

# John Locke's Practice of Argumentation

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**Abstract:** John Locke's writings on argumentative proof are brief and ambiguous. Passages in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* suggest but do not confirm that he privileged logical form and epistemological truth. Analysis of his arguments about religion and toleration demonstrates that, in practice, Locke took a dialectical approach to argumentation. Locke praised arguments that preserve an ideally rational dialogue and that invite a universally rational audience. Analysis of Locke's practice of argumentation further confirms that historically astute criticism, informed by the discipline of informal logic, can teach something about the Enlightenment ideal of "reason."

**Résumé:** Les écrits de John Locke sur la preuve argumentative sont brefs et ambigus. Des passages dans l'*Essai sur l'entendement humain* suggèrent mais ne confirment pas qu'il a privilégié la forme logique et la vérité épistémologique. Mais une analyse de ses arguments sur la religion et la tolérance démontre que Locke a adopté une approche dialectique envers l'argumentation. Locke louait les arguments qui préservent un dialogue idéalement rationnel et qui invitent un auditoire universellement rationnel. Une analyse de sa pratique de l'argumentation confirme en outre qu'une critique historiquement astucieuse, avisée par la discipline de la logique non formelle, peut nous enseigner quelque chose sur l'idéal de la «raison» dans le siècle des lumières.

## 1. Introduction

John Locke's contribution to Western logic remains ambiguous despite logicians' regular return to his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). In his great philosophical work, Locke admitted that the "greatest part of our knowledge depends upon deductions and intermediate ideas" (*WJL* 2.241).<sup>1</sup> But he also

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Locke's work will hereafter be presented parenthetically as *WJL* (*The Works of John Locke*) followed by the volume and page number. This reference, for instance, refers to volume 2, page 241.

derided formal logic, saying that God “has not been so sparing to men to make them barely two-legged creatures, and left it to Aristotle to make them rational.” Instead, he suggested that “the understanding is not taught to reason by these [scholastic] rules; it has a native faculty to perceive the coherence or incoherence of ideas” (*WJL* 2.244). Since he rejected tradition and proposed an innate rational faculty that requires neither theory nor pedagogy, Locke’s copious writings on reason remain hard to situate in any conversation about logic, be it formal or informal. As a result, C.L. Hamblin concluded that Locke offered a “classification of assent-producing devices,” but he did “not clearly condemn any of the argument-types” (1970, pp. 160-161). More recently, F. van Eemeren and R. Grootendorst credit Locke as “the ‘inventor’ of the category of so-called *ad-fallacies*.” Like Hamblin, they admit that Locke “does not explicitly state that he considers the *ad*-arguments to be fallacious” (1993, p. 49).

In this article, I suggest that an attention to Locke’s larger corpus of writings—especially his public arguments about religion and toleration—better reveals his contribution to informal logic. Specifically, I argue that: 1) Locke approached argumentation from two distinct perspectives, the first logical and the second dialectical; 2) Locke’s dialectical approach to argumentation is most conspicuous in his practices of argumentation and in his criticisms of how his opponents argued (i.e. as a theorist, Locke followed a logical approach to argumentation, but as a practitioner, he followed a dialectical approach); and 3) Locke’s dialectical approach to argumentation can teach us about the universal audience whom he addressed in his public arguments and the rational audience presumed by many Enlightenment intellectuals. I pursue this argument in three stages: first by recovering the logical approach to argumentation in Locke’s *Essay*; second by dialectically analyzing Locke’s contributions to three public controversies; and third, by rhetorically analyzing Locke’s universal audience of rational subjects. My analytical approach may better be characterized as “critical reasoning” rather than “informal logic,” for I emphasize specific instances, not abstract forms, of argumentation (Finocchiaro 1996/2005, p. 93). Nonetheless, like M. Finocchiaro, I imagine critical reasoning and informal logic as poles on a spectrum measuring degrees of generalization and specification. I therefore characterize the analysis below as “on

the side of” critical reasoning, though employing and informing the tools of informal logic (Finocchiaro 1996/2005, p. 94).

The conclusions to this analysis are twofold. First, we should rethink Locke’s place in the history of informal logic. He was not *just* a logical theorist. He was also an early and a distinctly Enlightenment-era dialectical practitioner of public argument. This conclusion follows a line of scholarship that D. Walton and A. Brinton heralded when they asked informal logicians to investigate their “historical antecedents” to gain a better understanding of a budding discipline (1997, p.1). Second, by dialectically and rhetorically analyzing Locke’s public arguments, I claim that, just as history can teach something to informal logicians, informal logicians can teach something about history. If Locke’s universal audience of rational subjects was not just *Locke’s* universal audience but also (some version of) the Enlightenment’s universally rational subject and if dialectical and rhetorical analysis of Locke’s public arguments reveals the nuances within, the origins of, or the rhetorical features calling forth this universal audience, then informal logic offers a unique perspective on Locke’s historical period. In sum, while attending principally to John Locke’s argumentative theory and practice, I aim to demonstrate that the informal logician can learn from the historian’s panoramic view of an era, while the historian can learn from the informal logician’s precise analysis of arguments.

Finally, a prefatory coda: Since this article proposes to make no groundbreaking contributions to informal logic, and since the Latinate terms common among present-day informal logicians do not line up with the Latinate terms favored by Locke, for consistency and clarity, when discussing Locke’s theory of argumentation and fallacy, I will hereafter use the Anglicized terms glossed here: appeal to evidence (a.k.a. *argumentum ad rem*); appeal to reason (a.k.a. *argumentum ad iudicium*; NB—Locke referred to both the *argumentum ad rem* and the *argumentum ad iudicium* as *argumenta ad iudicium*); appeal to an opponent’s premises and conclusions (a.k.a. among contemporary informal logicians as *argumentum ex concessis* but which Locke called *argumentum ad hominem*); appeal to guilt-by-association (a version of *argumentum ad hominem* theorized by Walton, 1998, p. 237); appeal to authority (which Locke called *argumentum ad verecundiam*); appeal to ignorance (which Locke called *argumentum ad ignorantiam*).

