

Title: Re-visioning Reason, Revelation, and Rejection in John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious*

Author: Jonathan S. Marko

Date: 2012 Degree: Ph.D., Calvin Theological Seminary

Supervisor: Ronald J. Feenstra

External Reader: Alan P. F. Sell

Digital full text not available

Call Number: BV4070.C2842 2012 .M37

## **ABSTRACT**

Histories of philosophy that cover the rise of natural religion in England will inevitably move from John Locke to John Toland. The typical account portrays Locke as sincerely Christian and trying to balance the demands of faith and reason. His rationalistic epistemology in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Essay) even defends doctrines that are “above reason.” Toland is portrayed as a disciple of Locke whose modified Lockean epistemology in *Christianity Not Mysterious* (CNM) results in a subordination of revelation to reason and a dismissal of doctrines that are above reason. More detailed treatments note that CNM is the catalyst of the Locke-Stillingfleet debate, which begins when Bishop Stillingfleet observes CNM’s dependence on the Essay and then accuses Locke of paving the way for heresy.

This dissertation argues that the differences between Locke and Toland with respect to their epistemologies are not based upon or evidenced by their respective categorizations of propositions, but rather on Toland’s attempt at working out the implications of Locke’s epistemological principles in conjunction with Toland’s interpretations of certain biblical passages and certain theological preferences and presuppositions. Had Locke ordered propositions according to his preferred consideration of reason, his categorization of propositions would be the same as Toland’s. The resultant, substantial differences between Locke and Toland in their understandings of epistemology are connected with Toland’s definite or likely rejections of theological and philosophical positions that Locke does not dismiss: non-materialism of the soul, post-New Testament original revelation and miracles, and prior-to-the-close-of-the-New-Testament divine revelation requiring a supernaturally bestowed faculty and private miracles for believers.

This thesis is demonstrated through three main chapters. The first concentrates on the Locke-Stillingfleet debate. It explains certain foundational concepts of Locke’s and Toland’s epistemologies, Stillingfleet’s misunderstandings, and how the controversy and its reception leaves little resolved regarding a comparison of Locke’s and Toland’s respective epistemologies. The next chapter builds on the previous one and explains reason, faith, revelation, and their relationships in Locke. The last of the main chapters explores the same questions as the preceding one but with regard to Toland. It also delivers a point-for-point comparison with Locke.