

(Provisional Syllabus) HH 3034: *Asceticism: The Discipline of Desire*

Asst. Prof. Nicholas Witkowski

Thursdays 13:30-16:30

Venue TR+109

Email: nwitkowski@ntu.edu.sg

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Aims

Asceticism is an intense negotiation of the self with its desires, usually taking the form of the attempt to repress or curtail sexual desire. Asceticism is often misunderstood as a radical response to the problem of obsessive desire. Excessive attachments to sex, food, and money are among the most common of these concerns—today we refer to these as addictions—both in the contemporary world and to those living in a pre-modern context. In this course, we will discuss the experiences of ascetic figures throughout history not as relics of history but as intelligible responses to the problem of obsessive desire common to all ages. We will examine case studies of ascetic practices from ancient and modern India, Southeast Asia, medieval China and Japan, and the ancient and medieval Christian worlds. The first part of the course will be devoted to understanding some of the most notable social science approaches to ascetic behavior in the field of religion while the second part of the course will be devoted to close readings of case studies in light of these theoretical approaches. Cross-cultural comparison and contrast will be stressed. In the final part of the course, we will turn to modern conceptions of asceticism, attempting to answer the question—does the ascetic response to obsessive desire make sense in the world we live in today?

Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you (as a student) will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast conceptions of asceticism across a wide range of Asian and Western historical contexts.
2. Utilize methods in the study of religion to understand the historical patterns of ascetic practice across Europe, South, East, and Southeast Asia.
3. Explain a number of social scientific methodological approaches to the study of ascetic practice and culturally specific modes of negotiating desire.
4. Develop historical empathy for practitioners of asceticism across a wide variety of Asian and Western cultural contexts.

Requirements and Expectations

Weekly Online Submissions and Discussion - 20%: Each week, you are to submit online a 500-word **summary** and **analysis** of at least one **of the following week's readings**. You will submit the summary 2 days before the class to give other students the opportunity to read through your discussion. In these discussions with other students, you will come together to **formulate evidence-based, well-reasoned arguments** for your **interpretations** of the case studies covered throughout the course.

Research Essay Proposal - 10%: You will write a proposal for the research essay containing the following elements:

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1. Statement of the essay question (this is not the same as an essay topic or subject area and needs to take the form of a *question*).
2. Summary of background research conducted to date, noting: i) the key issues in the secondary source literature; ii) the available primary sources for the topic.
3. The theoretical approach or approaches you will take in the essay.

Primary Source Analysis - 30%: You will submit a 1500-word essay (due Week 7) that will be a close reading of one ascetic text of your choosing.

Final Research Essay – 40%: For your final research paper (3000 words), you will select one ascetic text and **develop a novel way of conceptualizing and explaining** how the text relates to the historical processes in its broader social and cultural context. You will present a clear research question and hypothesis, review the scholarly literature on the topic, **collect and synthesize** the data, and state a clear conclusion. The research paper can represent an introductory chapter to your final year project (FYP) or one of the chapters for your thesis.

Course Outline

Week (1)	Course Introduction and Overview
Week (2)	Nietzsche, Baudrillard, and the Critique of Modern Hedonism: A Rationale for Examining Ascetic Responses to Obsessive Desire <u>Readings:</u> Wimbush, 3-15; Baudrillard, 28-55
Week (3)	Psychological, Biological and Cultural Explanations for Ascetic Behaviors <u>Readings:</u> Wimbush 162-177 and 553-575; Harpham, “Introduction”
Week (4)	The Social Function of Asceticism <u>Readings:</u> Weber 166-183; Wimbush 544-552
Week (5)	Asceticism as a Technology of the Self <u>Readings:</u> Foucault 135-209

Assignment Due: Research Paper Proposal on Blackboard

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Week (6) Case Study 1: Desire in the Early Christian Asceticism of The Life of St. Antony

Readings: Life of Antony 30-100; Brown 5-32 and 213-240

Week (7) Case Study 2: Asceticism among Women in Medieval Europe

Readings: Bynum, Chapters 1-3

Assignment Due: Midterm Essay Due

Week (8) Case Study 3: Indian Asceticisms, Ancient and Modern

Readings: Hausner

Week (9) Case Study 4: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China

Readings: Company, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6

Week (10) Case Study 5: Eminent Nuns: Women Chan Masters of the Ming Dynasty

Readings: Grant

Week (11) Case Study 6: Ascetic Practice in Contemporary Japan

Readings: Lobetti

Week (12) Case Study 7: Asceticism and Social Engagement in Contemporary Southeast Asia

Readings: Rozenberg

Week (13) Epilogue: Protestant Asceticism and the Critique of the “Last Man”

Assignment Due: Final Submission of Research Papers on Blackboard

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Readings

Athanasius. 1980. *The Life of St. Antony*. Trans. Robert C. Gregg. New York: Paulist Press.

