One of the most interesting examples of contact between the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental philosophical spheres is the reception and interpretation of the body of Freudian work theory within analytic philosophy. Leaving aside the heavy influence which psychoanalytical theory has exerted during the 20th century over culture in general, attempts have more recently been made within Anglo-Saxon (and particularly British) philosophy of mind and psychology to establish a link between the analytic conception of thought and language and the Freudian theory of mind. For the most part, these attempts have followed the strategy of regarding psychoanalytical explanation as an extension of the commonsense or folk-psychological model of behaviour in terms of beliefs and desires. My thesis in this paper is a double one:

(a) psychoanalytical theory cannot be regarded as an extension of commonsense psychology without contradicting Freud's theses regarding the nature of representation;

(b) intentional-object theories of intentionality constitute a better link between analytic philosophy of mind and psychoanalytical theory.

(a) In the first part of the paper, I will argue that the analytic reading of psychoanalytical explanation as an extension of folk psychology constitutes a serious misinterpretation of Freudian theory. For even though psychoanalytical theory is indeed compatible on a certain, rather obvious, level with commonsense explanations of behaviour, it does not constitute an extension of folk psychology, but rather its basic conceptual grounding is essentially of a very different nature. In particular, I will claim that the Davidsonian desire-belief model which is usually assumed to underwrite folk psychology is not applicable to Freudian theory. For indeed, according to Freud, existential belief plays no role in a large part of intentional processes, namely unconscious thoughts, which would constitute the main bulk of all mental activity.

A brief sketch of the psychoanalytic model of belief and desire, as outlined in Freud's seminal paper on Denial, is given, in order to show how Freud's conception crucially differs from, and indeed is incompatible with, folk-psychological notions in that it hypothesizes a developmental and logical asymmetry between desire and belief.

(b) In the second part of the paper, I will go on to suggest that intentional-object theories of intentionality, such as those put forth by Parsons and Zalta, constitute a better bridge between Freud's account of mental (meta) representation given in Denial and the analytic tradition. I will briefly sketch out the similarities, via Brentano's notion of intentionality, between intentional-object theories and the psychoanalytical conception of representation. Finally, I will claim examine how the conception of representation common to intentional-object theories and psychoanalytical provides a better account of intentionality and human behaviour than the folk psychology alternative.