## 2. How Locke argued about argumentation

Though he wrote a great deal about reason, Locke wrote very little about argumentation. Fewer than three of the *Essay's* pages (subsections xix-xxiii.17.IV) explore five types of argumentative proof and their quality. In these paragraphs, Locke ranked appeals to what he called “shame-facedness, ignorance, or error,” above “proofs and arguments [...] arising from the nature of things themselves” (*WJL* 2.261). Most of the *Essay* is dedicated to the refinement of the superior proofs, thus justifying Locke's preference for rational deduction and careful observation. The *Essay* also lists formal criteria for identifying such appeals. Since his formal approach to reason is extensive and already well-known, I will not offer a detailed recapitulation. Suffice it to say that Locke favored appeals to deductive reason and to inductive evidence, while he denigrated everything else, offering specifically pejorative words about the appeals to ignorance and authority. The following table represents the *Essay's* hierarchy of appeals in a quickly digestible format:

Appeals that are valid because epistemologically superior	Appeal to Evidence (Induction)
	Appeal to Reason (Deduction)
Appeals that are invalid because epistemologically inferior	Appeal to the Speaker's Authority
	Appeal to the Audience's Ignorance

Table 1. Locke's logical approach to argumentative proof

Even though Locke rejected formal Aristotelian logic, his approach can be characterized as “logical” in C. Tindale's present-day sense of the term: The logical perspective on argumentation emphasizes validity, which is identified as a “matter of form” (Tindale 1999, p. 21). When voicing his epistemological concerns about appeals to authority and ignorance (as well as his adoration of appeals to evidence and reason) Locke emphasized the form of the argument. Seeing things this way strengthens a common association between Locke and English Royal-Society empiricism (Howell 1970, pp. 264-98; Walmsley 2003, pp. 15-17; Aarsleff 1982, p. 57). This perspective also obscures Locke's treatment of another appeal, one to which he afforded a scant descriptive sentence. After

several paragraphs on the appeals to ignorance and authority, Locke quickly mentioned “a third way [...] to press a man with consequences drawn from his own principles, or concessions” (*WJL* 2.260). His brief remarks admit two versions of the appeal to an opponent’s premises and conclusions. Locke may have been describing an appeal that marshals an opponent’s premises to support conclusions to which the opponent would object in order to “press” her into an opposite set of premises. Finocchiaro, following Hamblin, contrasts this appeal to commitment with an argumentative attack on someone’s character (1974/2005, p. 330). Walton points out that the appeal to a person’s commitments can lead to a personal attack, since pointing to an opponent’s inconsistent commitment undercuts his credibility. The opponent’s “apparent inconsistency of commitments shows he is dishonest, or somehow has revealed bad character,” so the appeal to an opponent’s premises and conclusions may lead to “a circumstantial *ad hominem*” (Walton 2004, p. 366). (NB: Both Finocchiaro and Walton present the appeal to an opponent’s commitment as the properly “Lockean” variety of the appeal to an opponent’s premises and conclusions.)

If Locke saw the appeal to a person’s premises or conclusions as a personal attack, then he should have censured it along with the appeals to ignorance and authority because all three venture far from his beloved domains of evidence and reason. If, however, Locke saw the appeal to an opponent’s premises and conclusions as a strictly logical effort to undercut an opponent’s arguments by rationally deriving new conclusions from her premises, then he should have adulated it as an epistemologically superior argument. Finocchiaro (quoting Locke) points out, this appeal “‘brings true instruction with it and advances us in our way of knowledge’ for conditional knowledge is still knowledge” (1974/2005, p. 333). Yet, in the *Essay*, Locke expressed no unequivocal evaluation of the appeal to an opponent’s premises or conclusions. As Hamblin remarked, Locke seemed to regard it as “less than perfect” (1970, p. 161).

The *Essay* furthermore leaves unanswered questions about Locke’s approach to argumentation. H. Johnstone has noted that Locke objected to appeals that aim “to ‘silence’ one’s opponent” (1996, p. 90). Writing in a similar vein, H. V. Hansen has claimed that Locke allowed and even used many appeals to pursue “dialectical success” without “having established a proposition as true” (1998, p. 58). According to Hansen, in

addition to his epistemological concerns about an appeal's ability to reveal objective truth, Locke also worried about argumentative forms that might stall "discourse occasioned by disagreement and aimed at rational resolution" (1998, p. 56). Since Locke's theoretical discussion of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions is spare to the point of ambiguity, in order understand his epistemological and dialectical concerns, we should look at the real dialogues to which he contributed. We should stop analyzing his arguments about argument, and we should start investigating his arguments about religion and toleration.

### 3. How Locke argued

When engaged in public controversies, Locke revealed strong dialectical anxieties about one argumentative form (the appeal to guilt-by-association) but no such anxieties about either the argument-from-commitment or the personal-attack varieties of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions. Alongside his condemnation of appeals to guilt-by-association, Locke's appeals to an opponent's premises and conclusions indicate that he favored arguments that promote the dialogic search for truth over arguments that interrupt such an exchange. Locke's dialectical practice of argumentation is therefore akin to that promoted by contemporary theorists (Hamblin 1970, 231-234; Walton 1995; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004). This argument can be compressed into the following table:

Appeals that are dialectically superior because they do not interrupt the rational and dialogic search for truth	Appeal to an Opponent's Premises and Conclusions (Argument-from-Commitment and Personal-Attack Varieties)
	Appeal to Evidence (Induction)
	Appeal to Reason (Deduction)
Appeals that are dialectically inferior because they do interrupt the rational and dialogic search for truth	Appeal to Guilt-by-Association
	Appeal to the Speaker's Authority
	Appeal to the Audience's Ignorance

Table 2. Locke's dialectical approach to argumentation

I will spend the lion's share of this analysis discussing the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions and the

appeal to guilt-by-association. Locke used or engaged both versions of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions. He condemned (in dialectical terms) the appeal to an opponent's guilt-by-association. From his behavior in polemical debate, I conclude that Locke esteemed the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions as dialectically permissible and disparaged the appeal to guilt-by-association as dialectically destructive. The analysis relies on three paradigms, each borrowed and slightly adapted from Walton:

- (1) The appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions (argument-from-commitment variety): a is committed to proposition A (generally, or in virtue of what s/he said in the past). Therefore, in this case, a should support A (Walton 2004, p. 362).
- (2) The appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions (personal-attack variety): a advocates argument  $\alpha$  which has proposition A as its conclusion. a has carried out an action or set of actions that imply that a is personally committed to not-A (the opposite of A). Therefore a is a bad (untrustworthy) person. Therefore a's argument  $\alpha$  should not be accepted (Walton 2004, p. 364).
- (3) The appeal to an opponent's guilt-by-association: a is a member of or is associated with group G which should be morally condemned. Therefore a is a bad person. Therefore a's argument  $\alpha$  should not be accepted (Walton 1998, p. 238).

While remaining attentive to the paradigms, my analysis mostly focuses on the natural-language presentation of certain arguments. Towards the end of this section, in order to demonstrate that Locke likely held other appeals to a dialectical standard, I return to the appeals to evidence, reason, authority, and ignorance.

