

## RESEARCH STATEMENT

### Steven DeLay

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Since completing my doctoral studies at Oxford in 2017, I have completed four monographs: *Faint Not: Twelve Brief Meditations on the Word of God* (Wipf & Stock, 2022), *In the Spirit: A Phenomenology of Faith* (John Hunt Publishing, 2021), *Before God: Exercises in Subjectivity* (Rowman & 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 with the publication of *Before God*, which is a work of Christian existentialism deconstructing oversimplistic divisions between theology and philosophy, and that articulates a comprehensive view of human existence. While the first book focused on French thinkers exclusively, German philosophical figures and traditions (among others) feature prominently throughout *Before God*. The first chapter, for instance, challenges Heidegger’s distinction between philosophy and theology, and the work’s penultimate chapter turns to Nietzsche, arguing against him that it is in fact possible to affirm suffering without recourse to lies. I am also the editor of *Life above the Clouds: Philosophy in the Films of Terrence Malick* (SUNY, 2022), and the editor of *Finding Meaning: Philosophy in Crisis* (Wipf & Stock, 2023), a volume based on the collection of online essays, “Finding Meaning,” published at Mr Richard Marshall’s *3:16 AM*. Mr Marshall is known for his long-standing philosophy interview series that has interviewed hundreds of leading philosophers across the world. Mr Marshall’s commissioning me to edit the series was an extraordinary honor—there is only one other series like it, “Flickering Shadows: Truth in 16mm,” Prof Huw Price’s series analyzing a 1973 conversation between the Oxford philosophers P.F. Strawson and Gareth Evans. With the publication of these books and edited volumes along with many articles, chapters, and reviews, I am at the moment probably the most prolific phenomenological philosopher working in the world in English.

*Before God* has been endorsed by senior figures at the University of Cambridge and Furman University. Jean-Yves Lacoste has said,

“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 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.”

In his review in *Phenomenological Reviews*, Walter Hopp has said,

“DeLay certainly has a ‘zeal for wisdom’, and his book is, ultimately, about how to identify and obtain the ‘supreme good’. The short answer lies in the title: we should live our lives ‘before God’. The long answer can only be acquired by reading the book. For what DeLay offers is a series of powerfully written and insightful reflections on what a life lived before God looks like for the one who lives it [...] It is a work of immense wisdom, compelling arguments, and rich phenomenological descriptions. It is, finally, a refreshing reminder of what draws most of us to philosophy in the first place: to grapple with ultimate questions of human existence, with clarity of thought and expression, and without methodological evasions.”

In his review in *New Blackfriars*, John D. O’Connor has said,

“*Before God* is a richly insightful, frequently opinionated, and sometimes idiosyncratic book well worth the effort. This is philosophically-inspired discussion at the service of spiritual growth, enrichment, and conversion. It is a book I recommend and will very happily return to.”

*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. While *Phenomenology in France* at this point is better known, I think *Before God* will ultimately prove to be the more important of the two. It is the work where I develop a view of my own, and philosophize freely, whereas the first book was largely exegetical. A paperback is due out in 2021.

*Phenomenology in France* has received international attention. Claudio Tarditi 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 eminent phenomenologists in Paris. 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 set the conceptual itinerary for my second monograph, which begins with a critical assessment of Heidegger’s understanding of the relation between theology and philosophy. If I try to produce work that is creative and original, that is because writing

*Phenomenology in France* was a formative experience in my life as a scholar. I wrote the book without any academic appointment or any institutional funding. It was simply a labor of love. In writing it, I came to embrace the meaning of philosophy as a way of life, and it is a book that I think has earned the respect of the thinkers in France whom it covers. Being entrusted to write it was a great honor, and something that taught me to be judicious and sensitive when reading the work of others. Currently, it is being translated into Turkish and Chinese.

I am now aiming to reach a wider philosophical audience, with work that is accessible to general readers. To that end, my third monograph, *In the Spirit* articulates an existence of faith in Christ. With attention to the Bible and works of art (Caravaggio, Doré, Pissarro, Poussin, Rembrandt, and Rodin), it explores the depths of the human experience, offering a descriptive account of our personal encounter with God. A contribution to the longstanding tradition of edifying Christian works, it extols the glory of being human in light of God's word.

Ryan S. Kemp has said,

“As much a work of philosophy and theology as art-criticism, *In the Spirit* invites the reader into an exercise of searing attention, where pressing topics of life and faith are considered with a sophistication, creativity, and seriousness that is truly invigorating. DeLay's unique voice and uncompromising vision herald an author who looks to make an original and lasting impact on discussions of religion and spirituality. This beautiful book is an awakening.”

