



## Complexity: A Philosophical Overview (Science and Technology Studies)

By Nicholas Rescher

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**Complexity: A Philosophical Overview (Science and Technology Studies)** By Nicholas Rescher

Our world is enormously sophisticated and nature's complexity is literally inexhaustible. As a result, projects to describe and explain natural science can never be completed. This volume explores the nature of complexity and considers its bearing on our world and how we manage our affairs within it.

Rescher's overall lesson is that the management of our affairs within a socially, technologically, and cognitively complex environment is plagued with vast management problems and risks of mishap. In primitive societies, failure to understand how things work can endanger a family or, at worst, a clan or tribe. In the modern world, man-made catastrophes on the model of Chernobyl can endanger millions, possibly even risking the totality of human life on our planet. Rescher explains "technological escalation" as a sort of arms race against nature in which scientific progress requires more powerful technology for observation and experimentation, and, conversely, scientific progress requires the continual enhancement of technology. The increasing complexity of science and technology (and, in consequence, of social systems) along with problems growing faster than solutions confront us with major management and decision problems.

This study is the first of its kind. There have been many specialized studies of complexity in physics and computation theory, but no overall analysis of the phenomenon. Although Rescher offers a sobering outlook, he also believes that complexity entails mixed blessings: our imperfect knowledge provides a rationale for putting forth our best efforts. Rescher urges us to gear the conduct of life's practical affairs to the demands of a complex world. This highly readable and accessible volume will be of interest to those interested in philosophy, the philosophy of science, science policy studies, and future studies.

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About the Author

Nicholas Rescher, distinguished university professor of philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh, is currently chairman of the Center for Philosophy of Science.

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