Following Finocchiaro's prescription for historical analysis of argumentation, the paragraphs immediately to follow put history in the service of informal logic by detailing "the content and historical background of the text" in order to enrich the analysis (1987/2005, p. 38). Two aspects of the historical context especially shaped these debates: First, Locke was publicly deliberating two of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century's most volatile issues, religious heresy and toleration. Locke wrote the *Essay* and many of his other works in an ostensible effort to advance knowledge without running afoul of the Church of England. He had watched religious differences contribute to a civil war, a

bloody interregnum, a tense restoration, and a “glorious” revolution. In the company of Whig activists, Locke lobbied to end Anglican cruelties, including the persecution of minority sects, which was permitted by mid-century legislation, such as the Quaker Act of 1662.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his adult life, Locke approached these matters indirectly by writing philosophical manuscripts (all unpublished before the late 1680s) and directly by engaging in radical politics. For conspiring with Whig tolerationists and their nonconformist allies, he found himself under investigation, so he fled to Rotterdam (1682), where he wrote the most widely circulated (and anonymously published) draft of the *Letter Concerning Toleration* (*Epistola de Tolerantia* 1689). Shortly after returning to England (1688), he published the *Essay* under his name and *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) anonymously. Locke's writings on philosophy, religion, and toleration (the *Essay*, the *Reasonableness*, and the *Letter*) sparked extraordinary public ire. The *Reasonableness* incited the furor of John Edwards (1637-1716). Jonas Proast (1642-1710) objected to the *Letter*, and Bishop Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699) took issue with the *Essay*. All three men wrote pamphlets contesting Locke's work. Locke responded to their responses. Voltaire's (1733-34) comment about the Stillingfleet controversy pithily summarizes all three debates: Three theologians reasoned as “a rector and Locke argued as a philosopher” (2007, p. 43). Locke principally appealed to evidence and reason, occasionally indulging other proofs, such as the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions.

The second important aspect of the historical context: As anyone with cursory knowledge of Locke's work knows, he pilloried the “insignificant wrangler,” who argues minute points of definition, for such a man does not pursue “truth” (*WJL* 8.178). Yet Locke's excursions away from his beloved appeals to reason and evidence cannot entirely be attributed to a hypocritical and opportunistic effort at winning the argument while throwing aside every commitment to rational dialogue. Two points caution against concluding that Locke violated his own dialectical principles. First, in other argumentative matters, Locke practiced what he preached. In the *Essay*, he suggested using simple terms to reference simple ideas, and he himself defined abstract concepts, such as “liberty,” by using simple

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<sup>2</sup> See Marshall (2006) chapter. 3.



terms to reference simple ideas (*WJL* 1.226, 2.46). He also insisted that, in moments of potential referential ambiguity, the speaker should define terms clearly and carefully (*WJL* 2.48). In the debate with Stillingfleet, Locke defined his own terms (such as “nature” and “person”) with excruciating precision (*WJL* 3.330). Second, Locke regularly treated his opponents’ appeals to his own premises and conclusions as formally valid and dialectically permissible, though ultimately untrue. Locke’s effort to engage these arguments suggests that he harbored no misgivings about the appeal. The appeal to an opponent’s premises and conclusions does, after all, appeal to reason (though not always to the best reason). Furthermore, even though the personal-attack variety may be epistemologically inferior, Locke accepted it as dialectically sound, for such an appeal does not silence the interlocutor. His continual rejoinders indicate that Locke did not feel silenced when his opponents argued from his own premises and conclusions, even when they did so to attack his character. Furthermore Locke himself attacked his opponents’ credibility by drawing undesirable conclusions from their premises. Locke even attacked his opponents’ character by pointing to their inconsistent commitments. However, when Locke’s opponents appealed to his guilt-by-association—trying to shame Locke by lumping him together with unsavory heretics and free-thinkers—he did not respond so favorably.

The Locke-Edwards debate offers a promising point of entry, for John Edwards appealed to Locke’s premises and conclusions in order to accuse him of Socinianism (a belief system denying the coeval existence of three unique figures in the Godhead). Like many 17th-century pamphleteers, Edwards regularly drew anti-Trinitarian (and therefore heretical) conclusions based on premises asserted in ostensibly Trinitarian works. This argumentative strategy was not uncommon in late 17<sup>th</sup>-century debates about religion.<sup>3</sup> Scientific debates of the era similarly featured this argumentative tack. In his analysis of Galileo’s arguments from commitment, Finocchiaro concludes that deriving an “alternative conclusion” from an opponent’s premises or conclusions is an especially effective—if not the most effective—manner of critical reasoning (1994/2005, pp.

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bayle, himself a proponent of religious toleration, noticed appeals to Ralph Cudworth’s premises and conclusions, saying, “No one is unaware that in disputes, one objects to one’s adversaries as many inopportune consequences as one can from their principles” (qtd. in Marshall 2006, p. 258).

80-3). But Edwards added to the strategy. He argued that Locke's presumptions lead to heretical ideas. Then, he used this claim to associate Locke with specific heretical sects. For instance, in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Several Causes and Occasions of Atheism*, Edwards contended that Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* promoted Unitarian (anti-Trinitarian) ideas and therefore deserved to be grouped among other heretical writings: "this Gentleman and his fellows are resolved to be *Unitarians*; they are for *One Article of Faith*, as well as *One Person in the Godhead*" (1695, p. 121). By drawing heretical conclusions from Locke's assertions, Edwards also threw his opponent into a motley crowd including Christians (Socinians), deists (quasi-Christians whose beliefs may have derived *some* support from Socinian theology), and radical secularists (whose beliefs contradicted both Locke's own seemingly latitudinarian Christianity and Socinian dogma).

Edwards's charge appears less-than-certain, but not completely unfounded. Locke had charted a perilous middle course between systematic, mathematical reasoning (often allied with Cartesian and Spinozistic secularism) and Christianity (often the province of counter-Enlightenment religious conservatives) (Israel 2006, pp. 115-134). Even more worrisome, in his *Letter*, Locke echoed 16th- and 17th-century Anabaptist, Quaker, and anti-Trinitarian defenses of toleration, which he had studied (Marshall 2006, p. 319 & p. 494). John Edwards could say that Locke cited Scripture like a Socinian, because Locke's writing has an exoteric quality (insofar as it appears benignly Anglican though arguably latitudinarian) and an esoteric quality (insofar as it features sources, repeats claims, and adulates "reason" in a seemingly anti-Trinitarian fashion). To a 17<sup>th</sup>-century theologian, well-versed in the controversies of the day, Locke's writing "was capable of trinitarian as well as unitarian explication" (Marshall 2000, p. 174).

