This course addresses the topic and practice of sacrifice in three major areas: sacrifice in specific religious traditions; sacrifice in the service of a country or nation; and sacrifice for romantic love. All three areas have religious implications inasmuch as they involve suffering and the pursuit of some higher ideal and/or physical or spiritual transformation, even to the point of death. During the first part of the course we will focus on sacrificial rituals in major world religions (Traditional Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). The central question addressed will be why has sacrifice played such a prominent part in religions right up to the present? And what has encouraged humans to believe that supernatural beings demand the sacrificial death of men, women, children, and animals? In the second part of the course, we will examine the role of sacrifice in the formation of national identity and the promotion of patriotism. Finally we will look at Romanticism and the ideal of sacrificing oneself in the service of love. To help us understand these forms of sacrifice, we will analyze and evaluate various theories offered by scholars to explain sacrifice. Is it sufficient to understand sacrificial rituals as a means of communication with higher powers or as gift made in the hope of receiving something valuable in exchange? Or do we have to look more deeply into human nature and psychology and explain sacrifice as a response to human anxiety, aggression, and altruism? Finally, what, if any, role does gender play in sacrifice?