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The importance of complexity is well-captured by Hawking's comment: "Complexity is the science of the 21st century". From the movement of flocks of birds to the Internet, environmental sustainability, and market regulation, the study and understanding of complex non-linear systems has become highly influential over the last 30 years.

In this Very Short Introduction, one of the leading figures in the field, John Holland, introduces the key elements and conceptual framework of complexity. From complex physical systems such as fluid flow and the difficulties of predicting weather, to complex adaptive systems such as the highly diverse and interdependent ecosystems of rainforests, he combines simple, well-known examples -- Adam Smith's pin factory, Darwin's comet orchid, and Simon's 'watchmaker' -- with an account of the approaches, involving agents and urn models, taken by complexity theory