In the background to this chapter is a view about what is most significant and novel in the psychoanalytic understanding of mind. It could be summarised under these heads: (1) the developmental perspective in understanding mental functioning; (2) the unrivalled significance of object relations (relations to people and their parts in ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ worlds, including relations to one’s self) in the life of the mind; (3) the systemic or structural conceptions of mind which evolved in and from Freud’s later work; and (4) the insistently orectic and wishfulfilling character of mind. The view is not only that these things are clinically most significant, but that they are also philosophically most significant. The latter claim is unlikely to attract the same level of agreement as the former, at least among philosophers working in the Analytic tradition. From that tradition’s current redoubts this selection of psychoanalytic themes is likely to appear eccentric.

This claim about what is central and what by implication peripheral is, of course, very large and here my focus will be limited to some aspects of the relations between (2) and (3), the role of object relations in structuring mind and its bearing on a number of prominent philosophical problems. To my knowledge there is little that is directly relevant to this issue in the philosophical literature, but it turns out that all four themes hang together in various ways and there is some useful work bearing on (3) and (4). So one possible point of entry, which links all four themes, is a consideration of some of the recent work on wishfulfilment and partitive conceptions of mind.

It may be helpful to have at the outset a sketch of the discursive track my argument takes. Since Plato, philosophers have considered various partitive conceptions of mind. They have done so largely because the idea of a division or dissociation of mental contents and activities appears to offer a way of understanding some problematic forms of mental conflict and incoher-
ence of belief, especially those which characterise the so-called paradoxes of irrationality, weakness of the will (akrasia) and self-deception. Some of these conceptions are strongly partitive, in the sense, roughly, that the mind or self is conceived to be divided into independent centres of agency (sections III and IV). In the main, these latter conceptions have been rejected (for example, Thalberg, 1974; de Sousa, 1976; Davidson, 1982; Moore, 1984; Johnston, 1988; Gardner, 1993; cf. Pears, 1984; Rorty, 1988). Where Freudian notions of partition, or something like Freudian notions, have been considered, they have usually been interpreted as being either incoherent or as non-partitive in the strong sense. Philosophical consideration has also been given to the important Freudian conception of wish-fulfilment but, to my knowledge, partitive conceptions of mind have not been employed in the attempt to illuminate it (section III). Taking a lead from Freud, I argue that conflict of desire and incoherence of belief are not the only phenomena which press towards strongly partitive conceptions of mind. The consolidation of certain kinds of internalised object relations involving a range of, broadly speaking, narcissistic attitudes, which are not in the usual sense conflictual and do not necessarily involve irrationality, produce forms of dissociation into agencies or self-like parts which, on most of the germane criteria, appear to be strongly partitive. Moreover, this development, which is itself the consequence of the ineluctable need for maintaining secure object relations, largely explains our capacity for a range of reflexive, self-solicitous attitudes of which some forms of wishfulfilment, self-deception, akrasia and their congeners are important compartments.

II

That is the outline of the argument. Before turning to it I want to make a few historical and polemical observations on the significance of the clinical dimensions of Freud’s work and on some of the consequences of psychoanalytic phenomenology for a philosophical theory of mind.

Freud is by no means the whole of psychoanalysis but it remains a valuable exercise to follow the spoor of earlier thinkers in his work and to examine the similarities between his conceptions and those of his scientific and philosophical predecessors. It is important in such exercises to distinguish direct influence from mere thematic affinity, and to locate the significance of Freudian conceptions in their clinical as well as in their historical and philosophical contexts. Freud wrote on a range of issues – morality, civilisation, religion – that were in his time, as now, patently philosophical and his speculative and analytical work in metapsychology has pretty clearly a philosophical complexion. There is no harm in approaching Freud as if he were a philosopher (for example, Kitcher, 1992; Smith, chapter 4; Alford, chapter 3; Brook, chapter 2: this volume); but it is important to understand