Hilary Putnam claims to have discovered that there is at least one *a priori* truth. While I think he's right about that, such agreement is not the focus of this paper. What is of interest is how Putnam, having previously argued that the notion of the *a priori* ought to be abandoned, is going to defend this claim against his own earlier arguments. It has been suggested that the defense does not do much to combat those arguments. I think that this is mistaken, but I also think that the defense is stronger than Putnam makes it out to be. What I want to suggest is that Putnam has made his position seem weaker than it is by characterizing, in "Two Dogmas Revisited", what he calls the contextual *a priori* in a way that is at least misleading. Once this error is corrected, the reply can be seen to be more forceful. I shall also have a word to say about the characterization of the *a priori* Putnam and Quine share.

I

The argument that Putnam initially used to persuade us to abandon the notion of *a priori* truth is what he calls Quine's historical argument, the argument familiar from the closing sections of "Two Dogmas of Empiricism". Quine's oft-cited words are these:

Any statement can be held true come what may if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. Even a statement very close to the periphery can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination or by amending certain statements of the kind called logical laws. Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision. Revision even of the logical law of excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics: and what difference is there in principle between such a shift and a shift whereby Kepler superceded Ptolemy, or Einstein Newton, or Darwin Aristotle?
Quine was explicitly arguing against the notion of analyticity, but Putnam suggests that the real target was the notion of *a priori* truth, where such are construed as truths which one cannot rationally give up. And he argued that the historical argument establishes that no truths fall into this category. For Quine argues, correctly Putnam thought, that (1) no legitimate principle of scientific method requires us to embrace any statement no matter what, (2) previous revolutions in science have forced us to give up principles we'd taken to be *a priori*, and (3) there is really no difference between the proposal to abandon classical logic in the face of quantum mechanics and the proposal to abandon Euclidean geometry in the face of the general theory of relativity. Putnam took this to be entirely right, and concluded that the history of science shows that we have no room for "*this* notion of an analytic statement, i.e., for the notion of an *a priori* or unrevisable statement".

II

But there is also the question of what to say of those who thought that certain statements, including the axioms of Euclidean geometry, were *a priori*. After all, while they turned out to be wrong about this, they don't seem to have behaved stupidly or irrationally in maintaining such claims. Putnam has some solace for them, viz. the notion of statements that are contextually *a priori*. The idea may be gleaned from the following passage:

If the special epistemological status traditionally accorded the logical laws cannot be explained by the ‘analyticity’ of those laws, that does not mean that we have to simply decide to accept it as inexplicable, however. I urged above that there are statements in science which can only be overthrown by a new theory — and not by observation alone. Such statements *have* a sort of ‘apriority’ prior to the invention of the new theory which challenges or replaces them: they are *contextually a priori*. ...Euclidean geometry was always revisable in the sense that no justifiable canon of scientific inquiry forbade the construction of an alternative geometry; but it was not always ‘empirical’ in the sense of having an alternative that good scientists could actually conceive. The special status of logical laws is similar, in my view; they are contextually *a priori* (or were, before quantum logic).