**Between Optimism and Anti-Optimism: Prémontval’s “Middle Point”**

**Abstract**

In 1753, the Berlin Academy announced that the focus of the prize essay contest of 1755 would be optimism, with entrants required (among other things) ‘to put forward arguments that will be thought most fitting to confirm or destroy this system’. In line with these instructions, entrants submitted essays that were either pro- or anti-optimism. This was to the dismay of one of the judges of the contest, André-Pierre Le Guay de Prémontval (1716–1764), who had, by his own admission, surreptitiously attempted to influence the entrants by sketching out a ‘middle point’ between the polarized pro- and anti-optimist positions in a series of books published between 1754 and 1755, namely *Thoughts on Freedom*, *The*

*Diogenes of d’Alembert*, and *On Chance under the Rule of Providence*. The aim of this essay is to elucidate and historically contextualize Prémontval’s highly original ‘middle point’, as outlined implicitly in the aforementioned books and much more explicitly in a series of essays published after the essay contest had concluded.

**Keywords**

Optimism, Meliorism, Best possible world, Prémontval, Leibniz, Berlin Academy, Academy prize essays, Creation

**Introduction**

In 1753, the Berlin Academy decided that the focus of its prize essay contest of 1755 would be optimism. The official minutes of the Academy for 7 June 1753 record the decision: [[1]](#footnote-1)

The question proposed for the prize of 1755 was stated in these terms.

We request an examination of Pope’s system, contained in the proposition “All is good”.

It is a matter of: (1) determining the true meaning of that proposition according to the hypothesis of its author; (2) comparing it with the system of optimism, or the choice of the best, to indicate the connections and differences between them; (3) lastly, to put forward arguments that will be thought most fitting to confirm or destroy this system.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In fact, the question had been decided more than three weeks earlier. The Academy’s minutes for 17 May 1753 state: “The class of speculative philosophy determined, by a majority vote, the question to propose for the prize of 1755, and the choice fell on the Examination of Pope’s System.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The minutes also identify the members of the class of speculative philosophy who collectively made that decision: Johann Philipp Heinius (1688–1775), Nicolas de Béguelin (1714–1789), Jean-Bernard Merian (1723–1807), Johann Georg Sulzer (1720–1779), André-Pierre Le Guay de Prémontval (1716–1764), and the Academy’s perpetual secretary, Jean Henri Samuel Formey (1711–1797). Five of the six also served as judges when, two years later, the time came to select the winning essay—only Béguelin was absent for that.

In all, eighteen essays were submitted by the deadline of 1 January 1755,[[4]](#footnote-4) and on 5 June it was announced that the winning entrant was Adolf Friedrich Reinhard (1726–1783), chamber secretary to the Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz.[[5]](#footnote-5) The title of Reinhard’s essay, “Le système de Mr Pope sur la perfection de monde, comparé à celui de Mr de Leibnitz, avec un examen de l’optimisme”(“The System of Mr. Pope Concerning the Perfection of the World, Compared With That of Leibniz, With an Examination of Optimism”), gives no hint that the work is a strident attack on optimism. The crowning of Reinhard’s essay, which is at times novel but ultimately second-rate, quickly attracted a great deal of criticism, both from inside and outside the Academy. As a result of this furor, there appeared a much more original contribution to the optimism debate. It was the work not of any of the entrants, but of one of the judges: Prémontval, who had joined the Academy in June 1752. Prémontval was disappointed that all of the essay submissions were either pro- or anti-optimism, despite this being in line with the Academy’s original instructions ‘to confirm or destroy’ the system of optimism. By his own admission, he had surreptitiously attempted to influence the entrants by sketching out in a series of books published between 1754 and 1755 a ‘middle point’ between the polarized pro- and anti-optimist positions—in essence a novel form of meliorism. The aim of this chapter is to contextualize and elucidate Prémontval’s highly original ‘middle point’, as outlined implicitly in the aforementioned books and much more explicitly in a series of writings published after the 1755 essay contest had concluded. We shall begin with some context: in section 1, we shall examine the machinations behind the 1755 essay contest and, in particular, the mystery of who cast the deciding vote, while in section 2 we shall briefly consider Reinhard’s essay, the furor that surrounded its selection as the winning entry, and Prémontval’s response to Reinhard. The focus of section 3 will be Prémontval’s middle point between optimism and anti-optimism, and section 4 will consider how Prémontval’s meliorism anticipated later thinking.

**1. The 1755 Prize Essay and the Mystery of the Deciding Vote**

Let us start by detailing the circumstances under which the prize for the 1755 essay contest was awarded, or rather, the differing, indeed conflicting accounts of how Reinhard’s essay came to be crowned. It is well known that the Academy, at the time, was split between factions that could be loosely described as Leibnizian-Wolffian and Newtonian. The division was embedded right at the top of the Academy’s hierarchy—Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (1698–1759), the Academy’s president, was a fervent supporter of natural philosophy *à la* Newton, while Formey, the Academy’s perpetual secretary, was a supporter and indeed renowned popularizer of Leibniz’s and Wolff’s rationalist philosophy. The members of the class of speculative philosophy, who had set the 1755 prize essay contest on optimism and would ultimately be its judges, were similarly divided. One of its pro-Leibnizian members, Johann Georg Sulzer, believed the numbers were on its side to ensure that a pro-Leibnizian (for which read: pro-optimism) entrant would win the contest. To that end, Sulzer approached one of his friends, Martin Künzli (1709–1765), encouraging him to submit a pro-optimism essay. On 10 August 1754, Sulzer wrote to Künzli, urging him to get on with the task.[[6]](#footnote-6) In a subsequent letter of 22 September the same year, Sulzer intimated that he would be able to guarantee victory for Künzli, writing:

I am one of your judges and at least three quarters of your judges have the principles that you inevitably have too. I can tell you in confidence: [Johann Philipp] Heinius, [Samuel] Formey, [Jean-Bertrand] Merian and myself actually make up the entire class of philosophers at the Academy. The first two are sworn Leibnizians, Merian on his own cannot do anything. (Hirzel 1891, 110)

Sulzer’s claim here is untrue: the Academy’s class of speculative philosophy also included Prémontval and Béguelin. Sulzer may have thought it not worth mentioning Béguelin, who was sympathetic to the philosophies of Leibniz and Wolff, on the grounds that he was unlikely to be present for the vote, since at the time he rarely attended the Academy’s meetings (in fact he attended only a single meeting of the Academy between May 1753, when the question on optimism had been agreed, and June 1755, when the winning essay was announced). But it is unclear why Sulzer failed to mention Prémontval, who was at the time a regular attendee of the Academy’s meetings. In any case, buoyed by Sulzer’s encouragement, Künzli duly submitted his essay. Even after learning how many other essays had been submitted, Sulzer remained confident that Künzli’s would prevail. Writing on 3 May 1755 to Künzli, Sulzer declared that only three of the submissions were being seriously considered:

In four weeks, our prize is to be handed out. I don’t want to give you any firm hope of that just yet. But chances are you’ll get it, that is, by rights. There is only one point about which I’m not in agreement with Dr. Heinius, who finds another writing as excellent as yours. This much is certain, that only 3 came under consideration; among them is yours. (Hirzel 1891, 111)

But Sulzer’s confidence was misplaced and his machinations to no avail: on 5 June 1755, the Academy announced that it had awarded the prize to Reinhard.[[7]](#footnote-7) What had happened? Here is where we are presented with two accounts that differ in a key detail.

The first comes from Sulzer, who provided a (now lost) confidential report to his friend, Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), who claimed in a letter to another friend, Zimmermann,[[8]](#footnote-8) that initially “the votes were divided between reason and unreason,” but then the perpetual secretary of the Academy, Samuel Formey, who had initially been in favor of Künzli’s essay, gave the casting vote to Reinhard’s out of consideration for the Academy’s president, Maupertuis, who as a vocal opponent of the ‘Leibnizian-Wolffian’ philosophy was no supporter of optimism. Since Maupertuis abstained from voting,[[9]](#footnote-9) it was left to the members of the class of speculative philosophy to decide which essay to crown. Sulzer pointed the finger of blame at three members in particular:

Merian and Prémontval are quite unhinged, and Formey is a most miserly and vile man; the first two deny the principle of sufficient reason in their publications, and Formey talks and writes for money. So what else can one expect from such men but, as you put it, to turn the rights of humanity upside down. (Hirzel 1891, 115)

It doesn’t take much reading between the lines here to interpret Sulzer as claiming that Formey, along with Merian and Prémontval, had voted for Reinhard’s essay (with Sulzer and Heinius voting for Künzli’s essay). But the story Sulzer privately fed back to Künzli is not quite the same as the one that Prémontval told much more publicly after the result was announced.

Prémontval’s account of the voting comes from a letter he wrote to Reinhard, the winning entrant, on 18 July 1755, a little over a month after the result had been announced. In this letter, Prémontval explicitly tells Reinhard that the casting vote had been his: “Know, then, that with the votes equal between your piece and another, I—as much a supporter of optimism as I am—twice tipped the scales on your side” (Prémontval 1757, II: 69). We shall see in section 3 that Prémontval’s claim to be a supporter of optimism is not as straightforward as he makes out here. In any case, Prémontval continues:

The first time [Prémontval voted for Reinhard’s essay], our very astonished Wolffians protested that I had not been able to read the other piece [i.e. Künzli’s essay], which is in German.[[10]](#footnote-10) I agreed, and asked that it be explained to me. This having been done the next day with great precision, I firmly persisted in the preference I had given to number VII, which is yours. (Prémontval 1757,II: 69–70)

Prémontval subsequently published this letter in 1757, in volume 2 of his *Vues philosophiques* (Philosophical Views).[[11]](#footnote-11) His account was not publicly disputed, and only contradicted by claims made in the private correspondence between Sulzer and his friends that was published at the end of the nineteenth century.

On the matter of the voting in the 1755 contest, scholars have tended to give preference to Sulzer’s account over Prémontval’s. For example, Hirzel and Harnack both relate Sulzer’s account in detail and relegate Prémontval’s to a footnote, giving the impression that the former is more reliable than the latter.[[12]](#footnote-12) Other scholars, for example Hellwig and Calinger, present Sulzer’s account and do not mention Prémontval’s at all.[[13]](#footnote-13) Sulzer’s account certainly plays into the well-established narrative about competing factions within the Academy. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to treat Sulzer’s account with caution. First of all, it must be remembered that Sulzer was writing privately for Künzli and his circle after having tried and failed to get the 1755 essay prize awarded to Künzli. He would have known that the recipients of his letters had no way to verify his claims. Following on from this, second, Sulzer’s description of Prémontval’s place in the internal politics of the Berlin Academy is at best inaccurate and at worst plainly false. He appears to have informed Künzli that Prémontval and Merian were the stooges of the Academy’s president, Maupertuis, as Künzli reports on April 25, 1757:

Mr. Sulzer writes: “This Prémontval and his comrade, Merian, serve under the whip of the Frenchman Maupertuis, who has set his mind to take revenge on Leibniz and Wolff for allowing these Germans to be greater philosophers and mathematicians than the French themselves”. (Hirzel 1891, 117)

Sulzer is partly correct here, for it was no secret that Maupertuis was at the time hostile to both Leibniz and Wolff.[[14]](#footnote-14) But the first part of Sulzer’s claim, that Prémontval was under the thumb of Maupertuis, is ludicrous.[[15]](#footnote-15) Prémontval was certainly hostile to Leibniz and Wolff, though this was hardly at Maupertuis’ bidding because he was no less hostile to Maupertuis![[16]](#footnote-16) On 19 October 1752, less than four months after he had been admitted to the Academy, Prémontval delivered a memoir attacking a proof of God’s existence developed by Maupertuis—a rather brazen attack on the Academy’s president and on his own home turf too.[[17]](#footnote-17) Even a casual glance at Prémontval’s work reveals that he was no respecter of reputation or status and that he was as far from Maupertuis philosophically as he was from Leibniz and Wolff. This in fact made it difficult for him to find publishers for his work, as he complained to a friend in February 1755: “It is known that those [i.e. booksellers] of Berlin are dissuaded from dealing with a man without reputation, equally unwelcome among Maupertuists and Wolffians, freethinkers and hypocrites.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

