

RESEARCH STATEMENT

Steven DeLay

Ambrose College, Woolf University
Old Member, Christ Church, University of Oxford

Since finishing my doctoral work at Oxford in 2017, I have published two monographs, *Before God: Exercises in Subjectivity* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2020) and *Phenomenology in France: A Philosophical and Theological Introduction* (Routledge, 2019). *Phenomenology in France* has established itself as the definitive introduction to the “theological turn” in contemporary phenomenology. I followed it up with the publication of the second monograph, which is a work of philosophical anthropology deconstructing oversimplistic divisions between theology and philosophy. German philosophical figures and traditions feature prominently throughout the text, including the first chapter on Heidegger and a key chapter toward the book’s conclusion on Nietzsche. With the publication of these books as well as many articles, chapters, and reviews, my work has become well-known in the phenomenological world. I am now aiming to reach an even wider philosophical audience. I try to write work that transcends the analytic-continental divide, and that is relatively accessible to general readers. The new book I aim to write, *Conscience: A Philosophical History*, will show how the programs of German Enlightenment and Idealism and phenomenology, as well as Nietzsche and Freud, contributed crucially to the formation of the concept of conscience, and how the revisionist understanding of conscience—as represented by Marx’s, Nietzsche’s, and Freud’s “school of suspicion” —to which the book will respond came to be.

My most recent book, *Before God: Exercises in Subjectivity* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), has received endorsements from senior figures at the University of Cambridge and Furman University, including the following from Jean-Yves Lacoste, “The preposition ‘before’, *coram* in the Latin, has had a distinguished intellectual history since Luther discovered its importance in Jerome’s translation of the Bible. Steven DeLay comes after many theologians and philosophers who have described what man is ‘before God’ — and who have done so because they found it fruitless to speak of man as he ‘is,’ substantially and before all relation. This clear and precise book summarizes a long episode. An original contribution to philosophy, it also brings noteworthy precisions.” In another endorsement, J. Aaron Simmons at Furman University has said, “Henry David Thoreau once wrote that ‘there are nowadays professors of philosophy, but no philosophers.’ ... Steven DeLay is a striking and exciting counter to this trend. In the very best sense of the term: DeLay is a *philosopher* in that he is devoted to a life in which he sees his task as in line with Thoreau’s description: ‘to love wisdom and to live according to its dictates.’ ... Far from simply being a book ‘about’ philosophers and theologians, *Before God* itself stands as an ‘exercise’ in thinking and living well.” A book symposium will be dedicated to it at *Syndicate*. *Before God* was anticipated in the phenomenology community, as it is my first research monograph following on *Phenomenology in France*. Drawing on the history of philosophy in order to deconstruct traditional divisions between theology and philosophy in the name of a phenomenological approach that describes the contours of lived existence, *Before God*

is a significant addition to my academic profile. It showed that my work is relevant to philosophers and theologians working in many traditions and specialties.

My first book, *Phenomenology in France: A Philosophical and Theological Introduction* (Routledge, 2019), received international attention, with endorsements and positive reviews from many figures in Paris and beyond. Claudio Tarditi at the University of Turin in his review wrote, “[I]n DeLay’s book there is much more than what can be summarized in a review ... it develops a fundamental argument about the fruitfulness of a radical reassessment of the relation between philosophy and theology for the phenomenological reflection that is still to come.” The editors at *Phenomenological Reviews* then selected the book to inaugurate a new series at the journal wherein authors respond to their reviewers. It was also selected for review in the inaugural issue of the *Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion*, where the reviewer William L. Connelly said, “In treating these authors and these subjects DeLay provides clear relief of the established phenomenological tradition coming from Husserl and Heidegger, thereby granting the text a remarkable unity despite covering such a wide range of distinct figures and topics ... DeLay’s text balances two competing aims, the first in addressing the need for more commentary on those figures most productively interrogating the legacy of Heidegger and Husserl, and secondly, to introduce the texts in their own terms, and in their own styles, so that readers can enter into their own distinctive world ... In total, we find a noteworthy contribution on two fronts: a compellingly clear account of intellectual history, and a unique contribution to the ongoing work of phenomenology itself.” Despite disagreeing philosophically with the material introduced in the text, respected figures as François Raffoul have recognized the book’s scholarly importance: “[T]he book is a well-written and provocative work, which makes for a lively reading and which gives much to think.”

The monograph received endorsements from preeminent figures in the field. For instance, Claude Romano at the Sorbonne has said, “Steven DeLay offers a very careful and complete overview of French phenomenology from the 1980s to the present. He shows that - far from being concerned only with parochial issues - this phenomenology is an original and valuable contribution to philosophy in general.” Jean-Yves Lacoste has said, “Steven DeLay is the heir of a long and distinguished history, and he lives in an academic world where many distinguished scholars have been influenced by their French colleagues. His book was well needed: after many original contributions to phenomenology in the wake of the French reception of Husserl and Heidegger, there was room left for a comprehensive introduction to French figures who have done something to keep phenomenology alive and creative. DeLay has provided Anglophone readers with such an introduction. He has done it thoroughly. And his is the work of a historian of philosophy who is also a promising philosopher in his own right.” Finally, in his endorsement of the book, Emmanuel Falque wrote that it “must be put in all hands, not only for what it gives to understand, but also for what it gives to think. Every philosophy has a present and a future, and it is all the merit of this introduction to really demonstrate it.” *Phenomenology in France* has become the definitive introduction to the “theological turn” in phenomenology. It also laid the basis for my second monograph, which in its first chapter critically assesses Heidegger’s understanding of the relation between theology and philosophy.

A 2020 article, “Being Oneself: Self-Consciousness in Husserl and Henry,” is due in a special issue on Husserl in *Philosophy Kitchen*. It will also appear in translation in *Sabah Ülkesi*, a Turkish culture magazine in Germany that has published contributions from Hans Belting, Peter Burke, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, William Chittick, Graham Harman, Peter Adamson, Frank Griffel, François Raffoul, Catherine Malabou, Rémi Brague, Françoise Dastur, Graham Priest, Daniel Heller-Roazen, John Milbank, Terry Pinkard, Jean Grondin, Nader al-Bizri, Rudiger Safranski, Abdelfattah Kilito, Markus Gabriel, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Carlo Ginzburg, Jacob Rogozinski, Renaud Barbaras, Michael Taussig, and Donatella Di Cesare. The article provides an accessible overview of the phenomenological tradition’s handling of the question of self-consciousness starting with Jean-Paul Sartre and the subsequent dispute between Michel Henry and Edmund Husserl. In so doing, I show that Dan Zahavi’s reading of Henry’s objection to Husserl, while correct so far as it goes, does not address the deepest source of disagreement between Henry and Husserl. Accessible to a wide audience, including both specialists (as in the *Philosophy Kitchen* Husserl special issue) and general readers (as in the *Sabah Ülkesi* consciousness issue), this piece is characteristic of my work’s style.

A 2019 article, “The Vanity of Authenticity,” published in *Sophia* originated from doctoral material I wrote while at Oxford. It brings the work of Jean-Luc Marion into direct dialogue with the Anglophone secondary literature on Husserl and Heidegger, showing how scholars working on both French and German figures have common philosophical ground that remains to be explored.

Currently, I am editing a philosophical volume on the work of American film director Terrence Malick. With over forty international contributors working from a variety of intellectual perspectives, *Life above the Clouds: Philosophy in the Films of Terrence Malick* will be an excellent resource for students and scholars in aesthetics, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, philosophy of film, phenomenology, and existentialism. It will also be useful to those in related fields such as theology, film studies, art criticism, and cultural studies.