

Spring 2017

Interview of Cornelia Tsakiridou, Ph.D.

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Recommended Citation

Tsakiridou, Cornelia Ph.D. and Moser, Caitlin E., "Interview of Cornelia Tsakiridou, Ph.D." (2017). *All Oral Histories*. 109.
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FIELD NOTES

Interviewee: Dr. Cornelia Tsakiridou, Ph.D.

Interviewer: Caitlin E. Moser

Interview dates: The interviews were conducted over a span of five weeks, taking place on March 30th, April 11th, April 13th, April 20th, and concluding on April 27th, 2017.

Interview location: Dr. Tsakiridou's office, located in La Salle University's Philosophy department within Wister Hall, Room 223.

The Interviewee: Cornelia Tsakiridou was born in 1955 in Thessaloniki, Greece. She first came to the United States during high school, through an exchange program called Youth for Understanding. Upon graduating, she spent a year in England deciding what she wanted to do before enrolling at the American College of Greece where she completed her undergraduate work in three years. Dr. Tsakiridou originally began her graduate career at Villanova University in Philadelphia before transferring to Temple University where she obtained two Masters degrees in philosophy and history. She was offered a full scholarship from Georgetown University to complete her Ph.D. where she wrote her dissertation on Hegel's Aesthetics. After completing her Ph.D. in 1990, Dr. Tsakiridou spent one year teaching at Bucknell University before moving to La Salle University. She currently holds the rank of Professor of Philosophy at La Salle University and the director of the Diplomat-In-Residence Program (DRP). Her specialized interests include aesthetics and iconography, the philosophy of art, film, and photography, and social and political philosophies concerning topics such as nationalism, modernity, and radical ideologies. She teaches philosophy courses ranging from the required introductory courses to more advanced subjects, including metaphysics and the theoretical philosophies of photography

and film. She is well-published, having contributed to chapters in larger works, as well as an array of her own journal articles. Her most recent publication, in 2013, is her book, *Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity: Orthodox Theology and the Aesthetics of the Christian Image*, in which she features photographs of artworks taken by her personally.¹

The Interviewer: I, Caitlin Moser (b. 1990), was born and grew up in Pennsylvania, first in Schwenksville and now in Phoenixville. I completed my B.A. in History with a minor in Philosophy from La Salle University, Philadelphia in 2016. I am currently enrolled in La Salle University's 5-year M.A. program where I will earn my M.A. in Modern European History this upcoming May, 2017. I am currently a Key Leader at lululemon athletica at the King of Prussia mall. I hope to become an adjunct professor at Montgomery County Community College upon obtaining my M.A. while I search and apply to Ph.D. programs.²

Background: I first met Dr. Tsakiridou in the fall semester of 2015 when I took her Philosophy course, Metaphysics: of Evil (PHL 313). The following semester, I enrolled in her Philosophy of Art (PHL 265) course where we studied Hegel, her forte. During the spring semester of 2016, I, along with a few other fellow students, presented our learnings on "What is Evil?" in an Explorer Café event. Sharing a common interest in history, we created a relationship and kept in contact. During a conversation I had with Dr. Allen in the fall semester of 2016, we discussed the upcoming Oral History class and the importance of collecting more female accounts, at which time Dr. Allen mentioned that Dr. Tsakiridou would be an excellent candidate. At the start of

¹ Unable to procure the traditional biographical details of the narrator, this paragraph is taken from the student/interviewer, Caitlin Moser's, abstract found within the typed Field Notes required for this final project.

² This brief biography is taken from the practice interview conducted at the beginning of this course, HIS 650.

our class this semester, I began to pursue Dr. Tsakiridou out of admiration and genuine interest. I first reached out to Dr. Tsakiridou in an email on February 7th to ask whether she would be interested in being the subject of my Oral History interview and coursework. We began a conversation which went back and forth of her asking for more information, and of course in her inquisitive nature, *why* I specifically chose *her*. One week later, on February 14th, she agreed to participate, offering the topic of the immigrant experience for focus and discussion, given the current political atmosphere of the world.

On March 21st, I sent an email asking when we could meet. Due to her busy schedule, she originally asked to meet after Easter. I politely but adamantly told her that was too late of a date to begin this project. In an effort to appease her, I suggested one thirty-minute session to start with. She agreed, and we decided we would meet four times, for thirty-minute sessions each to reach the two-hour requirement. This schema ultimately turned into five sessions to accommodate final reflections and thoughts. Although I was eager to cater to her, this would prove to be a flaw in our interview as thirty minutes at a time did not allow for as much reflection as one would hope for in conducting an oral history. Still wanting to accommodate her schedule, I initially emailed her my questions for our first interview. When we met to conduct the interview, the first session was very rushed and I was panicking throughout it, not able to fully relax as I was constantly checking my watch. For the next four sessions, I did not send my questions in advance, essentially to surprise her, and give her time to reflect in person. Though there still was not adequate time to offer genuine reflection, the remaining four sessions conducted in this manner went much more smooth.