Unfortunately, we have no other accounts of how the votes were cast in the 1755 prize essay contest, so no way of checking whether the decisive vote was cast by Formey or by Prémontval. But there are, as we have seen, good reasons to doubt the reliability of at least some of the information Sulzer privately fed back to his friends.[[19]](#footnote-19) Of course, the fact that Sulzer’s account of the prize essay voting is sometimes doubtful does not mean that Prémontval’s is reliable. Though here it should be noted that Prémontval did publish his account in 1757, thus opening himself up to public scrutiny and potential public correction from other eyewitnesses in a way that Sulzer did not—and it should be further noted that no such correction was ever made. Further, it is difficult to see what ulterior motive Prémontval could have had for being untruthful about how the votes were cast. Certainly, in telling Reinhard that he had voted for his essay, Prémontval was not attempting to win Reinhard’s favor or gain a supporter; in fact, as we shall see, in his letter to Reinhard, Prémontval went on to tell him just how bad his winning essay was!

**2. Reinhard’s Winning Essay and Prémontval’s Response**

In order to understand Prémontval’s misgivings about Reinhard’s essay, a brief overview of its contents is in order.[[20]](#footnote-20) The first half of Reinhard’s essay is concerned to show that Pope and Leibniz taught the same doctrine (“No difference; same mind, same ideas, same system”), though his methodology is somewhat questionable (Reinhard 1755, 8). Reinhard expounds Pope’s ideas at length, supporting his detailed exposition with numerous quotations from the poet while occasionally interjecting that Leibniz held precisely the same ideas, though Reinhard does not offer any textual evidence to support these claims (while he cites Pope frequently, he does not cite Leibniz at all). In this part of the essay, Reinhard demonstrates an impressive knowledge of Pope’s poem and an unfamiliarity with Leibniz that is equally noteworthy. In one of the more egregious examples, he states that on the principles of Leibniz’s optimism “it necessarily follows that God has created all possible substances” (Reinhard 1755, 12).

The second half of Reinhard’s essay contains a critique of optimism, which consists of two main points. The first objection charges that optimism strips God of free will, while the second is directed at the optimist’s claim that there is a single best possible world, which Reinhard dubs “the dogma of the unique greatest perfection” (Reinhard 1755, 29). The first objection focuses on Leibniz’s insistence that God’s perfect nature is such that he would choose to create no other world than the best, to which Reinhard responds: “If God’s perfections contain the determining reason of his volitions then there is no longer any freedom; all his actions are as necessary as mathematical truths” (Reinhard 1755, 38). The second objection, which is unique to Reinhard, seeks to establish that an intelligent being’s primary end, or chief goal, is usually served by multiple secondary or tertiary ends, and that all of these ends can be attained in many different ways. This is true also for world-creation, he supposes, since in addition to the many different primary and secondary ends God could propose, there are likely many different ways of attaining each and every one of them and the optimist is in no position to deny that some of these will be just as good as others, leading to worlds of equal perfection.[[21]](#footnote-21) Hence there is no single best world and thus no requirement for God to create one world in particular.

Reinhard’s essay was a controversial choice as winner and it soon attracted widespread criticism. The Academy’s perpetual secretary, Samuel Formey, found Reinhard’s reasoning so weak that he was uncharacteristically moved to publish a critical review of the prize-winning essay in the *Nouvelle bibliothèque germanique*,a journal under his editorial control (Formey 1756, especially 29–32). Other criticisms were leveled by a pre-critical Immanuel Kant and Moses Mendelssohn.[[22]](#footnote-22) Prémontval, as we know, opted for a more direct approach, writing to Reinhard to tell him that despite his misgivings about Reinhard’s essay, he had voted for it anyway. And Prémontval was not shy about revealing his misgivings: in his letter to Reinhard, immediately after claiming that he had twice voted for Reinhard’s essay, Prémontval states: “Not – in truth, sir, I tell you frankly – not that I am much edified by it. What ideas you have of God! And you live in peace!” (Prémontval 1757, II: 69–70)

Prémontval’s concern was that Reinhard had insisted that God was entirely free in his choice of world, and indeed free to choose whether to create or not, it being a matter of complete indifference to him whether other beings existed or not (Reinhard 1755, 36). For Prémontval, this made God’s actions entirely arbitrary. As he wrote in *On Chance under the Rule of Providence*: “a God who wills things without any reason for willing them, or who has no other reason for willing them except that he wills to will them” is “in a word, pure arbitrariness”.[[23]](#footnote-23) As abhorrent as such thinking was to Prémontval, he told Reinhard that the pro-optimism essay by Künzli had an even worse failing: “What made me give preference to your piece, Sir, in addition to the spirit of research I noticed in it, is largely its distance from Leibnizian fatalism, which is even worse than your arbitrariness” (Prémontval 1757, II: 72–3).[[24]](#footnote-24) Although in his letter, Prémontval objected only to the idea of an arbitrary God, this was not the only problem he had with Reinhard’s essay. In fact, Prémontval found so much wrong with it that he compiled a lengthy point-by-point rebuttal, enclosing it with his letter to Reinhard. Two years later, he published both his letter and his rebuttal in volume 2 of his *Vues philosophiques* (*Philosophical Views*).[[25]](#footnote-25)

In his letter, in addition to telling Reinhard what was wrong with his essay, Prémontval gave a brief and often elusive sketch of his own position vis-à-vis optimism:

Surely what the greatest wisdom prefers is the wisest; what the greatest goodness does is the best, or else there is neither wisdom nor goodness if there is no object of wisdom and goodness, that is, a most perfect possible, the object of the greatest wisdom, and a best possible, the object of the greatest goodness. But sovereign wisdom, Sir, and sovereign goodness, do not do everything. We do something too, we others who make up this world; infinite collection of stray and wicked beings, existing of themselves in a perpetual conflict of actions and interests. We do, and do only too much: here is the knot. Is there so much mystery there? This is what I intend to bring to the highest point of demonstration in my *Essay on Theocharis*. (Prémontval 1757, II: 71–2)

Prémontval never did write his projected *Essay on Theocharis*. Eight years later, in 1763, the year before his death, he stated that he was earnestly thinking about starting it![[26]](#footnote-26) Nevertheless, he did develop many of the ideas raised in his letter to Reinhard, most notably in an essay entitled “General misunderstanding on the question of optimism”, which was written to serve as a sort of preface to his letter to Reinhard and the lengthy rebuttal of his essay when both were published.[[27]](#footnote-27) Prémontval devotes much of this essay to sketching out his own views and presenting them as the ‘middle point’ between the sharply pro- or anti-optimist positions he had encountered in the essays submitted to the Academy’s prize contest. Let us turn, then, to Prémontval’s ‘middle point’.

