Laurence BonJour argues for a rationalist position according to which pure reason can discover substantive truths about the world. Rationalism has been dominant throughout the history of philosophy, but in recent years the development of philosophical naturalism has diminished its prestige. Naturalism holds that reason’s putative grasp of these truths can either be explained away in terms of convention or dismissed entirely. The first move explains reason’s putative grasp of these claims in terms of definitions and trivial implications between synonyms. This view is associated with moderate empiricism. The other naturalist move takes aim against the distinctions and concepts upon which the traditional debate over the a priori relies. BonJour focuses on Quine’s radical empiricism in this connection. One of the themes I return to is that BonJour doesn’t appreciate the depth of Quine’s criticism of the traditional rationalist-empiricist debate. I restrict my attention to BonJour’s indispensability arguments. He argues that unless one is a radical skeptic about justification, there must be some substantive a priori justification. BonJour refers to this argument as “the master argument” of his book. He argues that unless there is some substantive a priori justification then no reasoning is ever justified and no one is ever justified in believing any claim that transcends experience. My primary aim is to rebut these arguments. There is a gap in BonJour’s indispensability arguments that undermines their force. This lacuna corresponds to BonJour’s failure to mine the depths of explanatory coherentism. I aim, therefore,

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1 BonJour (1998).
2 Ibid., 3.
3 BonJour (2001b, 626).
to explain this explanationist alternative in the context of responding to BonJour's indispensability arguments. In contrast to BonJour's avowals, explanatory coherentism is a coherent and plausible account of the a priori.

At the outset I want to make it clear that I will not be arguing for the connection between naturalism and explanatory coherentism. These positions develop within Quine's philosophy, and Quine's naturalism can be seen as developing out of explanatory coherentism. In my estimation, much contemporary work on philosophical naturalism can be interpreted as extending explanatory coherentism. My primary purpose is to defend the coherence of an explanationist account of the a priori from BonJour's criticisms. I also want to distinguish my argument from a Quinean indispensability argument for the a priori. A Quinean indispensability argument aims to show that apparent a priori truths are justified by being embedded in a broader theory that has significant empirical confirmation. This kind of argument has come under significant fire. I do not intend to enter the fray over the merits of this Quinean argument. Rather, I argue for a position much closer to Goodman's justification of inductive and deductive rules. We start with various beliefs about the necessity of certain claims and by reasoning in a coherentist fashion come to have justification for believing that these claims are true. The argument I develop is compatible with our being justified in believing various branches of higher mathematics that are not embedded in any successful empirical theory. Our justification for these branches of mathematics consists in their overall coherence with the rest of our beliefs.

### 6.1 BonJour's indispensability arguments

BonJour argues that substantive a priori justification is indispensable for three reasons. First, there are putative a priori truths like $2 + 2 = 4$ and nothing can be both entirely green and red at the same time. BonJour argues that only a rationalist view of the a priori can account for their justification. Second, there are claims which transcend immediate experience. Nothing in my current experience indicates that I was asleep last night, but I am currently justified in believing this. BonJour contends that only a rationalist conception of the a priori can account for the justification.

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4 See Quine and Ullian (1970); Lycan (1988); Hylton (2007).
5 See, for example, Jeffrey Roland's recent article (2009).
6 See Goodman (1965).