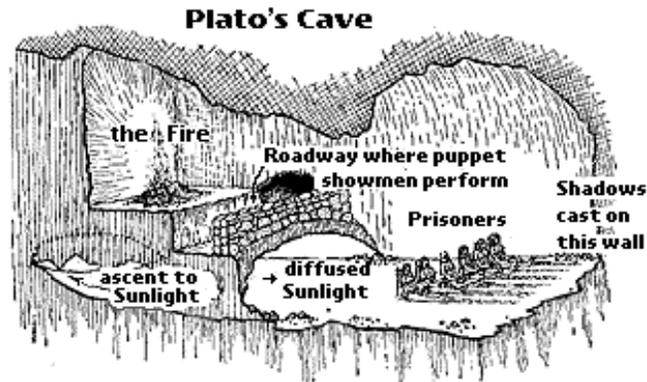


Excerpt from *Sophie's World*, by Jostein Gaarder



Plato relates a myth [called the] *Myth of the Cave*. ...

Imagine some people living in an underground cave. They sit with their backs to the mouth of the cave with their hands and feet bound in such a way that they can only look at the back wall of the cave. Behind them is a high wall, and behind that wall pass humanlike creatures, holding up various figures above the top of the wall. Because there is a fire behind these figures, they cast flickering shadows on the back wall of the cave. So the only thing cave dwellers can see is this shadow play. They have been sitting in this position since they were born, so they think these shadows are all there are.

Imagine now that one of the cave dwellers manages to free himself from his bonds. The first thing he asks himself is where all these shadows on the cave wall come from. What do you think happens when he turns around and sees the figures being held up above the wall? To begin with he is dazzled by the sharp light. He is also dazzled by the clarity of the figures because until now he has only seen their shadow. If he manages to climb over the wall and get past the fire into the world outside, he will be even more dazzled. But after rubbing his eyes he will be struck by the beauty of everything. For the first time he will see colors and clear shapes. He will see the real animals and flowers that the cave shadows were only poor reflections of. But even now he will ask himself where all the animals and flowers come from. Then he will see the sun in the sky, and realize that this gives life to these flowers and animals, just as the fire made the shadows visible.

The joyful cave dweller could now have gone skipping away into the countryside, delighting in his newfound freedom. But instead he thinks of all the others who are still down in the cave. He goes back. Once there, he tries to convince the cave dwellers that the shadows on the cave wall are but flickering reflections of "real" things. But they don't believe him. They point to the cave wall and say that what they see is all there is. Finally they kill him.