Locke responded to Edwards's allegations in two separate pamphlets, *A Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and *A Second Vindication* (1697). Edwards responded to Locke's responses in *Socinianism Unmask'd* (1696). This pamphlet war also included several other participants, such as Samuel Bold, an Anglican clergyman and friend to Locke, who authored, among other works, *Some Passages on the Reasonableness of Christianity &c. and its Vindication* (1697). The debate is prolix and abstruse. Momentarily ignoring the content allows attention to how

Locke's interlocutors argued and how he responded. Such an attention to argumentative form should begin by separating Edwards's appeals to Locke's premises and conclusions from his appeal to Locke's guilt-by-association.

Though he disagreed with Edwards's appeals to his own premises and conclusions, Locke did not dismiss them as out of bounds. Even when Edwards extended the argument into an attack on Locke's credibility, Locke often responded in good faith. He either rebutted Edwards's evidence or his conclusion. In the *Vindication*, for instance, while revisiting salient points, Locke continually noted that Edwards imposed false motives upon him. Edwards, for instance, had accused Locke of omitting discussion of the Pauline epistles because these texts reveal fundamental articles of Christian faith that Locke would deny. Based on this omission, Edwards accused Locke of a Socinian Biblical exegesis, a reading that selectively attends to the Gospels in order to arrive at a minimal catechism (1695, pp. 108-111). (Such a minimal catechism was typical among Continental tolerationists, including Socinians, Arminians, and Spiritualists [Zagorin 2003, pp. 84-85, p. 140, & pp. 176-177].) Based on the inconsistency between Locke's disavowal of anti-Trinitarianism and Locke's allegedly Socinian exegesis, Edwards claimed that Locke was untrustworthy. Locke rejoined that Edwards should not presume to see "so deeply into my heart." Edwards should not have concluded that a minimal exegesis indicates a heretical theology (*WJL* 6.168). Locke said he left out the epistles, not because of a sectarian allegiance, but because these parts of the New Testament offer at best a muddled presentation of fundamental Christian tenets. He said, "those fundamental articles were in those epistles promiscuously, and without distinction, mixed with other truths" (*WJL* 6.167). In essence, Locke agreed that Edwards's evidence was sound, but he rebutted the inference.

We can witness a similar pattern in the debate with Bishop Stillingfleet, a high-church Anglican who contended that Locke's *Essay* set the groundwork for a range of heresies, anti-Trinitarianism among them. The context for the Stillingfleet debate differs somewhat from the context for the Edwards debate. To begin with, Stillingfleet was Locke's social superior. Also, Stillingfleet had criticized a work publicly associated with Locke. Even more worrisome, Stillingfleet was a leader in the established national church, siding theologically with the empowered clergy under King William. Finally, a conviction of heresy could bring dire consequences. Despite these historical

differences, some notable argumentative similarities remain. Stillingfleet, like Edwards, drew heretical conclusions from Locke's premises. Stillingfleet qualified and tempered more than Edwards. Rather than calling Locke a Socinian, Stillingfleet insisted that Locke's *Essay* presents a series of notions that lead to heresy (including a manner of investigation and some presuppositions about substance). In his *Discourse in Vindication of the Trinity*, Stillingfleet said that Locke's "method of *true Reasoning*" would "make us reject Doctrines of Faith, because we do not comprehend them" (1697a, p. 267). Since he did not venture into the territory of a personal attack, Stillingfleet's appeal is an argument from commitment. Ostensibly and initially, Stillingfleet aimed to convince Locke to abandon his "method of true Reasoning" by demonstrating that this commitment leads to heresy.

Locke rebutted, saying that Stillingfleet's skeptical conclusions lack warrant: "If by the way of ideas [...] a man cannot come to clear and distinct apprehensions concerning nature and person [...] it will follow thence that he is a mistaken philosopher: but it will not follow from thence, that he is not an orthodox Christian" (*WJL* 3.68). Stillingfleet's subsequent pamphlet expanded his appeal to Locke's premises and conclusions to support the claim that Locke's *Essay* leads to heresy. For instance, Stillingfleet maintained that Locke's way of ideas ties consciousness to a material (mortal) substance, which leads people to disbelieve in resurrection. Moreover, Locke's ideas about "nature" and "person" lead to anti-Trinitarianism (1697b, pp. 32-44 & 77-89). Stillingfleet's terminological arguments refuse brief summary, though he attempted to encapsulate the position when stating, "the true Reason of Identity in Man is the vital Union of Soul and Body" (1698, p. 171). (Unpacking this claim required 200 pages of Stillingfleet's *The Bishop of Worcester's Second Answer to Mr. Locke's Second Letter* [1698]. Recent scholarly explication dedicates even more pages to Stillingfleet's argument [Stewart, 2000].) Important for present purposes is that Stillingfleet took Locke's premises and used them to support heretical notions, thus arguing that Locke's work is heretical. Locke's *Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter* (1697) is a monumental effort at rebutting Stillingfleet's appeal to Locke's premises and conclusions. In essence, Locke claimed that Stillingfleet's evidence—the passages that Stillingfleet chose from the *Essay*—was not

sound. He wrote, “My lord, the words you bring out of my book are so often different from those I read in the places which you refer to, that I am sometimes ready to think, you have got some strange copy of it” (*WJL* 3.407-408).

If analysis of the Edwards and the Stillingfleet debates remains insufficient to demonstrate that Locke allowed (if not approved of) both varieties of the appeal to an opponent’s premises and conclusions, then analysis of the Proast debate will decidedly tip the scales. At issue in the Proast debate was not anti-Trinitarianism but the magistrate’s use of force to encourage religious conversion. Responding to Locke’s first *Letter Concerning Toleration*, Proast contended that some amount of public force should lead people to consider true (Anglican) religion. As Proast put it, “outward Force is neither *useless* or *needless* for the bringing Men to do, what the saving of their souls may require of them” (1690, p. 12). Furthermore, the magistrate’s authority “is not an Authority to *compel anyone to his Religion*, but onely an Authority to procure all his Subjects the means of Discovering the Way of Salvation” (Proast 1690, p. 21). Unwaveringly committed to his principles of public argument, Locke demanded clearly defined terms. Just as he had defined his terms when arguing with Stillingfleet in the *Second Letter Concerning Toleration* (1690), Locke asked Proast to define “force” (*WJL* 5.111). Proast replied in his *Third Letter Concerning Toleration* (1691) that by “force,” he meant “having sufficient means of Instruction in the true Religion provided for them, [who] do yet refuse to embrace it” (1691, p. 23). In his own *Third Letter for Toleration* (1692), Locke further pressed Proast to define “force” in greater particularity, since past uses of force had ranged from the innocuous to the cruel (*WJL* 5.287-288). In his *Second Letter*, Proast assured that he only intended “moderate Penalties” for those refusing to participate in Anglican ceremonies (1704, p. 4).

