The issue posed for discussion here is problematic in more ways than one. It is problematic because the term "phenomenology" can be understood in so many ways that its meaning for our purposes must be limited very precisely if it is to be manageable at all. But how? The issue is problematic, too, because the term "psychoanalysis" is so comprehensive that some single aspect of it that will symbolically represent the whole must be chosen to provide a limited and sharp focus, so that in terms of it alone we have a feel for the rest. But which? Finally, it is problematic because the word "and" is seductive, for, standing there, like cupid, so coy and demure, it implies as a matter of self evidence that phenomenology and psychoanalysis are so compatible that they can be joined in holy wedlock—in a marriage of convenience if not of love. But can they? Does not any real marriage that is to last imply a genuine mutuality—mutual giving and mutual receiving, and thereby unified fulfilling? But are phenomenology and psychoanalysis in any form compatible enough to be thought of in that way?

Let us begin with the notion of phenomenology. We hear the word "phenomenology" used often enough to characterize the vivid description of a clinical issue. But this is a very loose use of the word and does not get us very far. In the same genre, though on a more sophisticated level, are the subtle analyses of phenomenologists (like Jean-Paul Sartre) of certain phenomena that are indeed of interest to psychoanalysts but, when all is said and done, deny the deepest suppositions of their work and in that sense nullify it completely. If phenomenology is going to be genuinely useful to the psychoanalytic enterprise, it must be of another kind.

I don’t think that we will find what we are looking for in Husserl,
however. For the touchstone of psychoanalysis, its "protean idea" (as Merleau-Ponty called it) is, I submit—at least for the purposes of this discussion—the notion of the unconscious conceived as a system. But Husserl's phenomenology, it seems, is helpless to gain access to the Freudian unconscious, inasmuch as Husserl's effort is essentially a philosophy of consciousness and can be nothing more. However inestimable the value of Husserl's investigation of the intentional structures of consciousness after his so-called "reduction" that involved bracketing the world of fact, and however much a thoroughly consequent analysis of the process of constitution led him to an exploration of the pre-reflective and unreflected dimensions of consciousness in terms of what he came to call "passive genesis," the fact is that the analysis of consciousness for Husserl cannot leap over its own shadow nor come any closer to the domain of the Freudian unconscious than that sphere of experience that Freud describes as "secondary process" and assigns to the system of the "preconscious." The "preconscious" system is that level of psychic organization that accounts for those elements of our experience that, descriptively speaking, are indeed not conscious but easily may become conscious and in that sense are accessible to consciousness, like the memories that are stirred by looking through an old photograph album. Such elements, and the psychic system that grounds them, are far different from those contents and mechanisms that are not available to consciousness as such but become accessible only through the laborious work of psychoanalysis, if at all. These derive from the psychic system of the unconscious for Freud, and it is this domain to which Husserl's analysis of intentionality, however elaborate, cannot gain access.

But followers of Husserl, starting from where he left off, were able to escape the iron circle within which he himself was caught. Merleau-Ponty, for example, was not content with a phenomenology of pure consciousness. Starting from the later Husserl's conception of the "lived experience of the world" (Lebenswelt), he quickly acknowledged that the "best formulation of the [phenomenological] reduction is probably that given by Eugen Fink, when he spoke of 'wonder' in the face of the world" (1962, p. xiii), wonder that for Merleau-Ponty himself began with an examination of consciousness as incarnate in the body that was its "window" on the world and correlative with the world. From the beginning, he took account of psychoanalysis, though with shifting attitudes that varied from the cautious but respectful reserves of the Phenomenology of Perception to the enthusiastic endorsement in his "Preface" to Hesnard's L'Oeuvre de Freud (1960). In this latter piece, composed in his maturity one year before his death, we hear Merleau-Ponty saying: