At the West Campus dining hall, one thing is for certain: there will be a painfully time-consuming, starvation inducing line for an overcooked, low-quality, cheeseburger. While it may not seem like a substantial enough problem to be discussed intellectually, this is actually a major concern of many in the world of academia. Drawing ideas from ancient texts may give some insight into how society can overcome this excruciating experience. Both *The Nicomachean Ethics* and *The Divine Comedy* explore human behavior and its consequences. Therefore, themes from these two books can give clues as to how to solve this plaguing situation that haunts college students at dinner time. Aristotle would take an ethical approach, reminding society of its higher goal of achieving happiness by exploring the function of humans, the virtue of moderation, and the reward that comes from an intellectual life. Dante, however, would take a much more intense stance, informing society that overindulgence and bitterness are sins that earn individuals eternal residence in Hell. He would use characters similar to Virgil to scare people away from such sandwich lines. Despite their differences, both solutions shine light on the importance of reading and understanding ancient texts in hopes of applying them to even the smallest of contemporary dilemmas. While both intellectuals offer compelling cases for their methodology, it depends on the individual, as well as society, to see which one should, or could, be implemented and whether or not the long lines for cheeseburgers will soon become a thing of the past.

In a world where humans are still learning how to solve the many issues a complex society contains, oftentimes the little problems can be overlooked. This is unfortunate because perhaps it is necessary to solve these before we can tackle the world-defining ones. As dinner time rolls around at any college, the despair that comes from a painful wait for a juicy burger is enough to make anyone realize that a change needs to be made. It is important to examine an array of techniques for solving such a problem and then choose the option which best suits the circumstances. With this in mind, one must first note that
a burger line is only a problem because it provokes unpleasant emotions in the people waiting. If these emotions were to be prevented, the problem would no longer exist. Secondly, this is a problem that can be viewed from a consequential standpoint because both the action of, and reason for, standing in line is preventative of a virtuous life, according to some. Finally, the line is formed due to sluggishness at the grill. Any suggestions as to how these three issues can be prevented must be fully considered. Analysis of the themes of ancient texts is one way of finding such plausible solutions, and those should not be overlooked.

Aristotle would take an objective approach to both prevent long lines, and to ease the pain they cause. He believes that humans have a gift from the gods, one that no other animal possesses. This he identifies as the gift of contemplation, writing:

the activity of the divinity which surpasses all others in bliss must be a contemplative activity, and the human activity which is most closely akin to it is, therefore, most conducive to happiness.

What better time is there to contemplate the world and human existence, searching for happiness, than in a line waiting for food? If this were to be put into practice, one would not be wasting time but instead be bettering oneself virtuously, leading to a diminished feeling of pain while watching the meat slowly cook. While Aristotle would encourage students to use this time for meditation, he would also urge chefs to be more efficient. He believes that there are some sciences that pertain directly to the highest form of human function and therefore require high levels of proficiency. These include strategy, household management, and oratory. Burger making is part of household management and requires a great deal of strategy, so the chef should be someone who has achieved excellence in this field and can make burgers efficiently and take orders flawlessly. Taking this into account, lines would move quickly and young students, who are still learning the virtue of contemplation, would suffer less. Finally, Aristotle would attack the students in line. It is common practice to order a double cheeseburger. Nearly everybody does and because
the grill is only so large, often there are more people in line than burgers cooking. Aristotle would promote the option of only allowing one burger per customer, if we understand correctly his claim that “since we are naturally more attracted to pleasure we incline more easily to self-indulge than to a disciplined kind of life.” He goes on to write that a truly virtuous man finds self indulgence “disgusting.” He would believe that we should find a mean between discipline and self indulgence and therefore only order one burger, seeing as it is all we really need. This would result in more customers being served at once and a substantially faster line, allowing students to return to their studying or to continue contemplation while they eat. Aristotle’s plan lays out three simple steps for dissolving the issue of time wasting lines. At once, they will both speed up the dining process, ease suffering, and make everyone involved a more virtuous person.