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>An example of Proast's argument from Locke's commitment:</b></p> <p><u>Natural Language:</u> "you [Locke] say [supposing that the national Anglican religion in England is the only rational and true religion] <i>Which being a Supposition equally unavoidable, and equally just in other Countries [...] will in other places exclude Toleration and thereby hinder Truth from the means of propagating itself.</i> How, Sir? Is this Supposition <i>equally unavoidable; and equally just in other Countries</i>, where false Religions are the National Religion? [...] If so, then I fear it will be equally <i>true</i> too, and equally rational [...] I hope, when you have thought a little more of the matter, you will be so far from asserting that the Supposition, <i>that the National Religion is the onely true Religion</i>, is in all Countries <i>equally unavoidable, and equally just</i>, that you will acknowledge that it cannot be <i>at all unavoidable, or just</i>, where any false Religion is the National Religion" (1691, pp. 11-12).</p> <p><u>Formal Paraphrase:</u> Locke has stated a commitment to the belief that all countries unavoidably and justly assume that the national religion is the true religion. Locke is also committed to the belief that the Anglican faith is the only rational and true religion. Locke's second commitment leads to the conclusion that wherever the national religion is false, the supposition that this religion is true must both be avoidable and unjust.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>An example of Edwards's appeal to Locke's inconsistent commitment which then grounds an appeal to Locke's guilt-by-association:</b></p> <p><u>Natural Language:</u> "It is true, he [Locke] tells us that <i>he never read the Socinian Writers</i>, p. 22 [a reference to a passage in Locke's pamphlet] but we know his Shuffling is such that there is no depending on his word. But suppose he did not <i>read</i> those Authors, yet he doth not deny that he hath <i>Convers'd</i> with some of them, and hath heard their Notions and Arguments: and this indeed he intimates to us when he lets us know that the <i>generality of Divines he more converses with</i> are not <i>Racovians</i>, p. 22. which intimates that there are some <i>Particular Divines he less converses with</i> that are of another way. What shall we say? The Gentleman is a <i>Racovian</i>, and yet pretends he doth not know it. So we must number him among the <i>Ignoramus-Socinians</i> (as they tell us in their late Papers of <i>Ignoramus Trinitarians</i>) which is one sort of those folks it seems" (1696, pp. 92-93).</p> <p><u>Formal Paraphrase:</u> <i>Appeal to Locke's Inconsistent Commitment</i>—Locke claims he does not entertain Socinian ideas. Locke admits that he converses with theologians who are not Trinitarians. Therefore Locke entertains Socinianism (perhaps as an "Ignoramus-Socinian"). Therefore Locke is a bad (untrustworthy) person. <i>Appeal to Locke's Guilt-by-Association, Premised upon the Appeal to his Commitment</i>—Locke associates with anti-Trinitarian heretics. Therefore Locke is a bad person (a Socinian heretic). Therefore Locke's beliefs about minimal Christian doctrine (as well as his denial of Racovian or Socinian sympathies) should not be accepted.</p>
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Table 3. A comparison of Proast's single argument-from-commitment and Edwards's argument, which ends with an appeal to Locke's guilt-by-association

The Proast debate lasted twelve years and provided grist for an intellectual mill yielding seven substantial works. Locke's *Fourth Letter*, which remained unpublished when he died (1704), ends with one of his most memorable arguments from Proast's commitment: "You tell us, it is by the law of nature magistrates are obliged to promote the true religion by force. It must be owned, that if this be an obligation of the law of nature, very few magistrates overlook it; so forward are they to promote that religion by force which they take to be true. This being the case, I beseech you tell me what was the Huaina Capac, emperor of Peru, obliged to do? Who being persuaded of his duty to promote the true religion, was not yet within distance of knowing or so much as hearing of the christian religion, which really is the true [...] Was he to promote the true religion by force? That he neither did nor could know any thing of; so that was morally impossible for him to do. Was he to sit still in the neglect of his duty incumbent on him? That is in effect to suppose it a duty and no duty at the same time" (*WJL* 6.573-574). The aforementioned passage is perhaps the most resplendent, though not the only, example of Locke drawing unsavory conclusions from Proast's commitments in order to press his opponent into a different position.<sup>4</sup> And Proast happily

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<sup>4</sup> As further evidence that Locke regularly appealed to Proast's premises and conclusions, consider the following two examples: (1) "[I]f you [Proast] should propose that all those who are ignorant, careless, and negligent in examining, should be punished, you would have little to say in this question of toleration. For if the laws of the state were made, as they ought to be, equal to all the subjects without distinction of men of different professions in religion; and the faults to be amended by punishments, were impartially punished, in all who are guilty of them; this would immediately produce a perfect toleration, or show the uselessness of force in matters of religion" (*WJL* 5.131-2). Locke's natural language can be paraphrased to show how it fits the argument-from-commitment paradigm: Proast is committed to having everyone thoroughly examine his/her religious beliefs, yet Proast would only have the magistrate require such examination of dissenters (not Anglicans), which contradicts his commitment to having everyone (without exception) thoroughly examine his/her religious beliefs. (2) "[I]f you [Proast] allow such a toleration useful in other countries, you must find something very peculiar in the air, that must make it less useful to truth in England; and it will savour of much partiality, and be too absurd, I fear, for you to own, that toleration will be advantageous to true religion all the world over, except only in this island" (*WJL* 5.65). Locke's natural language: Proast is committed to toleration outside of England to allow for the free discussion and dissemination of the true (Anglican) religion, yet Proast is also committed to using force to promote the true (Anglican) religion in England, which contradicts Proast's commitment to free discussion and dissemination of true (Anglican) religion.

responded with similar arguments from Locke's commitments. Locke and Proast wrangled for over a decade, drawing conclusions based on the other's commitments, all in an effort to advance the dialectical search for truth. As Table 3 (above) demonstrates, Proast's practice of argumentation differs most starkly from that of Edwards and Stillingfleet in one important regard. Proast (and Locke) drew inferences premised upon their opponents' conclusions. Stillingfleet and Edwards used the appeal to Locke's premises and conclusions to ground a follow-up appeal to Locke's guilt-by-association.

