

Editorial: Essays in Honour of Dean Zimmerman

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L'homme fait de la métaphysique comme il respire

E. Meyerson

It is a great pleasure for the editors of *TheoLogica* to present this special issue in honour of Dean Zimmerman. Dean Zimmerman's work in metaphysics has had a profound impact on discussions of analytic theology and the philosophy of religion over the last three decades. Few contemporary philosophers have done as much to bring analytic rigour into conversation with traditional theological concerns, or to frame metaphysical inquiry in ways that illuminate doctrines long central in the Christian intellectual tradition.

Dean Zimmerman completed his dissertation at Brown University, titled *Could Extended Objects be Made Out of Simple Parts?*, under the supervision of Roderick M. Chisholm. He went on to teach at the University of Notre Dame and Syracuse University, and has spent the majority of his career at Rutgers University, where he became a pillar of the department.

As the keyboardist of *Jigs and the Pigs*, he brought not only musical talent but also a creative spirit to the renewal of contemporary metaphysics. In 1996, he

founded *Metaphysical Mayhem*, a biennial *jamboree* of metaphysicians. This remarkable event became a space where some of the most distinguished philosophers shared their time and ideas—K. Fine, D. Lewis, E. Sosa, K. Bennett, J. Hawthorne, B. Leftow, M. Loux, W. Hasker, P. van Inwagen, L. Paul, T. Merricks, M. Rea, T. Sider, S. Yablo, D. Chalmers, T. Gendler, A. Plantinga, M. Johnston, T. Williamson, and many others. The list is so extensive that it would be impossible to honour all those who have been immersed in these metaphysical discussions.

Together with Michael Rota, Dean Zimmerman co-organized the *St. Thomas Summer Seminars in Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology*, further fostering rigorous dialogue at the intersection of philosophy and theology.

He also founded the Rutgers Center for the Philosophy of Religion, which hosts the *RATS (Rutgers Analytic Theology Seminar)*, the Sanders Lectures, and numerous outstanding conferences—*Pax et Bonum: A Workshop in Honor of Marilyn McCord Adams* and *A Philosophical Conference in Honor of Peter van Inwagen's 80th Birthday*, among others.

Zimmerman is the administrator of *The Sanders Prize in Metaphysics* and *The Sanders Prize in Philosophy of Religion*. He was the founding editor of *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, now co-edited with Karen Bennett. As of 2025, the series has published 14 volumes. He has also co-edited several influential volumes on metaphysics: *Metaphysics: The Big Questions* (with P. van Inwagen, 1998), *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (with M. J. Loux, 2003), “*Personal Identity*” issue of *The Monist* (with T. Gendler, 2004), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics* (with T. Sider and J. Hawthorne, 2008), *Persons: Human and Divine* (with P. van Inwagen, 2007), *God in an Open Universe* (with W. Hasker and T. J. Oord, 2011), and (with L. Buchak) the most recent volumes of *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* (2019, 2022, 2025).

This issue offers a deep and wide-ranging exploration of some of the most enduring metaphysical questions—the nature of God, the nature of human persons—through the prism of Dean Zimmerman’s influential work. His thought has served as both a foundation and a provocation for contemporary discussions in metaphysics and philosophical theology. The essays gathered here reflect this dual role: they critically engage with Zimmerman’s views, propose alternative frameworks, and pursue broader inquiries. These contributions can be categorized according to two central interests: on the one hand, the question of the nature and providence of God, and arguments for and against God’s existence, and on the other hand, the question of the nature of human persons and the possibility of their survival after death.

In the topic of God's attributes and providence, a major contribution of Dean Zimmerman was his objections against the Molinist model of Providence, and his defence of the alternative model of Open Theism.

Michael Bergmann, in his paper "Modest Molinism: An Explanation and Defense," presents a new version of Molinism (Modest Molinism) and shows how a Modest Molinist could respond to Zimmerman's objection. Daniel Rubio, on the contrary, doubles down on the anti-Molinist argument, and offers "Still Another Anti-Molinist Argument," which happens to be in the same family of arguments as Zimmerman's objection.

