

Draft Wikipedia entry (July 12, 2026)

## Steven DeLay



Steven DeLay (left), photo by Tim Hull

Steven Donald DeLay

**Born** May 13, 1986 (age 40)

Mountain View, California, U.S.

**Education** University of Oxford (DPhil, 2017)

**Thesis** *[Phenomenology and the Self's Measure: Studies in Subjectivity](#)* (2017)

**Doctoral advisor** [A.W. Moore](#) and [Steven G. Crowell](#)

### Philosophical work

**Era** [Contemporary philosophy](#)

**Region** [Western philosophy](#)

**School** [Phenomenology](#)

**Institutions** [Global Center for Advanced Studies \(GCAS\)](#)

**Website** <https://stevendelay.com/>

**Steven Donald DeLay** (/ˈstivən ˈdənəld diːleɪ/; born May 13, 1986<sup>[?]</sup>) is an American philosopher and writer who is an Old Member of [Christ Church, University of Oxford](#) and a fellow and tutor at Woolf University and the [Global Center for Advanced Studies \(GCAS\)](#). He is an international figure in phenomenological philosophy and existential philosophy. DeLay is featured in

conversation with [Jean-Luc Marion](#) of the [Académie Française](#) in a three-part discussion, “[Phenomenology and Revelation: Jean-Luc Marion and Steven DeLay in Conversation](#),” on Tim Hull’s [Theological Timeline Videos project](#). The interview was conducted at the [Institut de France](#) on December 12, 2025.

### **Early life, education and career**

Steven (Donald) DeLay was born in [Mountain View, California](#) in 1986, and was raised in the town of [Willow Glen](#) in [San Jose, California](#). He graduated from [Pioneer High School](#) in 2005. At Pioneer, he competed in cross-country and track, with a focus on the 1600m. He set what at the time was the school record in the 1600m, with a personal record of 4:22:5 at the 2004 [Arcadia Invitational](#), and was the [2004 Blossom Valley Athletic League 1600m champion](#) with a time of 4:28:3. He received a BA in philosophy and political science at [California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo](#) in 2010. While at Cal Poly, DeLay was introduced to phenomenological philosophy by his teacher, the Heidegger scholar Joseph K. Schear, who had just completed his doctoral work under the direction of [John Haugeland](#) and [Robert B. Pippin](#) at the [University of Chicago](#). In 2008, DeLay helped Schear with the paper, “[Experience and Self-Consciousness](#),” which Schear later presented at a 2008 Pacific American Philosophical Association author-meets-critic session with [Dan Zahavi](#). In the paper’s Acknowledgments, DeLay is credited for his comments and reactions to the paper along with [Hubert Dreyfus](#) and Zahavi. Under the direction of his senior advisor Kenneth Brown, DeLay completed a senior thesis, “Investigating Consciousness from the First-Person Perspective,” which in 2009 won the [department’s annual student essay prize](#). In 2013, he received an MA in philosophy from [Rice University](#) where he deepened his study in phenomenology with the American analytic philosopher of mind [Charles P. Siewert](#) and the American Husserl and Heidegger scholar [Steven G. Crowell](#). He then pursued a DPhil in philosophy from the [University of Oxford](#) beginning in 2013 while at Christ Church. He was initially supervised by Schear, but when his interests in phenomenology shifted from [Martin Heidegger](#) to French phenomenology, he changed supervisors to [A.W. Moore](#) and Crowell, completing a dissertation that drew heavily on [Søren Kierkegaard](#), [Michel Henry](#), and Marion. While at “the House” (the term reserved for the college by those who are members), he was an American Friends of Christ Church scholar.

In 2018, he taught philosophy at [Wake Forest University](#) where he served as a post-doc. Since 2019, he has been a Tutorial Fellow at Woolf University. Since 2022, he has served as a Research Fellow at GCAS.

### **Philosophical and literary work**

DeLay’s philosophy challenges the methodological atheism dominant in phenomenology since Heidegger, advocating instead for a phenomenological approach open to faith, revelation, and

the experience of existing *coram Deo* (before God). Influenced heavily by Kierkegaard (who prompted his [Christian conversion](#)), [Fyodor Dostoevsky](#), and French phenomenologists such as [Emmanuel Levinas](#), [Jean-Louis Chrétien](#), Michel Henry, [Jean-Yves Lacoste](#), and Jean-Luc Marion, he explores subjectivity, selfhood, intersubjectivity, and the human condition in light of divine givenness, responsibility, and the *imago Dei*. His first major non-exegetical work, *Before God*, published in 2020, received [a review](#) from the head of Blackfriars, Oxford, John D. O'Connor, in [New Blackfriars](#), highlighting the work's originality and provocativeness.

