

Jonathan S. Marko, *Measuring the Distance between Locke and Toland: Reason, Revelation, and Rejection During the Locke-Stillingfleet Debate*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017. X + 200 pp. \$26.00 (pbk & ebook). ISBN 9781498218955.

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Jonathan S. Marko's book investigates the relationship between Locke's views and those of John Toland, focusing on Locke's *Essay* and Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious*. It is well known that there are similarities between the epistemological views presented in those two works. Marko wants to go further than that, and argue that in many ways Toland and Locke agree. Yes, Toland's presentation is much less detailed than Locke's. And yes, there are some differences between them. But those differences arise from Toland rejecting philosophical or theological views Locke did not reject, such as whether there have been new original revelations or miracles since the time of the New Testament. On core epistemological issues, the two agree. Moreover, Marko argues, Toland and Locke even agree on one important issue of religious epistemology on which they seem at first to disagree, whether there are propositions that are 'above reason'.

Chapter 2 looks at some views about ideas and certainty, knowledge and faith in the work of both Locke and Toland, before turning to look at Stillingfleet's interpretation of their views. Though Marko's ultimate focus is on the relationship between the views of Locke and Toland, he frames his discussion in terms of Stillingfleet's reading and criticism of the two authors. Stillingfleet, Marko argues, managed to be right about one central thing — that Locke and Toland agreed on epistemological matters — despite being wrong about what both Locke and Toland actually thought.

Chapter 3 focuses on Locke's views on faith and reason. It works as a pair with chapter 4, which looks at Toland's views on those issues, and compares the two. One central issue in both chapters, and thus in the book as a whole, is what the two authors think about propositions that are allegedly 'above reason'. Marko argues that the two agree here.

That thesis, as Marko realizes, appears surprising. It seems, after all, that Locke thinks there are such propositions, but Toland denies there are any. Thus Locke in *Essay* IV.xvii.23 distinguishes three sorts of proposition: according to reason, above reason, and contrary to reason. Similarly, in *Essay* IV.xviii.7 Locke talks about things that are above reason, but "are, when revealed, *the proper Matter of Faith*". In both places Locke gives the resurrection of the dead as an example of something above reason. Toland appears to disagree: section III of *Christianity Now Mysterious* is titled "That there is nothing Mysterious, or above Reason in the Gospel".

Marko's first move here is to explore what Locke means by talking of things or propositions 'above reason'. He motivates this discussion by pointing out the ambiguities of 'reason' in the *Essay*, and arguing that, for Locke, 'above reason' propositions are only above reason in one sense, and not above reason in a different sense, which second sense is actually much more important for Locke.

In that second sense of 'reason', which Marko calls "proper reason" (62), "reason is the faculty or power employed by the mind to obtain demonstrative knowledge and probability and generally to assess situations and problems" (87). In this sense, Marko

thinks, there is not really a contrast between faith and reason for Locke. Moreover, there is nothing that is above reason in this sense for Locke. (Thus we can see him as agreeing with Toland.) But there is another sense of reason, which Marko calls “vulgar reason”. This sense appears near the end of IV.xvii, and is — Marko thinks — at work in IV.xviii, “Of Faith and Reason, and their Distinct Provinces”. In talking of such a contrast between faith and reason, Marko thinks, Locke “conceives of the faculty of reason operating in a diminished office” (62) and tries to accommodate a common way of speaking that does not really fit with his own “proper” view of reason.

Having made that distinction, Marko argues that Locke thinks that above reason propositions are above reason in the vulgar sense, but not above reason in the proper sense. Thus he argues that Locke, in IV.xvii.23, is describing as above reason propositions that are

those we would not have conceived of simply by the contemplation of the ideas that are naturally available to us. On the outside chance that we did conceive of such a true proposition and its ideas on our own we would have no basis to assent to it. In short, “Above Reason” is above vulgar reason (94).

There seems to be a difficulty here though, which arises from the order in which Locke presents various thoughts in the text of *Essay* IV.xvii. That chapter is “Of Reason”. According to IV.xvii.1, the word ‘reason’ “stands for a faculty in man, that faculty, whereby man is supposed to be distinguished from beasts”. Locke does not, however, devote IV.xvii to an explicit discussion of the ways he thinks human minds differ from those of beasts. Instead, the bulk of the chapter is devoted to explaining how we acquire intuitive and demonstrative knowledge (*Essay*, IV.xvii.2-22). That discussion includes Locke’s argument that syllogism is much less important here than some have thought (*Essay*, IV.xvii.4-8). Reason thus often appears — at least in this chapter — to be the faculty by which we acquire intuitive and demonstrative knowledge, through the perception of the relations between ideas and the construction of demonstrations. Locke here seems also (though without much explanation) to take reason to be responsible for our judgments of probability, though he allows that one could use ‘reason’ in either way, including or excluding matters of probability.¹

It’s at this point, in IV.xvii.23, that Locke distinguishes propositions as according to, above, or contrary to reason. That is, he appears to introduce this distinction with the discussion of reason in IV.xvii.1-22 in mind. This structure and context makes it likely that the above reason propositions are somehow above reason, in the technical sense of ‘reason’ Locke has been explaining. If so, they are not being introduced as above the vulgar reason that Marko says they are above.

Perhaps that seems too simple. After all, Locke in section 23 prefaces his distinction by saying “we may be able to make some guess at the distinction of things, into those that are above, according to, and contrary to reason”. That is, Locke is explaining other people’s terminology. And as Marko rightly notes, we do need to attend to the details of section 23. Might Locke not be using other people’s notion of reason here, in explaining their distinction? That’s a fair question, but it would be somewhat surprising if section 23 was introducing the view that above reason propositions are above what Marko calls vulgar reason, the reason that is contrasted with faith. That is because this vulgar sense of ‘reason’ is introduced by Locke at the start of section 24, as

¹ Quite how this all relates to sensitive knowledge is another question.

if it is a new thing that has not been discussed previously: “There is another use of the word *reason*, wherein it is opposed to faith”. This is, it seems to me, a key textual challenge for the details of Marko’s interpretation of Locke.² Thus, although Marko is clearly right to say that Locke uses ‘reason’ in multiple senses, and that we need to take care to figure out which sense is being used where, it is less clear that the sense of ‘reason’ in ‘above reason’ is the one that Marko has identified.

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² Marko notes something like this problem but does not dwell on it, saying that “one might think that he [Locke] is working with proper reason since this is prior to chapter xviii and its new consideration of reason, but this appears unlikely from what follows” (94).