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The Social Construction of Physical Cosmology

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Now the science wars have cooled it is appropriate to consider the role of society in the construction of the physical sciences. Particularly interesting is the sociologist Robert Merton's "multiples," lines of research that originated more than once. A classic example is Darwin and Wallace on natural selection. I offer examples from the history of physical cosmology that I argue illustrate the effect of our common culture of physical science. Since the standard LambdaCDM cosmology is incomplete another society with a different culture may well have hit on a better cosmology, and maybe found it in different ways from us. But of course a better cosmology would look a lot like LambdaCDM, because the universe has been observed from many sides now and found to look a lot like LambdaCDM.