*Publishers Weekly* has said,

“This dense treatise by DeLay puts scripture in conversation with classic works of art to address fundamental questions of faith and existence. DeLay's interpretations of works by such artists as Doré, Pissarro, Poussin, and Rodin are original and insightful. This dynamic volume will make a thought-provoking addition to scholarly collections.”

Sarah Pawlett-Jackson in *Phenomenological Reviews* has said,

There is a particular journey that *In the Spirit* hopes to take its reader on: starting in darkness, with the soul asleep, journeying through resistance to conversion to a life renewed, the book ends with a vision of perfection and the pattern of a divinely ordered life. This text is accessible to the engaged and interested reader of any stripe – no previous expertise in philosophy is needed. DeLay's unironic frontal delivery which, in a philosophical landscape typically concerned with caveats and an obsession with narrowing the scope of a set of claims, is refreshing.”

Further developing the phenomenology of faith begun in *In the Spirit*, *Faint Not* articulates how the existence lived before God—one of hope, faith, and love—is the life which transfigures temporality in light of eternity, the life, in short, which accordingly perseveres to the end, to that of eternal life. It will appear this year with Wipf & Stock.

Of *Faint Not*, Jean-Yves Lacoste has said,

“Already a noted historian of philosophy, Steven DeLay is enough of a Kierkegaardian to publish genuinely ‘edifying’ texts. This is an achievement many readers will notice and praise. I am proud to have been one of the first to read *Faint Not* and enjoy it. I am some sort of a Kierkegaardian myself!”

George Pattison has said,

“Steven DeLay is an unapologetic exponent of the theological turn in phenomenology, but here he writes in more direct layman’s terms about how the contradictions and frustrations of the human condition point us towards the life of faith. These twelve meditations show how the promise of eternal life provides a basis on which to affirm the value, dignity, and meaning of human life.”

The next academic monograph I will be writing, *Synergy: A Deconstruction of the Myth of Original Sin*, will provide a critical analysis of the Augustinian inheritance of theology and philosophy.

*Synergy* will provide the theological background for a related work, *Conscience: A Philosophical History*, that 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” —came to be.

A 2021 article that explores the spiritual senses vis-à-vis Heidegger and Locke, “The Heart Senses,” appeared in translation in Issue 66 of *Sabah Ülkəsi*, a Turkish culture magazine published 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, Donatella Di Cesare, and Richard Kearney, and Dan Zahavi.

A 2020 article, “Being Oneself: Self-Consciousness in Husserl and Henry,” appeared in a special issue on Husserl in *Philosophy Kitchen*. It also has appeared in Issue 63 of *Sabah Ülkəsi*. 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—the problem is how to interpret the facticity of consciousness. Henry takes things in an explicitly theological direction, whereas in the texts under consideration, Husserl does not (though I know he makes room for God in some of his later manuscripts). Accessible to a wide audience, including both specialists (as in the *Philosophy Kitchen* Husserl special issue) and general readers (as in the *Sabah Ülkəsi* consciousness issue), this piece is characteristic of my work’s style. The fact that the editor

commissioned the translation and readers of the publication know of my work was for me as a writer a significant milestone: I write purely for the love of writing and the hope that readers will take something of value from the work, so it was encouraging to know that my work has been reaching people.

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. To me, this piece is important from an institutional perspective, because I think it shows a way forward beyond the traditional territory wars marking international phenomenology research. My hope is that those who read it will be led to move forward in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation, rather than defensiveness and hostility. There are signs that will be the case. A response paper by Matthew Kruger entitled “Heidegger, Marion, and the theological turn: ‘The Vanity of Authenticity’ and the answer to nihilism” appeared in *Sophia*. This new paper is an indication that a new area of phenomenological debate in the secondary literature is opening.

I am editing a philosophical volume on the work of American film director Terrence Malick. With twenty contributors, *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. I have never written on the philosophy of film, so this is new territory for me, but I love learning new things, and so this project is one I am finding exhilarating, and something that is stirring me to learn as much as possible and to expand my intellectual horizons. It is slated to appear with SUNY in February 2023.

Iain Thomson has said,

“After Hitchcock, the ‘Hollywood auteur’ long seemed oxymoronic. What allowed Terrence Malick to break through? Not his renowned genius for casting, nor even his unrivaled cinematography (which blurs the Kantian line between beauty and sublimity), but rather, in a word, his philosophy. As these essays so compellingly illuminate, Malick uses film to philosophize; his films are philosophy carried out in another medium; indeed, he is the filmic philosopher par excellence. Others are now catching up (the later Sheridan, the Smith brothers, Hawley at his deepest), but Malick opened the field and set the terms with which the greatest Hollywood auteurs continue to negotiate. To understand why, and how, start by reading this book.”

Daniel R. Morgan has said,

“Life Above the Clouds is a rare collection: a series of essays about a filmmaker that are resolutely philosophical yet never lose sight of the intricacies, pleasures, and appeals of the films themselves. The essays range across Malick's career, providing original interpretations of his

films while shining light on the way broader philosophical and spiritual preoccupations are deployed in and through this original and unique body of work.”

