the 20th and early 21st centuries the focus of public policy has been on creating more 'order' in society and public policy. From this perspective, with the radical growth in computing power, communication technologies, and 'big data', a fully rational and accountable public policy should be increasingly within reach. The growth of New Public Management, the audit and targeting cultures in public policy and 'evidence based' strategies are the more recent manifestations of this trend. However, as most policy actors recognise, society and policy refuse to be orderly and simple.

A different way of looking at and responding to both can be found through the lens of a 'complexity' perspective. Complexity emerged out of the natural sciences (with roots in mathematics, physics and biology) in the 1970s and 1980s and began spilling over into the social sciences in the 1990s. Major works on complexity and public policy began to emerge in the 2000s. In his talk, Professor Geyer will briefly outline the influence of the orderly public policy perspective (focusing on the UK where he has been working for the past 18 years) and then introduce some of the main aspects of complexity and how they relate to public policy. Applying these insights to a range of UK and European social and health policies, he will argue that adopting a complexity perspective does not guarantee perfect public policy, but enables us to better understand its uncertain and emergent behaviour and encourage policies that promote open societal growth and development rather than fixed end states and rigid plans. An open discussion will follow, applying these perspectives and examples to the Californian public policy context.

**This lecture is open to the public**

**WHEN:** Wednesday, November 19, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

**WHERE:** Petris Room, University Library, Rm. 3023