While Aristotle would strive to make people happier in his approach, Dante would employ fear instead. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante uses the character of Virgil as a teacher and tour guide who has all the answers regarding Hell. Virgil’s sagacity is evidenced in Canto VII when Dante asks him a question and refers to him as “Master,” signifying Virgil’s superiority. When attempting to solve the contemporary problem, Dante would again use a teacher as a tool ensuring that it would be someone the students admire and look to for guidance. The teacher’s word would be final, and similarly to Dante in *The Inferno*, the students would feel subordinate to their teacher. From here, the teacher would spread God’s word, warning the people in line of Hell. For example, he would share the laments of the sorry souls trapped in the fifth circle who tell Dante (again, in Canto VII) that they are there because they “had been sullen in the sweet air that’s gladdened by the sun.” This is precisely what the complainers in the line are doing. The burger line is a blessing; it has cheeseburgers at the end of the wait, something these people should be thankful for. Instead, they whine. The teacher would have to remind them that in hell they would “[tear] each other piecemeal with their teeth.” This fear would defeat their feeling of despair, instead forcing them to realize what is good about the wait, thus rendering the problem a non-issue. Dante’s teacher would also look to reduce the line by explaining that the gluttonous also have a circle in Hell. This third
circle, as depicted in Canto VI, is plagued by “gross hailstones, water gray with
filth, and snow [that comes] streaking down across the river,” making many of
the customers realize the possible consequence of their sin (stuffing their faces
with a double cheeseburger packed with toppings and a side of fries). Many
of the righteous, God-fearing students would leave the line to find healthier,
smaller portions elsewhere, thus speeding up the process for everyone else.
In Dante’s approach, fear and obedience are the driving forces. Hell being as
horrible as Dante describes, it is no wonder that the use of Christian theology
would be his best approach to the situation.

The difficulty in solving problems arises from the fact that people often-
times do not listen to the good advice. Both methods offered above give vi-
able solutions, but it depends on the individuals in line as to which one would
work better. If the people were looking for happiness, by bettering themselves
virtuously, Aristotle’s approach would be more appealing. In a school full of
stress and competition, many may want to explore new ways to be happy and
be the best they can be. Dante’s religious route, on the other hand, would only
be taken seriously by people who believe in and fear Hell. Assuming they do,
however, the fear of fire and brimstone would be more than enough of a reason
to drop out of the line or stop complaining. With both ideas in mind, examin-
ing the beliefs of the average person in the burger line would most likely give
Aristotle an advantage. This is because the majority of people nowadays do
not fear Hell as Dante says they should. Since there is a significant amount of
sinning and general lack of strict religious followers, most people would dis-
dain Virgil’s words, whereas they would view Aristotle’s as more scientifically
realistic.

Assuming Aristotle’s approach is more effective, what is the chance that
it will ever be implemented? Slim, at best. Most people would rather stare at
Facebook on their smart phones than dive into the contemplative life during
their fifteen-minute wait. Secondly, the hall manager is not going to hire a
burger specialist due to high costs, so a proficient college student will get the
job. Finally, with hungry students they wish to please, the dining hall will have
to continue serving double cheeseburgers upon request. While the doctrines of
Aristotle may briefly spark interest when people worry that they are leading
meaningless lives, they will soon revert back to their accustomed ways. Before they know it, they will enter the gates of Hell and, looking to their left, will see Aristotle shaking his head from his spot in Limbo.

Imagine a dining hall where the burger lines are always short, a master chef prepares only single cheeseburgers, perhaps even healthful ones, and people wait patiently while contemplating the philosophical questions of the ages. Additionally, there are no complainers in line and everybody excitedly thanks the chef for their small meal and makes sure to say grace before taking their first bite. They fear divine wrath and strive for excellence in virtue. Anyone who has ever been to West Campus knows this could never happen. A culture where greed is accepted, complaining is tolerated, and anti-religious movements are on the rise challenges scholars to find new ways to apply themes of ancient texts to the contemporary world. It appears that despite philosopher’s best efforts, society has evolved to a point where these themes are simply too far from being relevant.

**ANALECTS OF THE CORE**

Aristotle: Friendship is most necessary with a view to living. For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods.

Dennis Costa: The fiction of this fiction is that the fiction is not a fiction.