Description of the Interview(s): Each interview took place in Dr. Tsakiridou's office in the Philosophy department located within Wister Hall on La Salle University's campus. The

interviews were conducted in the afternoon before the start of her 3:30 class. For three of the interviews, I rushed to campus from my job in King of Prussia. Fortunately, I always made it to La Salle before 3:00, but it certainly added unnecessary stress. We made small talk prior to starting, perhaps in an effort to make the situation more comfortable, however, the small talk was always rushed to meet the time constraints.

I arrived to her office on Thursday, March 30th, rushed on the commute to campus from work. She was eating her lunch and responding to emails when I walked in and began setting up. She asked if she could continue eating while we talked, and I said yes, but as we soon began, she was unable to eat and simultaneously answer my questions. I closed the office door, though unaware it was still open and slight background noise can be heard in the first tape. I set my phone on the desk, closer to her with the speaker aimed at her as well. I began the interview, introducing us, describing our location, and obtaining consent. As mentioned earlier, she was responding rather rapidly to my questions. She also jumped around, touching on points to be asked in the upcoming questions, which was difficult to keep track of and note. We ended our first session and I thanked her, profusely, making sure to emphasize my gratitude for consuming her time. In reflecting on our first meeting, I realized I would have to create more questions than before, and perhaps back up questions to aid in the interview process as well. I also decided to no longer send her the questions in advance. As I chose to keep my questions a secret, at the beginning of each session before recording, I would tell her our topics of discussion for the day.

I emailed her on April 4th to set a date for our second session which was confirmed for Tuesday, April 11th. In this initial email, I asked to meet with her on both days, to which she was hesitant because she had intentional office hours that week in preparation for her course exams the following week. On Tuesday, April 11th, again, I met her during the latter half of her office

hours, prior to her class starting. I made sure her office door was closed shut completely this time, to which she suggested I hang a note saying, “Interview in Progress – Done at/by 3:15”. We had our ice-breaking conversation and began with enough time to speak comfortably and at ease for 30 minutes. This session went much more smoothly and slowly as I had hoped. We did not make it through my entire list of questions which confirmed my hesitance of sending questions in advance. As we concluded, we discussed our third meeting to which she suggested Thursday the 13th, of that same week. Between our first meeting and the second one, she seemed to have warmed up to the idea of being interviewed and was more open to meeting with me more frequently to hit the two-hour requirement.

Since we left off in the middle of my second set of questions, I had to refer to our session at the start of our third meeting on Thursday, April 13th. While we were able to pick back up, the mood, or atmosphere, was different and any further reflections in response to my questions that could have happened on Tuesday, were missed. As I note in my presentation to the class, this is a real weakness of my interview. We concluded our third session and wished each other a happy Easter holiday. Dr. Tsakiridou informed me we could meet after the Easter holiday and asked me to email her and set a date. I emailed her in the beginning of the week and confirmed our fourth, and supposed to be final, session for Thursday, April 20th. During our fourth session, we ran out of time to properly conclude the full scope of the interview and our conversation ended around 3:25 in the afternoon, giving her little time to prepare herself for her class. I told her I would have to “bother”, jokingly of course, her one last time for final words. She happily obliged and suggested the following Thursday, April 27th.

On Thursday, April 27th, I arrived to her office and told her we had two relatively simple questions, more like offerings of reflection. She answered them, spanning only six minutes for

the fifth recording and we ended our session. I presented her with the legal release forms as I did at the end of every session for her to sign, to which she decided to question the purpose and integrity of this project. I tried my best to explain the significance of it, but she was not satisfied. I told her I would talk to Dr. Allen and provide a better, solid answer. She did not want to risk her words being taken out of context even though I assured her there would be an accompanying detailed log of our conversations together. She said that was good and all, but, “What about the *integrity* of my words?” Slightly panicking, I presented my inconveniently occurring problem to Dr. Allen prior to our class. Dr. Allen suggested telling Dr. Tsakiridou in the restrictions section she could write “Cannot be quoted from without permission”. I immediately emailed this solution to Dr. Tsakiridou and she responded, saying she would sign. While the crisis was technically averted, I did not feel at ease until Tuesday, May 2nd, when I met Dr. Tsakiridou in her office during the lunch period and had her sign the form.

To express my appreciation and gratitude, I bought a tiny, desk-sized succulent plant for Dr. Tsakiridou. She loved it. She was very excited and happy to receive it, noting she may not keep it in her office as it is so unique, she may bring it home with her. We hugged, and discussed my future plans after graduation to which she offered her help whenever it could be of service. I thanked her again and told her I would keep in touch. I also asked her to invite me to any future DRP events that would be of interest to me. She is possibly planning an event in the fall with a Holocaust survivor.

We both expressed the pleasures we experienced in having each other in class, and getting to know each other better through this experience.

Note on recording: To record, I used the voice memos app on my Apple iPhone 6s phone. I

made sure my battery was sufficiently charged prior to the interviews. I utilized the 'Do Not Disturb' option, and for further security, I turned my phone to Airplane Mode to ensure that there were absolutely no interruptions. Upon completing the interviews, I titled them and immediately emailed the files to my Gmail Drive account for backup purposes. The voice files originally saved in .m4a format, so I used the NCH Suite program, "Switch Sound File Converter" to convert them to .wav format.

Editing: There was no editing.