Locke considered and rebutted Proast's argument, showing that he held no dialectical reservations about the argument-from-commitment variety of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions. But what about the personal-attack variety? Would Locke allow or employ an appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions that leads to an attack on that person's character? As demonstrated above, Locke regularly allowed and happily replied to Edwards's personal-attack arguments based upon Locke's alleged inconsistent commitments. Additionally, Locke himself pointed to Proast's inconsistent commitment to allege that Proast was not trustworthy and to further conclude that Proast's arguments about moderate "force" should not be accepted. Table 4 (below) offers one example of an argument to which Locke repeatedly returned:



<b>Formal paraphrase of Locke's personal attack based on Proast's inconsistent commitment:</b>	<b>Locke's natural language:</b>
<p>Proast is committed to not persecuting religious dissenters, based on what he has written in previous pamphlets. Proast has advocated a policy that will surely lead to the persecution of dissenters. Therefore Proast is an untrustworthy man who hides his desire to persecute dissenters. Therefore the promise that use of "force" will not lead to persecution of dissenters cannot be accepted.</p>	<p>"You talk much 'of considering and not considering as one ought; of embracing and rejecting the true religion,' and abundance more to this purpose; which all, however very good and savoury words, that look very well, when you come to the application of force to procure that end expressed in them, amount to no more but conformity and non-conformity. If you see not this, I pity you [...] Since none are by your scheme to be punished, but those who do not conform to the national religion, dissenters, I think, is the proper name to call them by; and I can see no reason you have to boggle at it, unless your opinion has something in it you are unwilling should be spoke out, and called by its right name: but whether you like it or no, persecution and persecution of dissenters, are the names that belong to it as it stands now" (<i>WJL</i> 5.245-6)</p>

Table 4. Locke's personal attack premised on an appeal to Proast's premises

Locke's willingness to entertain Proast's argument from his own commitments and his willingness to attack Proast's character based on Proast's inconsistent commitments indicate that Locke harbored no dialectical misgivings about this variety of the appeal.

But an important distinction must be drawn between Locke's appeal to Proast's premises and conclusions and Edwards's appeal to Locke's guilt-by-association. Locke insinuated that Jonas Proast was truly motivated by a disdain for dissenters and not a desire to promote true religion or its critical investigation (*WJL* 5.245-246). But he never associated Proast with any actual party, sect, or philosophy. He never accused Proast of being a high-flying Anglican clergyman, though he certainly was. He never implied that Proast supported the Blasphemy Act of 1698, though he probably did. He never placed Proast in the company of those who opposed late 17th-century toleration for orthodox Protestant dissenters, though he likely would. Faced with a clear opportunity to tar Proast with guilt-by-association, Locke declined. And Proast replied in kind, never insinuating that Locke knew and sympathized with Unitarians and Socinians, though he likely did (Marshall 2000,

pp. 136-138). Never placing Locke in the company of Whig tolerationists, though he was. Never claiming that Locke had argued for a version of toleration too radical for contemporary Whigs, though he had (Ashcraft 1986, pp. 500-501). When, on one occasion, Proast invited Locke to claim a specific sect or party, Locke declined, saying that he represented those who follow "the light of their own consciences" (*WJL* 5.544). In sum, Locke used both varieties of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions. And when his opponents turned either variety of this appeal against him, Locke rebutted without acrimony.

Locke responded quite differently to Edwards's and Stillingfleet's yoking of the argument-from-commitment to guilt-by-association. Based upon Locke's own premises, his admissions, and his style of writing, Edwards associated him with various heretical sects: Racovians, Socinians, "Turks," and Unitarians. He said, for instance, that Locke "*follows the Steps of the Racovians, who submit the greatest Mysteries to the judgment of the Vulgar*" (1696, p. 21). Locke had asserted that "faith and repentance, i.e. believing Jesus to be the Messiah, and a good life, are the indispensable conditions of the new covenant, to be performed by all those who would obtain eternal life" (*WJL* 6.105). Edwards presented Locke's doctrinal minimalism as evidence of a "*Lank Faith*" like "*the Faith of a Turk*" (1696, p. 53). (He averred that Socinianism was rampant in Eastern Europe and Turkey.)

Paraphrasing, Edwards's (1696, pp. 92-93) natural language better demonstrates how his arguments fit the guilt-by-association paradigm: Locke is a Socinian or is associated with Socinians, who should be morally condemned because they are anti-Trinitarian heretics. Therefore Locke is a bad person (a heretic). Therefore Locke's beliefs about minimal Christian doctrine (as well as his denial of Racovian or Socinian sympathies) should not be accepted. Locke declared that he would prefer to address the evidence at hand, yet he must first "wipe off the dirt he [Edwards] has thrown upon me." Rather than addressing Edwards's evidence or the conclusions drawn therefrom, Locke accused Edwards of arguing out of bounds. He contended that Edwards should focus on "the most weighty and important points that can come into question"; Edwards should not turn this debate "into a mere quarrel against the author" (*WJL* 6.183). At several points in the *Second Vindication*, Locke repeated the same objection (*WJL* 6.197, 6.201, 6.211, 6.262-

263): Guilt-by-association arguments interrupt the dialogic search for truth by attempting to shame and thereby silence the opponent.

Though Stillingfleet's assertions lack Edwards's asperity, many remain guilt-by-association arguments. Stillingfleet's tactic transformed from an appeal to Locke's commitment into a guilt-by-association argument when Stillingfleet stopped using these claims to pressure Locke into different premises and he began to assert them as evidence that Locke kept bad company. Stillingfleet associated Locke with others whose skeptical philosophies led them to allegedly similar heresy, including René Descartes whose philosophy was attacked by numerous 17th-century defenders of traditional Christianity, both in England and on the Continent. Locke objected to Stillingfleet's initial practice of associating him with a plural "they," a group of skeptics who "expose a doctrine relating to the divine essence, because they cannot comprehend the manner of it" (*WJL* 3.45). In *The Bishop of Worcester's Answer to Mr. Locke's Letter*, Stillingfleet expanded his guilt-by-association argument, tying Locke to Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza (1697b, pp. 55-56 & p. 79). Associating Locke with Hobbes was a bothersome jab. Associating Locke with Spinoza was a full-force roundhouse. In the public eye, Hobbes was arguably secularist; Spinoza, openly atheist (Israel 2001, pp. 29-58). According to Stillingfleet, "my joyning *your words with another's Application*" was perfectly legitimate since an infidel had cited Locke's way of ideas when questioning Christian doctrine (1697b, p. 35). The question, according to Stillingfleet, should be "whether [...Locke's] general expression had not given [...] too much occasion" for the heretical conclusion (1697b, p. 40). The infidel referenced, the individual who had extrapolated heretical ideas from Locke's *Essay*, was none other than John Toland, whose *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) begins with Lockean assertions about the "agreement and disagreement of ideas." Based on such principles, Toland claimed to have developed a sense of reason that undercuts various Anglican doctrines (1696, pp. 10-14). Toland never directly cited Locke, a point that Locke himself noted in his *Reply to the Bishop of Worcester's Answer* (1698) (*WJL* 3.114-115). Nevertheless, freethinkers often referred to Locke's *Essay*, associating him in the public mind with men like Toland (Rivers 2000, p. 26). For these reasons, in his *Second Answer*, Stillingfleet could believably state that Toland "saw into the true consequence" of Locke's work (1698, p. 21). Locke rebuked

Stillingfleet's argument not for its invocation of his ideas but for its attempt to associate him with known heretics. The appeal to Locke's premises and conclusions was fine, the appeal to Locke's guilt-by-association, unforgivable.