Baudrillard, Jean. 2002. *Selected Writings*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Brown, Peter. 1988. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. 1987. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Campany, Robert. 2009. *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2013. *Religion and Culture*. London: Routledge.

Grant, Beata. 2008. *Eminent Nuns: Women Chan Masters of the Ming Dynasty*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Harpham, Geoffrey. 1992. *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hausner, Sondra. 2008. *Wandering with Sadhus: Ascetics in the Hindu Himalayas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Lobetti, Tullio. 2013. *Ascetic Practices in Japanese Religion*. New York: Routledge.

Rozenberg, Guillaume. 2010. *Renunciation and Power: The Quest for Sainthood in Contemporary Burma*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Weber, Max. 2001. *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge.

Wimbush and Valantasis. 1995. *Asceticism*. New York: OUP.

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Course Policies

(1) General

You are expected to complete all assigned pre-class readings and activities, attend all lectures/tutorials punctually and take all scheduled assignments and tests by due dates. You are expected to take responsibility to follow up with course notes, assignments and course related announcements for seminar sessions you have missed. You are expected to participate in all seminar discussions and activities.

(2) Absenteeism

Absence from class without a valid reason can affect your overall course grade. Valid reasons include falling sick supported by a medical certificate and participation in NTU's approved activities supported by an excuse letter from the relevant bodies.

If you miss a lecture, you must inform the course instructor via email prior to the start of the class.

(3) Late submission of assignments and extensions

Midterm essay assignments that are submitted past the due date will be deducted 10% off the mark assigned per day that the assignment is late, down to the pass mark (40%). That is, you will not be failed merely on late submission, but there is a significant penalty per day. If you receive 65% and your assignment is 1 day late, your mark will be 55% (a 10% penalty). If you receive 60% and your assignment is 4 days late, you will receive 40% (since I do not deduct below the pass mark).

Extensions: If you require an extension please email me **prior to day the assignment is due**. Extensions will only be given in cases of illness (in which a student presents a medical certificate) or in serious extenuating circumstances.

Appendix: Course Style Guide

1. Format of all written assignments

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1.A. Font

The essay should be in Times New Roman font. The body of paragraphs should be 12 point size. Headings should be 14 point size and footnotes 10 point size.

1.B. Spacing

The body of the essay (including block quotations) should be double spaced. However, footnotes may be single spaced.

2. Elements of style

2.A. Quotations

Double quotation marks should be used. Quotations within quotations should be indicated with single quotation marks. Place commas and full stops inside quotations and other punctuation marks (e.g. colons and semi-colons) outside the quotation, unless they are part of the quoted text.

Short quotes: Short quotations from other sources should be included in quotation marks within the body of the paragraph.

Block quotes: Quotations of four or more lines (before indenting) should be formatted as a block quote. In a block quote, the quoted text should be in a separate paragraph from the main text and indented from the margin. Neither italics nor quotation marks should be used in a block quote unless they appear in the original. The footnote to the quote should be included at the end of the quote, after the punctuation mark. The quoted text should be in double line spacing (like the main text).

2.B. Spelling

The essay should be in the English language. Students may use either American or British spelling, but should be consistent throughout. Quotations should follow the original text precisely, even if there are spelling or grammatical errors in the original. Students should insert “[sic]” after spelling and grammatical mistakes in quotations.

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2.C. Italics

Italics should be used for non-English language words. However, words of non-English language origin that are commonly used in English (such as “bazaar”) do not need to be in italics.

Moreover, foreign language proper nouns such as names, places, and organisations (for example, “Guomindang” or “Barisan Nasional”) should not be italicised.

2.D. References to titles in the text

References to the titles of books, pamphlets, films, etc. should follow the referencing style (see section 2 below). Thus, the following titles should be italicised: books; pamphlets; periodicals; plays; and films. The following should be enclosed in quotation marks: titles of articles; book chapters; unpublished works; and theses.

2.E. Brackets

Round brackets should be used in the main text (these are round brackets). Square brackets should be used for insertions in quotations, if an insertion is required so that the quoted sentence makes sense. For example: Washington stated in his 1796 Farewell Address, “The unity of government which constitutes you one people is also now dear to you [the American people].”

