

PHI 860: PRUDENCE, TIME, AND IDENTITY

Fall 2024

Ben Bradley

541 Hall of Languages

Office hours: 1:30-3:30 Tuesday and by appointment

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DESCRIPTION:

We will discuss questions about prudence, time, and identity, such as: what matters in survival? What grounds prudential concern for one's future self? Is it rational to be future-biased or near-biased? Can we owe things to future or past selves? Should we honor sunk costs? Is immortality or radical life extension possible or desirable? Does the impossibility of making a permanent difference to the world undermine the meaningfulness of our activities?

REQUIRED TEXTS: Trenton Merricks, *Self and Identity* (OUP); Meghan Sullivan, *Time Biases* (OUP). Available for free via SU Library website, or for purchase in the ways people buy books.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **TERM PAPER.** You will write a substantial (15-20 page) research paper on some course-related topic. Topics must be approved by me. The term paper is worth 70 points. More information on the term paper will be distributed later.
2. **PRESENTATION.** You will do a class presentation. The presentation may be on the topic of your term paper but that is not a requirement. The presentation is worth 20 points. The default presentation time will be during the final two class meetings, but you can go earlier if you want. More details will be provided later.
3. **QUESTIONS:** You are expected to do all the reading assignments and submit questions to me by email each week. Questions should be based on the reading assignments. They can be long questions but they don't have to be. You will get one point per question, for a maximum of 10 points. You may get credit for only one question per reading assignment, though of course you can ask as many questions as you want.
4. **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** You are expected to attend the class meetings and be ready to participate. Syracuse University requires class attendance. I do not take attendance or give participation grades.

GRADING TABLE:

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D	60-69

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Please consult <https://academicaffairs.syracuse.edu/important-syllabus-reminders/> for many university-wide policies. Policies relevant to this course are explained below.

DISABILITY STATEMENT

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit [Center for Disability Resources](#). Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

The CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

FAITH TRADITION OBSERVANCES

[Syracuse University's Religious Observances Policy](#) recognizes the diversity of faiths represented in the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their traditions. Under the policy, students are given an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors no later than the academic drop deadline. For observances occurring before the drop deadline, notification is required at least two academic days in advance. Students may enter their observances in MySlice under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

ORANGE SUCCESS

Orange SUccess is the platform used to help students succeed by providing timely feedback on academic progress. Throughout the semester I may communicate with you about your progress through Orange SUccess, including via Early-semester progress reports and Mid-semester progress reports. You will receive immediate email notification of these reports.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Syracuse University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit and for upholding course-specific, as well as university-wide, academic integrity expectations. The policy governs citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and truthfulness in all academic matters, including course attendance and participation. The policy also prohibits students from: 1) submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving advance written authorization from both instructors and, 2) using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course materials to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others and presenting the work as their own. Under the policy, instructors who seek to penalize a student for a suspected violation must first report the violation to the Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS). Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Instructors must wait to assign a final course grade until a suspected violation is reviewed and upheld or overturned. Upholding Academic Integrity includes abiding by instructors' individual course expectations, which may include the protection of their intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or otherwise share instructors' course materials without permission. Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered, as outlined in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. Students are required to read an online summary of the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

The Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric establishes recommended guidelines for the determination of grade penalties by faculty and instructors, while also giving them discretion to select the grade penalty they believe most suitable, including course failure, regardless of violation level. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

Please note that submitting work written by ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence program counts as a violation.

CLASS SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT
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Aug 27	Intro to course	N/A
Sep 3	Temporal bias	Parfit, "Rationality and Time"; Sullivan, intro and Ch. 1
Sep 10	Discounting and Near-bias	Sullivan, Chs. 2-4
Sep 17	Past and future bias	Sullivan, Chs. 5-6; Dougherty, "On Whether to Prefer Pain to Pass"
Sep 24	Future bias and sunk costs	Sullivan, Chs. 7-9; Kelly, "Sunk Costs, Rationality, and Acting for the Sake of the Past"
Oct 1	Life extension and meaning	Sullivan, Chs. 10-11
Oct 8	TBA	
Oct 15	Midterm break – no class	
Oct 22	Prudence and identity	Merricks, intro and Chs. 1-2
Oct 29	Identity and psychology	Merricks, Ch. 3; Lewis, "Survival and Identity"
Nov 5	Selves and narrativity	Merricks, Chs. 4-5
Nov 12	Narrativity and Immortality	Merricks, Chs. 6-7
Nov 19	TBA	
Nov 26	Thanksgiving – no class	
Dec 3	CLASS PRESENTATIONS	
Dec 10	CLASS PRESENTATIONS	
Dec 23	FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 5:00PM	