A passage in the *Theaetetus* is now one of the most discussed in Plato's dialogues. It consists of two parts, the so-called Dream of Socrates and its criticism. Though many respectable scholars have presented their readings, I am afraid that even now the section is so full of mysteries that there is still no general agreement even on the very nature of the arguments in it. Of course we can assume that the passage contains (possibly the most) important lessons Plato gives us.¹ The problem is to determine what, precisely, the lessons are.

What has made the passage extremely hard to approach is the way Plato puts the Dream into Socrates' mouth. Socrates states it in a totally dualistic manner, as if it were a kind of esoteric system of some dogmatist or other. For example, he says the elements can be named but have no λόγος though they are perceptible, while the things composed of them can be known, stated and thought with true belief. To interpret these words, you have to know what the 'elements' are and what the 'composition' means, and this in turn requires that you at least have a grip on the motivation and purpose of this whole theory. And here you will be left with few hints. On a superficial reading the Dream seems to have begun too abruptly and, maybe, too dogmatically.

There must be a motivation, which a detailed study can make clear. A picture of the motivation some recent scholars favour seems to be this. First, the purpose of the Dream is to show how one can distinguish the knowables from the unknowables, since Socrates asked Theaetetus about the word 'knowable' and also about the source of the alleged distinction

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(201 d 4-5). Secondly, to this end the Dream assumes that \( \lambda \gamma \alpha \gamma \zeta \) is the complex composed of names and that the elements lack it while the things composed of them have it. And finally, given this, and the other assumption that knowledge requires \( \lambda \gamma \alpha \gamma \zeta \), it concludes that things can be known if, and only if, they are composed. According to their picture, this thesis, the so-called asymmetry of knowledge, is the final theme in this paragraph.\(^2\) However clear this line of thought may be, I do not think it is a correct interpretation. In section one I hope to show that the very language of the Dream forbids it. If we are to be true to the language, we should regard the two asymmetries, one about knowability and the other about having \( \lambda \gamma \alpha \gamma \zeta \), as totally on a par. In particular, the alleged distinction between the assumptions and the conclusion will be shown to be only imaginary.

If I succeed in this counter-argument, that will not mean that the Dream remains mysterious. On the contrary, all the evidence I use in it points to a new interpretation that can clarify both the motivation of the Dream and its significance in its context. Specifically, it will be shown that the Dream is itself an exposition that concerns the third definition of knowledge (true belief with \( \lambda \gamma \alpha \gamma \zeta \)) as such. This positive side of my interpretation will be formulated in detail and defended in section two.

The remaining two sections are a reading of the criticism Plato makes against the Dream. I hope to show both that he takes the criticism seriously, and that it is, in fact, right. At the same time it will be shown that the hidden theme of the arguments in this context is the possibility of metaphysics. The Dream seeks to say something about reality but fails to do so, for its validity relies on whether or not it adequately analyses its paradigm case, the relation of letters and syllables, and the criticism proves that it is exactly some eccentric understanding of that relation that supports the Dream's totally dualistic way of speaking.

In stating the Dream, Socrates employs a language that concentrates on the contrast between the two kinds of entities, the elements and the things composed of them. This surface structure is clear from the frequency of the \( \mu \varepsilon v \ldots \delta \varepsilon \) construction. In this brief section there are five occurrences of