2.F. Numbers and dates

Spell out numbers less than ten, except for page numbers and dates, and material in footnotes and bibliography (see section 2 below on referencing style).

For dates, use the following forms: 20 December 1875; 1875–77; nineteenth century; 1870s; 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. Including A.D. is only necessary if non-inclusion would cause confusion. Abbreviations may be used in footnotes, e.g.: 20 Dec. 1875.

The following are examples of correct and incorrect references to decades:

The doctor gave up smoking back in the 1980’s. → Incorrect

The doctor gave up smoking back in the 1980s. → Correct

The doctor gave up smoking back in the ’80’s. → Incorrect

The doctor gave up smoking back in the ’80s. → Correct

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3. Footnote and bibliography referencing style

Students are required to use the 16th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which is available on-shelf in the NTU library. Below are examples of footnote and bibliography references taken from the Chicago style guide.

3.A. Footnotes

The first time a work is referenced in the footnotes, a full reference (including full author name, title and publication details) should be used. Subsequent references should be shortened to author's family name, short title and page number. When the same work is referenced in two consecutive footnotes, "Ibid., [page number]" should be used for the second footnote.

Book

One author

1. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 99–100.

[Short reference: Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma*, 3.]

Two or more authors

1. Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *The War: An Intimate History, 1941–1945* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 52.

[Short reference: Ward and Burns, *War*, 59–61.]

Four or more authors: List all of the authors in the bibliography; in the note, list only the first author, followed by *et al.* ("and others"):

1. Dana Barnes et al., *Plastics: Essays on American Corporate Ascendance in the 1960s . . .*

Editor, translator, or compiler instead of author

1. Richmond Lattimore, trans., *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 91–92.

[Short reference: Lattimore, *Iliad*, 24.]

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Editor, translator, or compiler in addition to author

1. Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, trans. Edith Grossman (London: Cape, 1988), 242–55.

[Short reference: García Márquez, *Cholera*, 33.]

Chapter or other part of a book

Book chapter:

1. John D. Kelly, “Seeing Red: Mao Fetishism, Pax Americana, and the Moral Economy of War,” in *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, ed. John D. Kelly et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 77.

[Short reference: Kelly, “Seeing Red,” 81–82.]

Preface, foreword, introduction, or similar part of a book

1. James Rieger, introduction to *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xx–xxi.

[Short reference: Rieger, introduction, xxxiii.]

Book published electronically

If a book is available in more than one format, cite the version you consulted. For books consulted online, list a URL. Include the year that the book was published, not the date it was put online, or the date you accessed it. If no fixed page numbers are available, you can include a section title or chapter number.

1. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007), Kindle edition.

2. Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., *The Founders’ Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/>.

3. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. [Short reference]

4. Kurland and Lerner, *Founder’s Constitution*, chap. 10, doc. 19. [Short reference]

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Periodical

Article in a print journal

In a note, list the specific page numbers consulted, if any. In the bibliography, list the page range for the whole article. If you access a print journal electronically, you do not need to include the URL or DOI (Digital Object Identifier). A DOI is a permanent ID that, when appended to <http://dx.doi.org/> in the address bar of an Internet browser, will lead to the source. URL's and DOI's are only necessary for journals which are published in electronic format only (see below).

1. Joshua I. Weinstein, "The Market in Plato's *Republic*," *Classical Philology* 104 (2009): 440.

[Short reference: Weinstein, "Plato's *Republic*," 452–53.]

Article in an online journal

Include a DOI if the journal lists one. If no DOI is available, list a URL. Do not include an access date.

1. Gueorgi Kossinets and Duncan J. Watts, "Origins of Homophily in an Evolving Social Network," *American Journal of Sociology* 115 (2009): 411, accessed February 28, 2010, doi:10.1086/599247.

[Short reference: Kossinets and Watts, "Origins of Homophily," 439.]

Article in a newspaper or popular magazine

If you consulted the article online, include a URL; an access date is not necessary. If no author is identified, begin the citation with the article title.

1. Daniel Mendelsohn, "But Enough about Me," *New Yorker*, January 25, 2010, 68.

2. Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Robert Pear, "Wary Centrists Posing Challenge in Health Care Vote," *New York Times*, February 27, 2010, accessed February 28, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/us/politics/28health.html>.