**3. Prémontval’s ‘Middle Point’ Between Optimism and Anti-optimism**

Prémontval creates the space for his ‘middle point’ by drawing a sharp distinction between these two propositions:

1. God essentially chooses the best among all the possibles.
2. The world is the best of all possible worlds.[[28]](#footnote-28)

He rightly notes that both partisans and detractors of optimism typically conflated the two, or at best construed (2) as the logical consequence of (1). Against this, however, Prémontval claims that while (1) is necessarily true, (2) is completely false. The first proposition is true because it is of the essence of an all-wise, all-powerful and all-good being to always choose the greatest good or best course:

God is as essentially all that he is as the triangle is angular, the circle is round, and two and two are four. God is as essentially good as intelligent. God loves and wills a greater good as essentially as he knows this greater good, and he knows it essentially, indispensably, necessarily, logically, and metaphysically. What God wills, what God does, is therefore essentially, indispensably, necessarily, logically, and metaphysically the best.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Needless to say, for Prémontval, affirming the first proposition thus amounts to accepting that God’s actions are necessitated (albeit by his own nature rather than by something external to him).[[30]](#footnote-30) While such a thought was generally anathema to optimists and anti-optimists alike,[[31]](#footnote-31) Prémontval considers it an inevitable consequence of the traditional view that God is essentially perfectly good and perfectly wise. Hence the first proposition, that God essentially chooses the best among all the possibles, is necessarily true.

Yet Prémontval denies that accepting the first proposition automatically entails accepting the second proposition, that the world is the best of all possible worlds. Indeed, he insists that this proposition must be rejected on the grounds that our world could clearly be better. He states: “The smallest good action that we can perform but don’t, would make it better. The most trivial crime, the slightest error into which we could avoiding falling but into which we do fall, makes it worse.”[[32]](#footnote-32) On the surface, such thinking appears overly simplistic, inasmuch as it seems to presuppose that actions and events occur in isolation, such that improving the world would be rather like correcting typos in a manuscript, each corrected error leaving everything else unchanged.[[33]](#footnote-33) But Prémontval does not base his rejection of the second proposition on such sloppy reasoning. Instead, he points to the traditional idea that God commands certain actions, prohibits others, and even promises punishment for transgressors. Since God is perfectly wise and wants only the best, Prémontval reasons that God promotes good actions because they make the world better and he forbids bad ones because they make it worse; if this were not the case, if the world was in some way made better by certain transgressions, it would be perverse, indeed absurd for a perfectly wise God to forbid them, let alone punish them. By *reductio*, then, Prémontval concludes from the fact that some people do not always obey God’s commands that this cannot be the best of all possible worlds.

Having teased apart two propositions that were usually conflated by the protagonists in the optimism debate, Prémontval seeks to harmonize his acceptance of (1) and rejection of (2) by offering a philosophical theology clearly indebted to Plato’s *Timaeus* or Timaeus of Locri’s *On the Nature of the World and the Soul*, in particular to their account of the formation of the cosmos by the divine craftsman, the demiurge. Both Plato and the author writing as Timaeus of Locri suppose that the demiurge acts on pre-existing matter that is by nature disorderly, chaotic, and unpredictable.[[34]](#footnote-34) In conferring order upon this material, the demiurge seeks to bring about the best arrangement, though as the material has natural properties that are in opposition to the order imposed on it, the effects of these properties can only be partially subjugated by the demiurge, never wholly eradicated. In a similar vein, Prémontval envisages God as being faced with a world of beings he had not created and over which he does not have direct control, though in his account this is because some or all of these beings are naturally endowed with free will, which God cannot override or remove even if he wanted to.[[35]](#footnote-35)

To this Platonic-Timaen vision, Prémontval adds an important twist: he proclaims that God’s principal (and indeed overriding) aim is to make all beings holy and happy, and this on the grounds that no other aim is consistent with supreme goodness.[[36]](#footnote-36) But since not all beings are happy and holy (as experience attests), we may surmise that it is not possible for God to make all happy and holy by fiat. Instead, he is restricted to interventions designed to guide these beings to his goal of universal happiness and holiness:

At each moment his infinite wisdom, animated by boundless affection, intervenes with all the weight of his power and all the efficacy of his grace, to increase goods, reduce evils, cure, put right, relieve, and heal; to right wrongs, to heal the wounds that blind or wicked beings constantly cause by mutual blows. If all is not better; if all is not holy and happy (confirmed by the facts, it is my turn to say this openly) it is because the thing is not yet possible: it is because it is possible only by development and by degrees and that it is a matter of leading beings to make themselves such rather than to make them such, which is absurd. If it were only a matter of willing them to be such for them to be all *holy, happy, identified with God himself*, infinite goodness would not hesitate, would not defer for a moment.[[37]](#footnote-37)

As the world is still a long way from being as good as it could be, Prémontval rejects the optimist’s claim that it is the best possible, opting instead for a more nuanced position. While he accepts that the world is the best with regard to that which depends upon God, who ensures that the world contains as much perfection at each moment as is possible, Prémontval holds that it is not best with regard to that which depends upon free beings—though he envisages these beings improving continuously under the guidance of God.[[38]](#footnote-38) Although Prémontval described himself as an optimist when writing to Reinhard, it should be clear from the above that the label is ill-fitting,[[39]](#footnote-39) and he is more accurately described as a meliorist, albeit *avant la lettre*, since the term ‘meliorism’ and its derivatives appeared in English only in 1877, while ‘méliorisme’ first appeared in French in 1915 and the derivative ‘mélioriste’ in 1931.

