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Subject: Re: Unsatisfactory 'file\_test()' behavior  
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Mon, 17 Dec 2001 15:01:41 GMT  
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Matt Feinstein (mfein@clark.net) writes:

```
> If I do
>
> e = file_test("")
>
> that is, test for the existence of a file whose name is a zero-length
> string, I get e = 1. This is not good ! (Using IDL v5.4 WinNT 4.0).
```

The reasons for this are obscure, but have to do with the quantum properties of vacuums. It turns out that you can never say that a particular unit of space is "empty", since quantum fluctuations cause physical elements to appear, however briefly. IDL is frequently used to solve this type of cutting-edge problem.

Cheers,

David

--

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Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: <http://www.dfanning.com/>  
Toll-Free IDL Book Orders: 1-888-461-0155

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Subject: Re: Unsatisfactory 'file\_test()' behavior  
Posted by [Paul van Delst](#) on Mon, 17 Dec 2001 15:23:22 GMT  
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David Fanning wrote:

```
>
> Matt Feinstein (mfein@clark.net) writes:
>
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>>
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```

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> with the quantum properties of vacuums. It turns  
> out that you can never say that a particular  
> unit of space is "empty", since quantum fluctuations  
> cause physical elements to appear, however  
> briefly.

But, you can only claim this if you can quantify the non-emptiness in some way. IDL apparently can. And the answer is '1'. That's pretty cool.

paulv

p.s.:

```
IDL> print, !version  
{ x86 linux unix 5.4.1 Jan 16 2001    32    32}  
IDL> print, file_test("")  
0
```

Looks like it may have something to do with the, uh..er, "fluctuating properties" of Windows.

--

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Subject: Re: Unsatisfactory 'file\_test()' behavior  
Posted by [Dick Jackson](#) on Tue, 18 Dec 2001 16:09:06 GMT  
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"Paul van Delst" <paul.vandelst@noaa.gov> wrote in message  
news:3C1E0DEA.7E4D534E@noaa.gov...  
>> Matt Feinstein (mfein@clark.net) writes:  
>>  
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>>>  
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>>> that is, test for the existence of a file whose name is a zero-length  
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> p.s.:  
>  
> IDL> print, !version  
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> IDL> print, file\_test("")

> 0  
>  
> Looks like it may have something to do with the, uh..er, "fluctuating  
properties" of Windows.

Fluctuating, indeed!...

=====

IDL Version 5.4 (Win32 x86). (c) 2000, Research Systems, Inc.

IDL> print, file\_test("")  
1

=====

IDL Version 5.5, Microsoft Windows (Win32 x86). (c) 2001, Research Systems,  
Inc.

IDL> print, file\_test("")  
0

=====

Perhaps this is considered to be fixed now.

--  
-Dick

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