

THE OED MISINTERPRETED

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Back in 1965, Dmitri Borgmann pronounced that PREDETERMINIST was not the kind of word that you could find in a dictionary (see p 87 of *Language on Vacation*). Said Dmitri:

Those of you who have penetrated into their innermost being know that dictionaries are incomplete, that they admit to being incomplete, and that they specifically sanction the formation of words additional to their own by the judicious use of standard prefixes and suffixes.

Dmitri went on to justify the existence of PREDETERMINIST as follows:

Put simply, an -ist is a follower of, or an adherent to, an -ism. For instance, a nationalist is a believer in nationalism. Evident as this connection may be to the more enlightened among us, it seems to have escaped the notice of the harassed dictionary-makers. Thus, they give us predeterminism and even predeterministic, but overlook predeterminist.

So, why should Dmitri want to justify PREDETERMINIST? Because it is a transposal of the common-or-garden word MISINTERPETED. Fourteen-letter transposals are noteworthy, and quite simply the PREDETERMINIST/MISINTERPRETED pair is too good to overlook.

However, if Dmitri had checked the OED carefully, he would have found the word PREDETERMINIST nestling in one of its entries. Checking the entry at PREDETERMINER, we find that definition 1b runs as follows: "A believer in predetermination (prop. *predeterminist*): = *predestinator*".

It appears that the OED is telling the reader that the proper word for a believer in predetermination is PREDETERMINIST, rather than the dictionary-entered PREDETERMINER. So why didn't Dmitri identify the existence of the desired word in the OED? Probably oversight. Nevertheless, the general point Dmitri was making--that new words can be created by careful use of already-existing elements--was completely valid. We have seen numerous examples in the pages of *Word Ways* over the last thirty or so years.