Prémontval believed that the idea of God found in his melioristic philosophy was more plausible and attractive than that possessed either by optimists or anti-optimists. The optimist, he complained, tended to place excessive emphasis on God’s wisdom, while the anti-optimist did likewise with God’s independence. It is worth examining Prémontval’s thinking here. Optimists such as Leibniz insinuated that God’s desire to make all beings holy and happy was not an overriding one, as Prémontval insisted, but rather subordinated to another, more important aim. Hence in his *Theodicy* of 1710, Leibniz had claimed that while the happiness of intelligent beings “is the principal part of God’s design,” it should not be thought that this was his sole aim.[[40]](#footnote-40) Leibniz stressed that God would also prize simplicity of means and the observation of general laws, intimating that this would result in a certain amount of evil: “God can follow a simple, productive, regular plan; but I do not believe that the best and the most regular is always opportune for all creatures simultaneously”.[[41]](#footnote-41) Nicolas Malebranche, from whom Leibniz appropriated these ideas, argued that God opts for simple means and general laws, despite the drawbacks these have for creatures, because these are what wisdom demands. Just as skilled artisans and craftsmen complete their work via the simplest means at their disposal, so God, as an artisan or craftsman par excellence, would make use of the simplest possible means to bring about his intended effect, as anything else would not be in keeping with supreme wisdom.[[42]](#footnote-42) By contrast, Prémontval found it bizarre to suppose that God would prize his own wisdom above the happiness and holiness of his creatures, the only aim worthy of God’s supreme goodness.[[43]](#footnote-43) In Prémontval’s eyes, then, Leibniz and his ilk had erred by supposing that God had identified more important considerations than the happiness and holiness of other beings.

On the other extreme, opponents of optimism erred by overemphasizing God’s *independence* to the point of denying that God essentially chooses the best. Such a denial typically stemmed from the concern that if God essentially chooses the best, then he must do so necessarily, which destroys divine freedom at a stroke. To counter this, some opponents of optimism, Reinhard among them, stressed God’s *independence*, insisting that God was entirely free in his choice of world, and indeed free to choose whether to create, it being a matter of complete indifference to him whether other beings existed or not.[[44]](#footnote-44) Prémontval offers a twofold response to this. First, he notes that as goodness is a propensity to do good, God’s essential goodness *presupposes* the existence of things outside of him to which he can do good, implying that it was not up to God whether these things existed or not.[[45]](#footnote-45) Second, Prémontval insists that an infinite goodness that was in any way indifferent towards the good of other beings would not be worthy of the name of infinite goodness, or indeed worthy of our love.[[46]](#footnote-46)

In “General misunderstanding on the question of optimism”, Prémontval expresses his dismay that none of the entrants of the 1755 prize essay contest had hit upon his preferred ‘middle point’, instead being clearly polarized, either fervently in favor of optimism or against it. Prémontval’s dismay was compounded by the fact that he had—he said—tacitly outlined his ‘middle point’ in three of the books he had published between 1754 and 1755, namely *Thoughts on Freedom*, *The Diogenes of d’Alembert*, and *On Chance under the Rule of Providence*, doing so in the hope that it would lead some of the competition’s entrants to arrive at the same ‘middle point’ he favored:

Nothing has contributed more to convince me of the need to open new paths, or to reopen old, neglected, long-lost paths, than the question proposed by the Academy on optimism. I do not speak of the serious application, of which the examination of this multitude of pieces submitted to us made me a duty; I mean of the character and the very opposition of the pieces. It cannot be denied that there were many estimable by their subtlety or by the depth of research, and the winning one was like this. But good God! In all of them, what opinions! In all of them, towards what extremities are we carried, determinedly, without looking behind us! Not the slightest attempt; not the slightest attempt at a mean between the opposing sides. Whichever side is chosen is endorsed entirely and with no turning back. I had suspected as much. It suited no one, least of all me, to claim as guide to those who entered this fray. However, I could try to inspire views, especially by doing it in such an indirect manner that no one spotted my intention. To this end I hastened to produce my *Thoughts on Freedom*, many of my *Thoughts on Man*,[[47]](#footnote-47) and my *Treatise on Chance under the Rule of Providence*, which even appeared in time, at the end of 1754. There, without making an express mention of the subject of optimism, as proposed by the Academy, I nonetheless present with some ingenuity all the light and all the shadows necessary to bring out the idea I wanted to see developed.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Of the three books mentioned here, *On Chance under the Rule of Providence* is the richest source of arguments and doctrines that would be subsequently fleshed out in “General misunderstanding on the question of optimism”. However, Prémontval’s claim that this book appeared at the end of 1754 is incorrect. In a letter to a friend written on 21 February 1755, Prémontval explained that the book was still “15 days or 3 weeks” away from being printed.[[49]](#footnote-49) Therefore, by the time that book was published, in mid-March 1755, the deadline for submissions to the 1755 essay contest—1 January—had passed, and with it any chance of the book influencing the entrants.

The two other books that Prémontval claimed were written in the hope of influencing the entrants of the prize essay contest contain only traces of the ideas later outlined in more detail in “General misunderstanding on the question of optimism”. For example, in an appendix to *Thoughts on Freedom*, having argued that it is of God’s essence not to do a lesser good, and thus that God is necessitated by his own perfect nature always to take the best course, Prémontval rails against “those who, on the pretext of preserving a freedom which is monstrous or chimerical, make him act arbitrarily”.[[50]](#footnote-50) And in *De dieu et de la religion: Suite du Diogène decent* (*On God and Religion: Follow-up to Decent Diogenes*), Prémontval states that “Goodness has an essential and necessary relation to beings capable of being made happy; it cannot subsist without this relation. Consequently, God could not be God if there were no beings capable of feeling that he is good” (Prémontval 1754a, 49). While such passages certainly gesture towards the ideas Prémontval would later sketch out more explicitly in *On Chance under the Rule of Providence* and “General misunderstanding on the question of optimism”, it would be difficult to reconstruct the later position from the scattered hints of it found in those earlier works.