The quality of Locke's objection to these guilt-by-association arguments is most important. He refused to engage the evidence or the inference. Instead, Locke accused both Edwards and Stillingfleet of trying to win the argument while ruining the dialogue. He reminded Edwards of their dialogic purpose: "The creed-maker [Edwards] spends above four pages of his Reflections, in a great stir who is the author of those animadversions he is reflecting on. To which I tell him, it matters not to a lover of truth, or to a confuter of errors, who was the author; but what they contain. He who makes such a deal to do about that which is nothing to the question, shows he has but little mind to the argument; that his hopes are more in the recommendation of names, and prejudice of parties, than in the strength of truth" (*WJL* 6.402). He was even more explicit with Stillingfleet, saying, "My lord, when you did me the honour to answer my first letter [...] you were pleased to insert into it direct accusations against my book; which looked as if you had a mind to enter into a direct controversy with me. This condescension in your lordship has made me think myself under the protection of the laws of controversy, which allow a free examining and showing the weakness of the reasons brought by the other side, without any offense" (*WJL* 3.249). As a practitioner of argumentation, Locke used and responded to both varieties of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions, while he denounced the appeal to an opponent's guilt-by-association, for the former allows rational dialogue in search of truth, and the latter interrupts such an exchange.

#### **4. How Locke argued about argumentation, a reconsideration**

The division between appeals that allow and appeals that hinder rational dialogue can be extended to the other arguments that Locke mentioned in the *Essay*. He took an identifiably dialectical approach to the appeals to authority and to ignorance (Coleman 1995, p. 374; Hansen 1998, pp. 57-58). These appeals and others that Locke derided aim to silence the opponent (Johnstone 1996, p. 90; Coleman 1995, p. 374). But Locke

would not say that all the *ad* arguments silence the opponent and stall dialogue, for he believed that the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions (which he called *argumentum ad hominem*) only silences dialogue when followed by an appeal to the opponent's guilt-by-association. If we accept that Locke favored rational dialogue both for the epistemological reasons presented in the *Essay* and for the dialectical reasons presented in his public arguments, then his hierarchy of appeal becomes much more nuanced:

Appeals that are epistemologically and dialectically superior because they lead to truth and do not stall the dialectical search for truth	Appeal to Evidence (Induction)
	Appeal to Reason (Deduction)
Appeals that are epistemologically questionable because they may not lead to truth but dialectically permissible because they do not stall the dialectical search for truth	Appeal to an Opponent's Premises and Conclusions
Appeals that are epistemologically inferior and dialectically impermissible because they do not lead to truth, and they stall the dialectical search for truth	Appeal to Guilt-by-Association
	Appeal to the Speaker's Authority
	Appeal to the Audience's Ignorance

Table 5. Locke's hierarchy of appeals

Table 5 encapsulates this article's principal contribution to our understanding of John Locke's practice of argumentation. This revised view leaves open the question of whether both varieties of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions are epistemologically sound. Finocchiaro has claimed that Locke would find the argument-from-commitment variety epistemologically sound (1974/2005, p. 333); building on his claim, we might further conclude that Locke would find epistemological flaws in the personal-attack variety of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions. These conclusions add to Hamblin's contention that Locke accepted the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions as "less than perfect" (1970, p. 161) and Johnstone's belief that Locke indulged the appeal as "an instrument of polemics" (1996, p. 92). My analysis of Locke's argumentative practice suggests that Locke would find no flaw in the argument-from-commitment variety of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions, but he would find some epistemological shortcomings in the appeal's personal-attack variety. Needless

to say, some of these conclusions are speculative, for Locke never parsed the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions so carefully, nor did he meticulously theorize the difference between an epistemologically and a dialectically flawed argument.

Without speculation, we can conclude that, in practical argumentation, Locke favored arguments that do not interrupt rational dialogue, and this conclusion leads to another important question: Why did Locke favor rational dialogue? If he were strictly invested in the scientific search for truth, then his epistemological reasons for favoring some proofs and denigrating others would be sufficient. His investment in scientific investigation explains some of his reservations about the appeals to ignorance, to authority, and to guilt-by-association. But Locke's investment in science (and the rational dialogue it might require) does not explain why he engaged and used appeals to his (opponents') premises and conclusions. If he were strictly invested in scientific truth and the rational dialogue leading thereto—if he believed as Hansen has claimed, that “dialectics is no substitute for science” (1998, p. 58)—then he would toss out both varieties of the appeal to an opponent's premises and conclusions along with the remaining epistemologically flawed proofs. Yet he did no such thing. In the section to follow, I argue that Locke's investment in rational dialogue had less to do with his epistemological commitment to empirical science and more to do with his political commitment to open debate among equal citizens in a free civil society. Understanding Locke's political commitment requires a rhetorical approach to his arguments and his audience.

### **5. Locke's audience: A rhetorical analysis of his practice and his theory of argumentation**

My analysis of Locke's argumentative practice contributes to a line of historical work that Finocchiaro has described as “historical.” It therefore leads to some of Finocchiaro's conclusions. Particularly, I find that “argumentation normally consists of critical arguments”; and furthermore, “critical arguments are more basic than constructive ones” (1987/2005, pp. 43-4). In Locke's case, the critical arguments that he made against his opponents' claims were often more interesting and revealing than the constructive arguments that he made about

reason, exegesis, or civil society. Like Finocchiaro, I find that historical investigation can teach something about informal logic. But I also maintain that informal logic can teach something about history.

In this concluding section, I rely on Tindale's distinctions among the logical, dialectical, and rhetorical perspectives on argumentation. As mentioned above, the logical perspective emphasizes validity, which is identified as a "matter of form" (Tindale 1999, p. 21). The "dialectical" perspective emphasizes a "formal dialectic" (an ideal manner of exchange) and then "develops rules to govern philosophical disputation" (Tindale 1999, p. 43). Locke's attitude towards appeals to an opponent's premises and conclusions as well as his denunciation of appeals to an opponent's guilt-by-association both derive from his dedication to an ideal rational dialogue. While he may not have systematically described or imagined this "formal dialectic"—certainly not to the degree found in present-day pragma-dialectics—he was nonetheless committed to some (admittedly vague) ideal, an argumentative practice governed by what he called the "laws of controversy" (*WJL* 3.249). Finally, the rhetorical perspective "has as its primary concern the attempt by an arguer to gain or increase the adherence of an audience for a thesis" (Tindale 1999, p. 69). It would be fatuous in the extreme to argue that Locke was a rhetorical theorist of argumentation. He was famously hostile to rhetoric, saying that such arts aim to "insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment" (*WJL* 2.41). But a rhetorical analysis of Locke's practice of argumentation can teach us much about the man and about his ideal of rational dialogue.

