

## “Teachers as Transcultural Guardians: A Lesson from Plato”

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Abstract:

The advances and innovations in new media have brought about unprecedented opportunities for the storage and dissemination of information, for communication and interaction, and for the enjoyment of entertainment. It is not difficult to see how this might be a mixed blessing: focusing on just one issue, a common concern that is raised by parents and educators is to question the quality of what the youth are viewing, reading, and listening to, very often at considerable cost: involving the possible neglect of more traditional cultural forms and also of the possible challenge to more traditional ideals and *mores*. In his texts *Politeia* (The Republic) and *Nomoi* (The Laws), Plato puts forward that the primary task of government is to oversee the education of the young, and this involves strict observance of rules of censorship in the reception of various ideas and art forms. While we may have misgivings with regard to acceding to state control over media, we may be instructed by Plato on what role the educator may play as a “guardian”, not in the Platonic sense of leader of the *polis*, but in the milder sense of guiding students towards a guarded and more critical reception of alternative cultural forms, practices and ideas. In this paper, the author will explore how material from these political and pedagogical works of Plato might be instructive in providing a manifesto detailing this task of patrolling cultural borders: not in the sense of refusing entry to what is other than one’s own, but in the sense of discerning both the form and content of what might enrich one’s education, particularly in view of an upbringing in virtue. Bringing Plato in dialogue with contemporary thinkers such as Peter Dahlgren (on the new opportunities provided by media) and Alan Bryman (on Disneyization, which involves simplification and homogenization in the consumption of cultural goods), this paper will reflect on the possibilities and limits in confronting the new challenges and complications in this ancient task of teachers.