Leo Zonn has said,

“This is an exceptionally rich, creative, and intriguing study of Malick and his imprint on the world of filmmaking that provides a unique philosophical lens through which such iconic filmmakers can be viewed. Each essay is a unique and well-crafted contribution to a collective whole that reflects the vision of a young and vibrant scholar who adds a much needed and pioneering voice to film studies. In short, *Life Above the Clouds* is a gem that deserves a prominent place in the contemporary dialogues that lie at the intersection of philosophy, film, the auteur, and the many surrounding forces.”

And John Caruana has said,

“This strong collection engages the spiritual, even mystical, elements of Malick's profoundly moving cinema. In their own distinct ways, these chapters bring a fresh new perspective to our understanding of one of the world's most important living filmmakers.”

Last year, I finished editing an online series at Richard Marshall's *3:16 AM*. Entitled “Finding Meaning,” the series commissioned contributors working from a variety of perspectives to reflect on what the philosophical life means to them personally. In doing so, they not only account for what personally led them to philosophy, but what philosophy itself has become today in the wake of “the death of God,” the age of nihilism. A print volume titled *Finding Meaning: Philosophy in Crisis* will be appearing with Wipf & Stock in 2023.

A paper drawing on Karl Jaspers entitled “Being True” has appeared in a special issue at *Religions* on the difference between spirituality and religion. I've also completed work on a number of other articles and essays due to appear. First, “Methodological Atheism Considered,” a piece which addresses popular objections to the so-called “theological turn,” is under consideration at the *Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion*. Second, a paper entitled “Lacoste on Appearing and Reduction” for a volume on the work of Jean-Yves Lacoste. Third, a paper entitled “The Word's Inexhaustibility: Jean-Louis Chrétien's *De La Fatigue*” for a volume on the work of Jean-Louis Chrétien. And finally, an essay called “Waiting on Love” for a volume on the phenomenology of love.

A three-volume novel titled *Everything* appeared in June of 2022 with Wipf & Stock. It is a work of Christian existentialism. It takes as its point of departure the recognition that thinkers such as Sartre and Camus held that existence is absurd, that consequently meaning is forged through the individual who must create it, a Promethean doctrine of reality which today has come to exercise a grip on us so firmly that we barely notice it, much less ever think to seriously question it. To be sure, the world is absurd. But existence as such? The novel tells the story of a knight of faith's quest for meaning. In his resulting voyage from the suburbs of Texas to the secret societies of Oxford, he encounters the ineluctable claim of eternity on the everyday. Part fairy tale, noir

mystery, psychological thriller, and essay in existential philosophy, *Everything* shows how only love, both human and divine, renders existence intelligibly true.

Of the novel, Matthew Clemente has said,

“Philosophy might be best described as the attempt to say something about everything. Yet the more abstract and systematic one’s philosophy is, the less it says about anything real. Recognizing that the only way to speak truth is to say something about someone, Steven DeLay has given us a book as profound as it is engaging. *Everything* is that rare kind of work that shows us what’s essential by showing us what’s personal. A tremendous achievement, this work will be read for years to come.”

And Jean-Luc Beauchard has said,

“There is no greater compliment one can give a work of fiction than to say that its author has created a world one would like to visit. DeLay has done something more than that. In depicting an individual character’s search for meaning in the face of a world that often appears cruel and chaotic, he has taken up Camus’s challenge to present philosophy in images and expanded upon it, showing us our world with all of its absurdity and grace.”

More about the novel can be found here at the Christ Church, Oxford website:

<https://chchconnections.org/news/alumni/76/76-Steven-DeLay-2013-Everything>

Currently, I am working on a novella titled *Elijah Newman Died Today*. The plot is simple. Elijah Newman is a man who thinks he is returning home to his wife from a trip when, like an Ivan Ilyich, he instead finds himself unexpectedly thrust before death. Wonder over what might have been, gratitude for all that was, hope for what could perhaps still be, and love of both God and existence—*Elijah Newman Died Today* is an existentialist account of one man’s thoughts on what matters amid what may be his life’s final moments. The novella will be appearing with Wipf & Stock in 2023.

Recently, I did a lecture on Michel Henry for Rev. Tim Hull’s *Timeline: Faith and Philosophy* Youtube series, as well as a two-part lecture, “Phenomenology and the Theological Turn.” A print version of that second two-part lecture entitled “Methodological Atheism Considered” is slated to appear in *Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion*.

Finally, in August of 2022, I will be convening the Woolf University Post-Kantian Philosophy Seminar, which will meet monthly online. Information about upcoming talks at the seminar can be found here: <https://lu.ma/Woolf>