Not surprisingly, Prémontval’s oblique attempt to influence the entrants of the 1755 essay contest was not successful. On the one hand, the writings he published prior to 1 January 1755 did not contain sufficient seeds of the doctrine he wanted to see blossom in the minds of others to enable them to cultivate it, and, on the other, Prémontval’s melioristic philosophy, sketched out in “General misunderstanding” and more obliquely in the books he published in 1754, was too heterodox to win widespread support. His rejection of the doctrine of creation as an unhelpful theological prejudice would have been seen as abhorrent in an age that still prized orthodoxy. And his claim that God’s principal aim was the happiness and holiness of his creatures was at odds with the mainstream Christian confessions, which typically saw God’s sole aim as the glorification of himself, something that was widely seen as quite compatible with the misery and even damnation of many creatures. Prémontval’s insistence that God’s principal aim was (and could only be) the happiness and holiness of his creatures would no doubt have been seen as the error of a philosopher working out the logic of God’s goodness and love independently of any other theological or scriptural concerns, which may well have been precisely how he arrived at it. As Prémontval relates in his memoirs, when he began studying philosophy at the age of sixteen or seventeen, he underwent a crisis of faith that led him to endorse atheistic Pyrrhonism before turning to deism and eventually converting to an unspecified branch of Protestantism at the age of thirty.[[51]](#footnote-51) Nevertheless, his writings suggest that he continued to entertain a philosophical notion of God over one that was recognizably Lutheran or Calvinist, a point that was not lost on his critics who castigated him for it.[[52]](#footnote-52)

**4. Meliorism in and after Prémontval**

Although Prémontval declared himself a partisan of optimism, I have suggested that he is better described as a meliorist, in that he believed the world (in fact, its inhabitants) improves ceaselessly over time. While ideas of human progress and perfectibility have a long history and were hardly uncommon during the Enlightenment,[[53]](#footnote-53) it is worth noting the distinctive features of Prémontval’s form of meliorism:

1) Progress and improvement are universal; that is, all creatures, human and non-human alike, will experience them. Prémontval often claims that God will make “all” or “every being” happy and holy, suggesting that human beings are not God’s only concern.[[54]](#footnote-54) Moreover, Prémontval states that God is not indifferent towards the plight of nonhuman creatures, which he claims suffer as much as, if not more than, human beings and thereby have a right to the favors of divine goodness.[[55]](#footnote-55)

2) Progress and improvement take place both in this life and in the afterlife, though mostly in the latter. That this is Prémontval’s position can be inferred from his repeated claims that God will ultimately make all happy and holy and the acknowledged fact that this has not yet been achieved.

3) Progress and improvement are God-driven rather than human-driven, and in this life, they occur more in spite of human activity than because of it. Indeed, Prémontval insisted that so far from free will being a divine gift, as was traditionally thought, it was more of an imperfection or curse since it enables those who have it to go wrong as well as right. Because this conflicts with God’s principal aim of bringing about a harmonious whole in which all creatures are holy and happy, Prémontval supposed that if it had been possible for God to remove or override the free wills of human beings, then he would have done so; the fact that he hadn’t suggested it wasn’t possible.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Unfortunately, Prémontval leaves no clues as to how he came to endorse such a set of ideas. One could speculate that his influences were various, and that he drew upon ideas such as universalism (that is, the doctrine of universal salvation), Christian utopian ideas such as those of Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202),[[57]](#footnote-57) Calvin’s belief that in the perfecting of human beings, God’s manner of action leads to gradual rather than instantaneous improvement,[[58]](#footnote-58) and perhaps—though this is a stretch—even Wolff’s doctrine of perfectibility, which taught that it was within human power (and indeed the supreme human good) to make unimpeded progress towards ever greater perfections.[[59]](#footnote-59) We may presume that Prémontval was familiar with all these ideas, or cognate ones at least, and conjecture that he fused and reworked some or all of them into a novel position of his own, though it should be stressed that there is no direct evidence for this. And we ought not rule out the possibility that Prémontval arrived at the component ideas of his meliorism philosophically, which indeed is the impression he gives.

We have already seen that, in spite of (or probably because of) its novelty, Prémontval’s melioristic philosophy failed to find adherents in his own age. This would not have surprised him in the slightest, as he fully expected that his ideas would receive a warmer reception in the decades and centuries to come. And in a sense, he was correct because his forthright endorsement of meliorism anticipated an important twist in the optimism debate that occurred in the nineteenth century, especially in France, where optimism experienced a renaissance, albeit not in quite the same form as it had been entertained in previous centuries. This renaissance was sparked in 1847 by Louis Auguste Javary (1820–1852), who insisted that God placed the very idea of good in the world so as to be “an inexhaustible principle of love and moral force” and thus serve as “a germ of improvement, which can make fruitful, blossom, and lead this world from an inferior state to a greater perfection” (Javary 1847, 525). Insisting that there was no limit as to how perfect the world could become, Javary offered a vision of an ever-improving universe:

The divine will can work only for the best, says optimism: we agree; but as a determinate best is never absolutely realizable, are not the two principles in agreement when we conceive that the state of the world—necessarily always imperfect—is nevertheless constantly improving, and approaching an absolute perfection, which it will doubtless never attain, but which ultimately it conceives and towards which it tends ever more? (Javary 1847, 525)

Inspired by Javary’s suggestion, a series of philosophers endorsed and elaborated upon it. Hence in 1854, Francisque Bouillier (1813–1899) claimed that as there could be no upper limit for the perfection of a universe, the optimist’s belief that our universe is the best one possible had to be reworked into a form of meliorism, which recognized that the universe was not (and could not be) statically the best at every moment but was instead ceaselessly increasing in perfection. Therefore, according to Bouillier, the best world of the optimist “is not the world such as it is, the world in actuality, it is the world in potentiality, such as it is becoming and ceaselessly will become in the endless progression of its developments” (Bouillier 1854, 455).

Later meliorists drew a distinction between true and false optimism, that is, between the idea of a world always exemplifying maximal perfection (false optimism) and the idea of a world continually increasing in perfection (true optimism). Émile Boirac, for example, supposed that the best world was infinitely perfectible, acquiring its perfections by the free efforts of creatures.[[60]](#footnote-60) Boirac stressed that whereas false optimism, with its claim of absolute perfection, inevitably leads to resignation and inaction, true optimism, on the other hand, concludes in favor of action, stimulating us to contribute to the ongoing development and improvement of the world.

As close as some of these ideas are to those developed by Prémontval, it would be a stretch to suppose that he influenced or inspired them. None of the aforementioned thinkers mention him in their discussions of optimism or meliorism, and indeed Bouillier, one of the earliest proponents of nineteenth-century French meliorism, identifies the seeds of his melioristic ideas in the work of Leibniz, Descartes, and Malebranche.[[61]](#footnote-61) A number of other doctrines in Prémontval’s work likewise anticipated later developments, such as open theism, process theology, and animal theodicy, without him having any claim to have shaped or inspired them.[[62]](#footnote-62) And so it was for Prémontval: ever the anticipator, never—in modern parlance—the influencer.[[63]](#footnote-63)

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1. From the register for 7 June 1753 held by the Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften under the shelfmark I IV 31/06, Bl. 48. All translations in this paper are my own. Where an English translation is available, I cite the original language source first followed by the English translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The question was publicly announced in the June 1753 issue of *Nouvelle Bibliothèque Germanique ou Histoire Littéraire de l’Allemagne, de la Suisse et des Pays du Nord* (1753, 457–8), edited by Samuel Formey. The question was subsequently publicized in the twice-weekly Hamburg journal *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt* (1753, 461–2) on 27 July 1753 (not 27 August 1753 as is sometimes claimed; there was in fact no issue of the journal published on that date), and then in the Paris journal *Suite de la Clef, ou Journal historique sur les matières du tems* (1753, 149) in August 1753. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. From the register for 14 May 1753 held by the Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften under the shelfmark I IV 31/06, Bl. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Buschmann 1989, 199n63. For an overview of these entries, see Hellwig 2008, 276–97. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See the register for 5 June 1755 held by the Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften under the shelfmark I IV 31/08, Bl. 35: “The perpetual secretary opened the session by declaring that the piece which had won the prize proposed for this year by the Class of Speculative Philosophy was No. 7... Whereupon, having opened the sealed letter, the name of Mr. Adolf Freidrich Reinhard was found therein.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Hirzel 1891, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See the register for 5 June 1755 held by the Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften under the shelfmark I IV 31/08, Bl. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Probably Johann Georg Ritter von Zimmermann (1728–1795). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As reported in Hirzel 1891, 115. It is possible that Maupertuis was not even in Berlin at the time the Academy members were reading, weighing, and voting on the submissions: according to the Academy’s records, the first meeting he attended in 1755 was that of 5 June, the day Reinhard was crowned winner of the essay contest. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Prémontval’s inability to read German meant that he could have read fewer than half of the eighteen entries, of which eleven were in German, four in French, and three in Latin (see Buschmann 1989, 199n63). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In a separate text, addressed to Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766), Prémontval wrote: “Nothing has been more straightforward and more free from intrigue and bickering than the affair of the prize of 1755” (Prémontval 1757, II: 137). While it is tempting to take this as a reference to the voting, this should be resisted, as Gottsched had raised no concerns about that. He had, however, complained about the prize essay question itself when it was announced in 1753. Indeed, upon learning of the topic, Gottsched (Gottsched 1753) published a short tract against what he perceived to be the negative and trivializing tone of the Academy’s question, his concern even extending to the use of the term ‘optimism’, which he correctly noted had been invented as a pejorative term (though he mistakenly thought it had been invented by Jean Pierre de Crousaz, whereas it had in fact been coined by Louis Bertrand Castel in a review of Leibniz’s *Theodicy*; see Castel 1737, 207). Gottsched was not the only one to complain about the choice of question for 1755; another attack came from Lessing and Mendelssohn, who ridiculed the juxtaposition of Pope and Leibniz in the Academy’s question, noting that the aims and approaches of the poet and philosopher were too different to warrant the sort of comparison the Academy proposed (see Lessing and Mendelssohn 1755). Prémontval later defended the Academy’s prize essay question, even stating that he had voted for it: “Certainly, although critiques of it [the question] have been made, the question is fine and very well presented. I took pleasure in contributing my voice to the preference it obtained” (Prémontval 1757, II: 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Hirzel 1891, 114 and Harnack 1900, 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Hellwig 2008, 276 and Calinger 2016, 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. There has been some debate about Maupertuis’ attitude towards Leibniz. For example, while Cassirer (1951, 86) saw an “objective kinship” between Maupertuis’ ideas and Leibniz’s, Beeson (1992) portrayed Maupertuis as straightforwardly anti-Leibniz, and Terrall (2002) depicted Maupertuis as more ambivalent towards Leibniz, albeit punctuated by periods of hostility. It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into this debate, and it will suffice here to note that in the mid-1750s Maupertuis was certainly hostile to Leibniz, no doubt in part because of the controversy over his principle of least action, which a number of detractors claimed to be an original invention of Leibniz’s. This sparked a pamphlet war between supporters of Maupertuis and Leibniz that lasted for several years. See Terrall 2002, 286–309. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Interestingly, in a history of the Berlin Academy, written in the mid-nineteenth century, Bartholmèss claimed that Sulzer was a follower of Béguelin and Merian (Bartholmèss 1851, II: 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In his biographical novel of Lessing, Hermann Klencke has Lessing tell Mendelssohn that Prémontval ‘is bitterly hostile to Maupertuis’ because he didn’t want to serve him as a tool (Klencke 1850, III: 285). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Prémontval 1757, II: 243–68 (2018, 1–10). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Prémontval to François Thomas Marie de Baculard d’Arnauld, February 21, 1755. Berlin Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Darmstädter Collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Sulzer’s claim that Prémontval denied the principle of sufficient reason in his publications is also inaccurate. In fact, Prémontval did not reject the principle of sufficient reason outright; he merely denied that it applied universally, as the Leibnizians and Wolffians claimed. While Prémontval accepted that there was always a sufficient reason for God’s (necessary) choice, he denied that this was always the case for the choices of other beings that stemmed from their free will. See Prémontval 1754c (2018, 11–56) and 1755 (2018, 75–129). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For a more in-depth examination of Reinhard’s essay, see Caro 2020, 146–71. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Reinhard 1755, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Kant 1759 and Mendelssohn 1844, IV, 1, 508–10; the latter was written in 1759. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Prémontval 1755, 19 (2018, 86). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Although Prémontval offered no further detail of this charge, his concern was probably that Künzli (Künzli 1755, 42–3), following Leibniz, supposed that God had the idea or pattern for this world in his mind prior to creation, such that any question about why such-and-such an event happens or why things are thus rather than otherwise must be referred back to this idea or pattern, the upshot of which is that all events are determined. Because of this, and in spite of Leibniz’s protestations to the contrary, some opponents of optimism supposed that Leibniz’s system was fatalistic (for example, Warburton 1740, 18). In his essay, Künzli actually addressed this objection, but did no more than quote Leibniz’s own words denying fatalism (Künzli 1755, 28–33). Since it was Leibniz’s own words that had caused opponents to bring the charge of fatalism in the first place, Künzli’s approach did little to assuage those who, like Prémontval, were inclined to see Leibniz’s optimism as fatalistic. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For the letter and the rebuttal, see Prémontval 1757, II: 67–74 and 75–136. The two pieces were subsequently republished in German translation along with a number of other pieces prompted by Reinhard’s winning essay; see Ziegra 1759. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Prémontval 2018, 320. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Prémontval 1757, II: 33–66 (Strickland 2020, 324–8). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Prémontval 1757, II: 34 (Strickland 2020, 325). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Prémontval 1757, II: 49–50 (Strickland 2020, 326). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This point is made more explicitly in Prémontval (1755, 137–8/2018, 120): “with regard to the Supreme Being which is infinitely wise and infinitely good, we can only conceive that, placed again in the same set of circumstances an infinity of times, it would take the same course of action an infinity of times, namely the *best*. Why? In short, because it is as *essential* to him—inasmuch as he has infinite wisdom and infinite goodness—to take nothing but the best course as it is for the circle to be a round figure, and the roundest of all figures. Thus God is *subject to necessity*, but to the necessity of his nature. In other words, God is no more free not to be infinitely good in name and in effect than he is free not to be God. He is no more free not to be what is *essential to God* than he is free not to be God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. With the occasional exception, such as the Scottish philosopher William Dudgeon (1705/1706–1743), who cheerfully accepted that God had created the best world out of necessity; see Dudgeon 1739, 7; cf. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Prémontval 1757, II: 37–8 (Strickland 2020, 325). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Some anti-optimists do appear to have thought of the matter this way. See for example Du Phanjas 1767, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Plato 1997, 1236 and Timaeus of Locri 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Prémontval 1757, II: 50 (Strickland 2020, 326–7). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Prémontval 1757, II: 50; Strickland 2020, 326. Additionally, see Prémontval1754c, 38–49 (2018, 25–8) and 1755, 45–7 (2018, 94–5). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Prémontval 1757, II: 53–4 (Strickland 2020, 327). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See Prémontval 1757, II: 51 (Strickland 2020, 327). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Despite Prémontval’s vocal opposition to Leibniz and his rejection of the central claim of Leibnizian optimism—that our world is best—he has sometimes been incorrectly pegged as endorsing an optimism not dissimilar to Leibniz’s own. For example, see Barber 1955, 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. GP VI, 168 (Leibniz 1985, 188). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. GP VI, 244 (Leibniz 1985, 260) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See Malebranche 1992, 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See Prémontval 1757, II: 58 (Strickland 2020, 327). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Although Prémontval does not mention it, similar claims were also sometimes made by optimists. For example, in a work in which he argued that ours is the best of all possible worlds, Christian Wolff (Wolff 1736, 401–2, §430) also claimed that God is sufficient unto himself and so indifferent as to whether to create or not. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Prémontval 1757, II: 61 (Strickland 2020, 328). The same argument would later be used by twentieth century process or neoclassical theists to reject the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. See for example Dombrowski 2016, 56–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See Prémontval 1757, II: 64 (Strickland 2020, 328). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. This is part of the subtitle of Prémontval 1754b. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Prémontval 1757, II: 47–9 (Strickland 2020, 326). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See Prémontval to Francois Thomas Marie de Baculard d’Arnauld, February 21, 1755, unpublished letter held by the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Darmstädter Collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Prémontval 1754c, 148 (2018, 60). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See Prémontval 1749, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. For example, one reviewer of Prémontval’s *Vues Philosophiques* (namely, Anon 1757, 36–7) complained that “The Christianity the author professes is very different from the Christianity Jesus Christ established. His writings offer us only a mangled Christianity, less suited to feature in the School of Jesus Christ than in an Academy of philosophers; in wanting to ease our faith, he continually upsets it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See, for example, the discussion in Passmore 2000 and the texts in Hourcade, Morel and Yuva 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. For example, Prémontval 1757, II: 398/2018, 184: “he is the creator of the world only in the sense that he is the creator of the order, the perfection, and the good, of an infinite good, toward which he leads every being by the fastest progress possible.” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. See Prémontval 1757, II: 209 (2018, 236). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See Prémontval 1754c, 14 (2018, 18); 1754c, 31–2 (2018, 23). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. For Christian utopianism, see Manuel and Manuel 1979, 205–410; for Joachim, see Passmore 2000, 332–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Calvin 2006, I, 601 (III.iii.9): “this restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh.” [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See Wolff 1738, 293–4, §374. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See Boirac 1892, 391–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See Bouiller 1854, 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See Prémontval 2018, xxvi–xxvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. I would like to thank Christian Leduc and Tinca Prunea for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper, and Julia Weckend for her kind assistance with some of the translated passages. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)