DeLay's main interests include [phenomenology](#), [existentialism](#), and the phenomenology of [religion](#), but he is best known in popular culture for his philosophical work on the American film director [Terrence Malick](#). In 2023, in an episode entitled "[Steven DeLay Goes Above the Clouds](#)," DeLay appeared as a guest on the film critic and author John Bleasdale's *Writers on Film* to discuss his [scholarship on Malick](#). In 2024, Bleasdale published [The Magic Hours: The Films and Hidden Life of Terrence Malick](#), the first official biography of Malick. Bleasdale consulted DeLay for guidance on Malick's philosophical relationship to Heidegger, DeLay reviewed the manuscript for the press, and he was thanked in the biography's Acknowledgments. In 2024, [an interview](#) DeLay gave on Malick also appeared in the Turkish-language European art and cultural magazine *Sabah Ülkesi*.

DeLay has also contributed to public philosophy. After *Phenomenology in France*'s having received a [critical review](#) in Notre Dame Philosophical Review (NDPR), DeLay gave an interview in response to objections against the "theological turn" titled "[Is Phenomenology in France Theology or Philosophy?](#)" at Richard Marshall's 3:16. In 2020, Marshall then commissioned DeLay to curate an online series of essays, "[Finding Meaning](#)," on nihilism, featuring contributions from prominent philosophers including [Ken Gemes](#), [Simon Glendinning](#), and [Paul Moser](#), among others. In 2023, the series was published in an expanded and revised form as a print volume, [Finding Meaning: Essays on Philosophy, Nihilism, and the Death of God](#), and [was reviewed](#) in [The Philosophical Quarterly](#). In addition to his books, essays, articles, reviews, and edited volumes, DeLay has also appeared on [numerous podcasts](#) for interviews on philosophy, theology, literature, and film.

In 2022, DeLay was interviewed for the [BBC](#)-syndicated Stories of our Times (now The Story) series "[The Feud](#)." Hosted by [Sunday Times](#) journalist [Andrew Billen](#), the series' five episodes investigated the long-standing, much-publicized scandal surrounding the attempt of a [cabal of dons at Christ Church](#) to remove the college's dean [Martyn Percy](#). From 2017, the scandal had received sustained national coverage in [BBC](#), [Telegraph](#), [Guardian](#), and [Times](#). DeLay sided publicly with Percy, saying that Percy had always been supportive of DeLay during his own time studying at the college, and that the dons who were targeting Percy had no basis for a campaign

against Percy that eventually was [sactioned by the Charity Commission](#) and led to a college [Governance Review](#).

That same year, his book *In the Spirit* received a [favorable review](#) in [Publishers Weekly](#). This rare achievement for an academic philosopher signaled that his philosophical work had transcended the ivory tower and was reaching a wide public readership. The book is now currently forthcoming in Italian translation under the title *Nello Spirito: Una Fenomenologia della Fede* at Inschibboleth Edizioni. [The series](#) is managed by the Levinas family, and includes books by Emmanuel Levinas, daughter [Danielle Cohen-Levinas](#), as well as titles published by [Jean-François Courtine](#), Emmanuel Falque, [Jean-Luc Nancy](#), and Marion.

DeLay is the translator of Jean-Louis Chrétien's *Pour reprendre et perdre haleine* and Jean-Yves Lacoste's *Thèses sur le vrai*. He has stated publicly that both texts were given to him by their authors as gifts. DeLay maintained a letter correspondence with Chrétien in the very final years of the latter's life. The letters are now available in digital form at the Chrétien Archives in Caen, France.

