

Preface

Life persists in all corners of our social and natural environments, through a constant process of problem solving. Historically, our investigation of the breadth of this problem solving has seen a sharp demarcation between the natural and social scientists, despite the common elements to their discourse, mainly in their reference to environment and adaptation. This book is designed to unite aspects of those natural and social perspectives and thus consider the ecology of firms and the social processes through which their persistence is possible. This work is the product of our mutual curiosities to explore ideas and circumstances, doing our best to avoid dogma and idealism, and guided by our observations on the persistence of individuals through their adaptive mechanisms. Time after time, we find ourselves drawing upon past thinking as we attempt to synthesise the old with the new in developing a schema by which to investigate ecological phenomena from the natural and social perspectives.

One of us (Jones) is an ecological novice, an enthusiastic and ever curious social scientist. A lack of satisfaction with current explanations of why firms persist led Jones intuitively to decouple individual firms from the populations to which others would ascribe them membership. The result has been a growing fascination with *the* firm and *its* environment. The other of us (Walter) is an ecologist. His focus on individual organisms and their interactions with the environment, as mediated by their species-specific adaptations, casts doubts on the predominant ecological and evolutionary generalizations, those based on the view that the environment, and therefore natural selection, is primarily competitive.

We aim to lay a strong foundation for others to apply autecological ideas to the study of firms. We hope we have made the case that firms do persist through matching the requirements of their environments, and that understanding the ecological nature of this imprecise and difficult process is worthy of our time. We believe this book marks the necessary start of an ongoing conversation from which many new and/or contradictory ideas may yet emerge. But in the spirit of Robert Hutchins's "Great Conversations", we choose to add to the progress of knowledge by sharing our present thinking. At this stage we do not have all the answers regarding the persistence of firms, but we believe our present thinking is worthy of your time.