What can continental philosophers, particularly Gadamer and Foucault, teach Anglo-American analytic epistemologists about the coherence theory of knowledge? 'Plenty', Alcoff hopes to show. 'Practically nothing' is, however, the answer that emerges from her book.

Alcoff contends that the coherence theory has three advantages over its main competitor, foundationalism: its assumptions are closer to actual psychological and social facts about knowers; it explains how epistemic justification can depend on political and moral influences; and it accommodates the notion that truth inheres in, rather than transcends, human language. She also aims to encourage 'a dialogue between analytic and continental philosophy' (3) by showing how Gadamer, Foucault, and other continental figures can help solve three problems facing analytic versions of coherentialism: (a) the difficulty of showing how the coherence of beliefs can contribute to the likelihood of their truth in a way that makes them epistemically justified; (b) coherentialism's preoccupation with propositional knowledge over against the non-propositional knowledge embodied in social practices; and (c) the worry that striving for epistemic coherence is 'based on totalitarian impulses' (15). As Alcoff admits, only problem (a) has bothered analytic epistemologists, and so in discussing (b) and (c) it's not clear that she is still addressing an analytic audience.

Alcoff examines several positions familiar to analytic epistemologists: internalism and externalism about justification, coherentialism about justification and about truth, global relativism, and global skepticism. Unfortunately, she shows signs of misunderstanding every one of those positions.

She misrepresents internalism when she suggests that only externalist theories require that justification be truth-conducive. 'If his is primarily an externalist theory ... then it is a theory which links justification to truth-conduciveness' (56), she says, as if internalist theories required no such link. No self-respecting internalist denies that justification must be truth-conducive; that's why coherentialists recognize that problem (a) is a problem for them. She asserts that on 'an internalist account of justification ... for a belief to be justified a believer must be able to give an account of how the belief came to be justified' (92), a false assertion that ignores the crucial distinction her colleague William Alston has drawn between having a justification and being able to give one.

She misunderstands externalism when she implies that imposing a truth-condition on knowledge makes one an externalist: according to Alcoff, Michael Williams's contextualist theory 'has an externalist component' because 'Williams rejects the identification of knowledge with justified belief' (221),
a criterion that would make every analytic epistemologist on the planet an
externalist. She classifies Foucault as an externalist 'precisely because Fou-
cau t relates justified beliefs not to the intentions of believing subjects but to
the ways in which statements come to be labeled "true"' (133, emphasis
added), in which case Foucault is an externalist of a stripe that few, if any,
analytic externalists would recognize or welcome.

She also seems to misconstrue coherentism about justification and coher-
entism about truth, even while making them the focus of her book and even
while arguing that the former gains plausibility when conjoined with the
latter. For example, in her eagerness to portray Foucault as a coherentist of
both kinds, she ends up claiming that 'even displacement and exclusion'
count as relations of 'mutual support' among propositions or beliefs, 'in
the sense that these disparate operations are grounded in specific forms of
connection between elements' (128). But if a proposition and its negation can
offer each other 'mutual support' simply in virtue of their specific connection
(each logically excludes the other), then the notion of mutual support relied
on by both kinds of coherentism has run amok: only logically independent
propositions could fail to cohere. She contends that the coherence theory of
truth enables coherentist epistemology to overcome problem (a), the problem
of truth-conduciveness, but she never makes a persuasive case for that con-
tention. Indeed, late in the book she concedes an important point without
realizing how much trouble the concession makes for her: 'it confers little
warrant on a justified belief to say that justification is conducive to truth if
truth is simply defined in terms of justification' (196). Why isn't that claim
equally true if we replace 'justification' with 'coherence?'

Global relativism, says Alcoff, implies 'the all-encompassing suspension
of belief' (180). It implies no such thing: the global relativist feels entitled
to retain his beliefs because, on his view, they are as true as any beliefs get. She
dismisses global skepticism, a position she calls 'arguably ... psychotic' (87):
'If radical skeptical doubts are generated without any specific reason, they
cannot be addressed,' she asserts; 'to entertain skeptical doubts cannot im-
prove our knowledge' (226). Both parts of her assertion are belied by an
impressive recent literature in analytic epistemology that has addressed (if
not resolved) such skeptical doubts and improved our understanding of
knowledge.

Alcoff's misreading of important positions will not inspire confidence on
the part of the analytic epistemologists she hopes to convince. Neither will
her frustratingly imprecise use of crucial terms. Without ever saying what
she means by 'validity', for instance, she writes of the 'validity conditions for
knowledge' (2); 'the validity conditions for justified belief' and 'the validity
conditions for any serious speech act' (3); the 'valid' pronouncements of
authorities (27); the validity of self-satisfaction (54), of ancient texts (54), and
of the strands of a tradition (205); a 'criterion of validity for competing beliefs'
(173); 'valid descriptions' (186); the 'relative validities' of beliefs (216); and
'skepticism's claim to validity' (223) — thus indulging in both vagueness and
ambiguity, two concepts she conflates (173). Without ever explaining her

strange usage, she uses 'a priori' as a count noun (148), making the passage
in which it occurs, like many others in the book, opaque.

Even in Alcoff's sympathetic treatment, Gadamer and Foucault don't look
very relevant, and her conclusions about their value to analytic epistemology
are surprisingly, but perhaps wisely, hedged (e.g., 114). Indeed, it's often
hard to tell just where Alcoff herself comes down, since some of her pro-
nouncements seem impossible to harmonize. She repeatedly endorses Gad-
amer's line that knowledge and truth are irreducibly linguistic (18, 36, 71, 73)
but then says that 'belief ... in my view, need not be articulable in proposi-
tional or even linguistic form' (168). She never explains how knowledge de-
"""