Two papers join Zimmerman in his defence of Open Theism. Ryan Mullins, in "Open Theism and Perfect Rationality: An Examination of Dean Zimmerman's Views on God, Time, and Creation," discusses the details of Zimmerman's version of Open Theism and proposes some refinements. William Hasker, on the other hand, argues that Zimmerman, in his version of Open Theism (and what he says about "simple foreknowledge") has made a concession to the Molinist that he shouldn't have made. His paper is titled "Et Tu, Zimmerman? Is Foreknowledge Useful After All?"

Samuel Lebens' paper also deals with God's attributes, more precisely with God's Omnipotence: "Omnipotence – Dean Zimmerman, Negative Nelly, and the Divine Delegates". Lebens and Goldschmidt have defended an argument from the existence of God to the truth of idealism. In the course of a searching examination of Zimmerman's account of the divine attribute of omnipotence, Lebens defends this Lebens-Goldschmidt argument against Zimmerman's criticisms.

Finally, two papers deal with arguments for or against God's existence. Peter van Inwagen, in his paper "Improbable Creations," addresses the No-Best-World Argument for atheism, starting (approvingly) from Zimmerman's response to the same argument and making some additions to this response. Joshua Rasmussen, on the other hand, offers a new argument *for* God's existence, in the family of arguments starting from the requisite of explaining existence; his paper is titled "Why Does Anything Exist? In Search of the Best Possible Answer".

The second group of papers address Zimmerman's game-changing contributions to the questions of the nature of human beings (especially his discussions of Dualism), and the possibility of their survival after death (even under the assumption of Materialism).

Three papers discuss Zimmerman's defence of Dualism (and arguments against Materialism). Timothy Pawl, in "Scholastic Hylomorphism and Dean Zimmerman," endorses Zimmerman's main arguments for Dualism (and against Materialism) but shows that these arguments can be brought in defence of Hylomorphic Dualism – a variant of Dualism that Zimmerman rejects. David

Hershenov argues that one of Zimmerman's favourite arguments against Materialism (the problem of too many thinkers) backfires against *his own* version of Dualism, namely Emergent Dualism; his paper is titled "A Divine Alternative to Zimmerman's Emergent Dualism". Finally, Eric Olson discusses another anti-Materialist argument defended by Zimmerman, namely "The Problem of People and Their Matter," and shows how a Materialist can respond to it.

Two papers address Zimmerman's famous defence that, even under the assumption of Materialism, post-mortem survival is possible for human beings. Harriet Baber, in "Personal Persistence and Post-Mortem Survival," argues that Zimmerman's model of materialist survival (the Falling Elevator model) cannot plausibly be true under (Zimmerman's own) assumption of endurantism: she argues that the best model of Materialist survival would involve exdurantism (the "stage theory" of personal identity). Yann Schmitt, on the other hand, argues that Zimmerman is too optimistic when he states that post-mortem survival is possible "on almost every account of the nature of human persons that has any plausibility": on the contrary, Schmitt's paper, titled "Not Everyone Will Get Out Alive: On Dean Zimmerman's 'Personal Identity and the Survival of Death'," argues that the possibility of survival cannot easily and plausibly generalize to *all* human beings.

Finally, Mark Johnston's paper, "Surviving Death, Again," addresses both Zimmerman's Emergent Dualism and his model of post-mortem resurrection: against Emergent Dualism, Johnston defends and develops an alternative model of neo-Aristotelian non-reductionism, which is proposed as being also a better model of post-mortem survival.

Together, these essays mark not only a sustained dialogue with Zimmerman's contributions but also a forward-looking engagement with such diverse themes as embodiment, personal identity, freedom, or divine agency. They affirm that the metaphysical and theological stakes remain as vital as ever—and that the discussions generated by Dean Zimmerman's work have helped to shape them in decisive ways.

We dedicate this issue with admiration and gratitude to Dean Zimmerman. It is a testament to the enduring vitality of the questions he has raised—and the intellectual community he has helped to foster—that so many distinguished philosophers continue to engage with his work with such care, creativity, and admiration.

"Watch this space!" Zimmerman's response to these essays will come soon!