Like many in his era, Locke believed in the "rational-critical" ideal of public debate that J. Habermas placed at the core of liberal civil society, a free "*public competition of private arguments*" that replaces the absolute sovereign's will with the citizens' deliberate consensus. As Habermas said, rational-critical debate "*was supposed to transform voluntas into a ratio*" (1989, p. 83). When Locke appealed to evidence and to reason (and even to his opponents' premises and conclusions), he addressed an ideally rational audience. In the first *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), he explained that only "light and evidence" can "work a change in men's opinions," repeating the *Essay's* inductive and deductive commitments, but this time claiming that proper induction and deduction respect the listener's rational capacity (*WJL* 5.12). R. Ashcraft has noted that Locke put sovereignty in the people's collective hands

because he believed that “every individual [is] capable of employing his or her reason with sufficient industry to gain a knowledge of God and their moral duties” (1987, p. 379). Locke believed in a universally rational person (1987, p. 392-4). Locke conceived every person as “an intelligent free agent capable of law” (Ashcraft 1987, 88), and he imagined any action that interrupts the rational faculty as a violation of right.

In his public arguments about religion and toleration, Locke appealed to a “universal audience,” showing that, like other rhetorical theorists of argumentation, he was “concerned not just with the adherence of minds to the claims put forward but also the improvement of those minds” (Tindale 1999, p. 17). Locke not only wanted to speak to the universal rational subject. He also wanted to call that subject into being. When considering this universal audience, Locke’s discussion of the appeals to ignorance and authority (in the *Essay*) takes on a new meaning. Locke said that the disputant appealing to authority would “style it impudence in any one who shall stand out against them.” Appealing to ignorance will similarly “force” disputants “to submit their judgments, and receive the opinion in debate” (*WJL* 2.260). Locke’s terminology here is especially telling, for in his pamphlets on toleration he often objected to using “force” to persuade, saying at one point, “men out of the right are [...] apter to use force than others” (*WJL* 5.76). Only those stultifying an innate rational capacity will appeal to ignorance or authority. Those who want to improve the audience, those who want to invite us to exercise reason and to become universally rational subjects, those rationally ameliorative disputants should avoid such appeals, not only for their epistemological failings but also for their dialectical shortcomings.

A historically grounded understanding of Locke’s universal audience should begin by remembering the words of arch-rhetorical theorists C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca: “Everyone constitutes the universal audience from what he knows of his fellow men, in such a way as to transcend the few oppositions he is aware of” (1969, p. 33). Locke’s universal audience—his ideally rational subject deliberating freely in civil society—likely arose out of his exposure to specific people. To begin with, Locke participated in a society of intellectuals that was largely sustained through epistolary correspondence, secular societies, and official publications. Based on his exposure to such philosophes, he imagined himself as a member of an international community dedicated to the pursuit of truth



through polite conversation and constructive criticism (Marshall 2006, pp. 508-518). He furthermore knew and interacted with latitudinarian Anglicans who favored “rational” over “traditional” approaches to theology. As archetypes of such people, consider the early 17th-century collection of intellectuals often referred to as the “Great Tew Circle,” including William Chillingworth, John Earls, George Eglington, and Edward Hyde—all Oxford intellectuals and all committed Anglicans, though many had doubts about their religion. (Chillingworth had Catholic sympathies and bounced back and forth between the Jesuits and the Anglicans throughout his young life.) Like Locke, these men advocated the individual’s rational interpretation of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Locke admirably recommended Chillingworth’s great work, *The Religion of the Protestants* (1637) to many of his friends (Marshall 2006, p. 291). In *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke advanced a similarly latitudinarian view of religion, saying God made man a “rational creature” capable of following “the law of reason,” which empowers every individual to interpret Scripture and investigate nature (*WJL* 6.11).

Considering Locke’s universal audience raises a question asked by 21st-century rhetorical theorists interested in the relation between argumentative inference and ethical ideal (Gross & Dearn 2003, p. 32; Crosswhite 1996, p. 170; Tindale 1999, p. 86-87): What kind of ideally rational and ethical person would find this sort of argument persuasive and good? In his willing entertainment and use of some appeals and in his refusal of other appeals, Locke invited a universal audience committed to rational deliberation. When he wagged his finger at the guilt-by-association appeal, he engaged in what A. de Velasco calls “a fundamentally rhetorical struggle over the form and identity of the universal audience” (2005, p. 51). He did so on behalf of Whiggish liberalism. Locke’s appeal to a universal audience of rational subjects freely deliberating in civil society reveals a political dimension to his comments about the appeals to ignorance and authority. His description of the appeal to authority, presents a haughty official, not unlike James II, who has “gained a name, and [...a] reputation in the common

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<sup>5</sup> In H. Trevor-Roper’s words, the Tew Circle’s “most distinctive contribution [...] was the restoration of the Anglican Church not merely as an institution of Style, in a particular form, victorious over Calvinism, Puritanism, and the sects, but also with a particular philosophy.” Free from a commitment to “prophetic history,” the Church could accept “critical reason and humanist scholarship as the interpreter of its own documents” (1987, p. 229).

esteem” and whose wrath people fear when they dare to “derogate any way from [...his] authority.” Locke predicted that the disagreeing subject who would dare such a “breach of modesty [...] is apt to be censured” (*WJL* 2.260). Such a political leader would castigate anyone who voices oppositional ideas, just as James II imprisoned and executed radical Whigs in Locke’s cohort. Locke’s dismissal of the appeal to ignorance seethes with a dissenter’s distaste for national religion. Who other than a high-flying Anglican prelate would “force [...others] to submit their judgments, and receive their opinions in debate” because no better explanation is available (*WJL* 2.260)? Locke asked his audience to ignore their prejudices about the speaker’s circumstantial identity and to focus on the speaker’s ideas, to exercise their reason and to abandon their bigotries. He did so because he thought that appeals to evidence and reason—even appeals to an opponent’s premises and conclusions—respect people’s rights and improve their persons. He did so because he believed that a free civil society shaped by responsible debate will respect the individual’s right to reason, will diminish ecclesiastical and political tyranny, will empower the citizen, and will liberate the truth.

Locke’s dialectical approach to argumentation intimates that the Enlightenment was a rational era committed to an ideal form of dialogue. It would be an exaggeration to call Locke a full-blown dialectical theorist, and it would be an absurdity to call him a committed acolyte of rhetoric. Nonetheless, we can see in his argumentative practice a dialectical undercurrent sustained by an unstated commitment to a universal audience of free rational subjects. If we can see this commitment in Locke’s practice of argumentation, then we can also see it in his era.

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