3. Mendelsohn, "But Enough about Me," 69. [Short reference]

4. Stolberg and Pear, "Wary Centrists." [Short reference]

Book review

1. David Kamp, "Deconstructing Dinner," review of *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, by Michael Pollan, *New York Times*, April 23, 2006, Sunday Book Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/23/books/review/23kamp.html>.

[Short reference: Kamp, "Deconstructing Dinner."]

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Unpublished source

Essay or dissertation

1. Mihwa Choi, “Contesting *Imaginaires* in Death Rituals during the Northern Song Dynasty” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008).

[Short reference: Choi, “Contesting *Imaginaires*.”]

Paper presented at a meeting or conference

1. Rachel Adelman, “‘Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On’: God’s Footstool in the Aramaic Targumim and Midrashic Tradition” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society of Biblical Literature, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 21–24, 2009).

[Short reference: Adelman, “Such Stuff as Dreams.”]

Website

Because website content is subject to change, include an access date or, if available, a date that the site was last modified.

1. “Google Privacy Policy,” last modified March 11, 2009,

<http://www.google.com/intl/en/privacypolicy.html>.

2. “McDonald’s Happy Meal Toy Safety Facts,” McDonald’s Corporation, accessed July 19, 2008, <http://www.mcdonalds.com/corp/about/factsheets.html>.

3. “Google Privacy Policy.” [Short reference]

4. “Toy Safety Facts.” [Short reference]

3.B. Bibliography

The bibliography below contains examples of each of the source types listed above. **The source type is included in square brackets after the example. You obviously should not include this in your bibliography.** The sources should be listed in the bibliography according to alphabetical order (as below).

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For journal articles and book chapters, include the page number range of the article/chapter in the bibliography. For other types of books, it is not necessary to include the pages or chapters you consulted.

Bibliography entries should be indented from the margin from the second line (as below).

Adelman, Rachel. “‘Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On’: God’s Footstool in the Aramaic Targumim and Midrashic Tradition.” Paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society of Biblical Literature, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 21–24, 2009. [Paper presented at a meeting or conference]

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2007. Kindle edition. [Book published electronically]

Choi, Mihwa. “Contesting *Imaginaires* in Death Rituals during the Northern Song Dynasty.” PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008. [Essay or dissertation]

García Márquez, Gabriel. *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Translated by Edith Grossman. London: Cape, 1988. [Editor, translator, or compiler in addition to author]

Google. “Google Privacy Policy.” Last modified March 11, 2009. <http://www.google.com/intl/en/privacypolicy.html>. [Website]

Kamp, David. “Deconstructing Dinner.” Review of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, by Michael Pollan. *New York Times*, April 23, 2006, Sunday Book Review. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/23/books/review/23kamp.html>. [Book review]

Kelly, John D. “Seeing Red: Mao Fetishism, Pax Americana, and the Moral Economy of War.” In *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, edited by John D. Kelly, Beatrice Jauregui, Sean T. Mitchell, and Jeremy Walton, 67–83. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. [Book chapter]

Kossinets, Gueorgi, and Duncan J. Watts. “Origins of Homophily in an Evolving Social Network.” *American Journal of Sociology* 115 (2009): 405–50. Accessed February 28, 2010. doi:10.1086/599247. [Article in an online journal.]

Kurland, Philip B., and Ralph Lerner, eds. *The Founders’ Constitution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/>. [Book published electronically]

Lattimore, Richmond, trans. *The Iliad of Homer*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951. [Editor, translator, or compiler instead of author]

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McDonald's Corporation. "McDonald's Happy Meal Toy Safety Facts." Accessed July 19, 2008.

<http://www.mcdonalds.com/corp/about/factsheets.html>. [Website]

Mendelsohn, Daniel. "But Enough about Me." *New Yorker*, January 25, 2010. [Article in a newspaper or popular magazine]

Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin, 2006. [Single author book]

Rieger, James. Introduction to *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, xi–xxxvii. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. [Preface, foreword, introduction, or similar part of a book]

Stolberg, Sheryl Gay, and Robert Pear. "Wary Centrists Posing Challenge in Health Care Vote." *New York Times*, February 27, 2010. Accessed February 28, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/us/politics/28health.html>. [Article in a newspaper or popular magazine]

Ward, Geoffrey C., and Ken Burns. *The War: An Intimate History, 1941–1945*. New York: Knopf, 2007. [Book with two authors]

Weinstein, Joshua I. "The Market in Plato's *Republic*." *Classical Philology* 104 (2009): 439–58. [Article in a print journal]