Beyond his philosophical and translation work, DeLay, like earlier phenomenologists such as Henry and [Jean-Paul Sartre](#), and like earlier Oxonian philosophers such as [Iris Murdoch](#), is a novelist. His literary work is a contribution to his attempt to revive [Christian existentialism](#). A reviewer of *Anomie*, the first of DeLay's three-volume debut novel [Everything](#), has said that he "has taken up Camus's challenge to present philosophy in images and expanded upon it." In interviews, DeLay [has said](#) that his literary influences include [Albert Camus](#), Dostoevsky, [William Faulkner](#), [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#), [John Fowles](#), [Seichō Matsumoto](#), and [Marilynne Robinson](#). *Everything*, published in 2022, was inspired by his time in Oxford. That same year, he also published a novella, thematically-inspired by [Leo Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich](#), [Elijah Newman Died Today](#). In 2025, he published his third novel, [Lab Notes](#), which is indebted to Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. DeLay has explained his views about the relationship between philosophy and literature, giving a two-part lecture in 2024 at Tim Hull's Theological Timeline Video project titled "[Literature as Phenomenology: Marilynne Robinson and William Faulkner](#)."

According to Marion, DeLay is a "serious thinker," whose aphoristic style in *This Present World* displays "style, vision, and courage," and who should "be read as he has written: with care." According to Lacoste, he is "the heir of a long and distinguished history." According to Falque, his work "questions the future of philosophy itself." And according to Claude Romano, he has shown that "the lens of a 'theological turn' once popularized by [Dominique Janicaud](#) - while not being completely misguided - remains nevertheless very partial when accounting for the complexity and innovative power of *la nouvelle phénoménologie*." With the explicit endorsements of Marion, Lacoste, Falque, and Romano, DeLay has established himself as a leading voice contributing to the legacy of phenomenology as a living philosophy.

His work's influence is reflected in its growing international reception into foreign translation, including forthcoming translations of *Phenomenology in France* into Chinese and Romanian, *In the Spirit* into Italian and French, *Before God* and *Faint Not* into Spanish, *This Present World* into Romanian and Italian, and *Life Above the Clouds* into French.

At Woolf University, DeLay convenes the Post-Kantian Philosophy Seminar, a public series that has featured talks by Emmanuel Falque, A.W. Moore, [Robert Stern](#), [Simon Glendinning](#), and [Lee Braver](#), among others. [Kevin Hart](#) and [George Pattison](#) are currently slated as future speakers.

### Public activism

DeLay has been a longstanding public critic of elite academia's lack of sufficient response to the Epstein affair. In 2019 and 2020, he sent letters to the presidents of Harvard and MIT, detailing Epstein's [extensive connections](#) to university faculty, and demanding justice. He has given a number of [public interviews](#) on the subject, in which he criticizes the [culture of silence and apathy](#) among his academic colleagues [on the issue](#). In 2026, DeLay's name appeared in the [Epstein files](#), as the subject of internal FBI discussion pertaining to his criticism of the agency's handling of the Epstein investigation. The names of the FBI personnel in the file (EFTA00038124) are redacted, and the file remains the subject of an ongoing FOIA process, given that the redactions may violate the [Epstein Files Transparency Act](#). The American journalist [Michael Tracey](#) has [agreed to debate DeLay](#) on the significance of the Epstein files at a panel discussion in Oxford. DeLay has also invited [Tucker Carlson](#) and [James Orr](#), among others, to the discussion, but there is currently no set date for the panel.

### Personal life

DeLay is married to his wife, Gabriella, to whom he frequently dedicates his works. His parents, Donald and Paula, live in California. DeLay is the son-in-law of prominent atomic physicist [Randall Hulet](#). Despite sharing a surname, he is not related to former American Congressman [Tom DeLay](#).

### Books

- 2019 [Phenomenology in France](#) (Routledge)
- 2020 [Before God](#) (Bloomsbury)
- 2022 [In the Spirit](#) (Christian Alternative)
- 2022 [Faint Not](#) (Wipf & Stock)
- 2022 [Everything](#) (Wipf & Stock)
- 2022 [Elijah Newman Died Today](#) (Wipf & Stock)

- 2023 [\*Finding Meaning\*](#) (Wipf & Stock) - editor
  - 2023 [\*Life Above the Clouds\*](#) (SUNY Press) – editor
  - 2025 [\*Lab Notes\*](#) (independently published)
  - 2025 [\*This Present World\*](#) (Kalos)
  - 2026 *Hymns to Life* (Cascade) – editor with Steven Nemes
  - 2027 *The Sleep unto Death* (Kalos)
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- Personal [Homepage](#)