The Divine Comedy, is a very long poem traditionally judged to be one of the most important in Western culture. At the center of the poem is the human being, his condition in the after life and his punishment or reward. Taken literally, the theme is the state of the souls after the death. But allegorically, the true subject is moral life and thus the torments of the sins themselves or the enjoyment of a happy and saintly life. Since the beginning of its circulation, the Divine Comedy has been seen as a text to be read in context, that is in light of the cultural tradition Dante was channeling and interpreting. The course proposes to contextualize the reading of Dante’s Commedia considering a selection of Dante’s prose works: Vita nuova, Banquet, On Vernacular Speech, Monarchy. Attention is directed to the context in which Dante lived and wrote, we focus not just on the Commedia but also on the culture that the Commedia inherits and on the circumstances in which the Poet operated. Readings include fragments of Aristotle (Ethics and Politics), Augustine (Confessions), Plato’s Timeus (Chalcidius). We consider the Commedia in the context of social history, poetry and poetics, literature, art, music, politics and economy, ancient and medieval science, philosophy and jurisprudence.

The objective of the course is to familiarize students with one of the most important authors of Western culture. Through Dante’s texts, students will gain a perspective on the Biblical, Christian, and Classical traditions as well as on the historical, political, literary, philosophical context of medieval Europe. We emphasize the continuity of Western tradition and its intellectual history, the influence of Arabs and Jews and the new canon that the entrance of Aristotle and Aristotelianism, has established. The context in which the Commedia was conceived portrays Dante as a man of his time. The context allows an innovative reading. However theologically motivated, Dante is the first poet and intellectual who, writing in vernacular, attempts to educate his readers to the value and meaning of a political and ethical earthly happiness.