

# Re: Examples of Coincidence as Misleading Explanation

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*Source:* <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.physics/2006-03/msg00959.html>

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- *From:* "Hexenmeister" <[vanquish@xxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:vanquish@xxxxxxxxxxxxx)>
  - *Date:* Sat, 11 Mar 2006 13:55:06 GMT
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"John Bailey" <[john\\_bailey@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:john_bailey@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)> wrote in message [news:7gf512lorqf51s1ju4q314ubl7hla3hd3d@xxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:news:7gf512lorqf51s1ju4q314ubl7hla3hd3d@xxxxxxxxxxxx)

On Fri, 10 Mar 2006 06:28:00 -0500, Rich Sondheim <[sondheim74@xxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:sondheim74@xxxxxxxxxxxx)> wrote:

I was wondering if anyone could give me one or more good examples where, in the history of physics, coincidence was mistakenly accepted as a legitimate explanation for a phenomenon that ended up not being the least bit coincidental --- or a phenomenon was simply ignored because it did not conform to the generally accepted theory.

Yours was a good question. I was hoping for more answers than have appeared.

I did run across this example.

<http://scienceworld.wolfram.com/biography/Eddington.html>

Eddington cooked up pseudoscientific "proofs" on "physical" grounds that the fine structure constant alpha was exactly 1/136. When experiments yielded a more accurate value, Eddington produced another proof...

Not a very good example since his original theory was not widely accepted. N rays (<http://mikeepstein.com/path/nrays.html>) might provide a better example but that's only a possible hint.

Your question smacks of a bias in the Anthropic Principle debate.

<http://lanl.arxiv.org/abs/hep-th/0407213> vs

<http://xyz.lanl.gov/abs/hep-th/0407266>

Many versions of Anthropic Principle conclusions undoubtedly propose that certain physical constants could only be just so because of a selection process or result. (when is an anthropic result a coincidence?) Later, it is likely many of these will be explained by a feature of the theoretical structure which explains their value. (which came first, the mass of the electron or the four fermion coupling constant?) Aka, which is the value explained by theory,

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which is the result of coincidence?

John

The most recent accusations of forgery made against Ptolemy came from Newton in [12]. He begins this book by stating clearly his views:–

This is the story of a scientific crime. ... I mean a crime committed by a scientist against fellow scientists and scholars, a betrayal of the ethics and integrity of his profession that has forever deprived mankind of fundamental information about an important area of astronomy and history.

Towards the end Newton, having claimed to prove every observation claimed by Ptolemy in the Almagest was fabricated, writes [12]:–

[Ptolemy] developed certain astronomical theories and discovered that they were not consistent with observation. Instead of abandoning the theories, he deliberately fabricated observations from the theories so that he could claim that the observations prove the validity of his theories. In every scientific or scholarly setting known, this practice is called fraud, and it is a crime against science and scholarship.

<http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Mathematicians/Ptolemy.html>

The most recent accusations of forgery made against Einstein came from Androcles. He begins this accusation by stating clearly his views:–

This is the story of a scientific crime. ... I mean a crime committed by a scientist against fellow scientists and scholars, a betrayal of the ethics and integrity of his profession that has forever deprived mankind of fundamental information about an important area of astronomy and history.

Androcles, having claimed to prove every observation claimed by Einstein in the theory of relativity was fabricated, writes:–

Einstein developed certain astronomical theories and discovered that they were not consistent with observation. Instead of abandoning the theories, he deliberately fabricated observations from the theories so that he could claim that the observations prove the validity of his theories. In every scientific or scholarly setting known, this practice is called fraud, and it is a crime against science and scholarship.

<http://www.androcles01.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/Smart/Smart.htm>