

between these virtues and the critical act will be that between first and second act; from the character of the former, as described by Aquinas, we can infer the ~~skx~~ character of the latter; for in the first instance, habits, like potencies, are known from their acts. Now it happens that we find Aquinas describing prudence and wisdom in terms that apply very aptly to the critical act of understanding. Critical understanding is the resolutio in principia as the final grasp of the whole in a single view: it sees at once first and principles/ sensible data; it sees all that are relevant; it sees them not in themselves merely but in their implication of a projected judgment; and it sees what follows from this implication, namely, that not to assent to the projected judgment would involve the rejection of principles and data. It is the full act of intellectual consciousness, that is, of consciousness not merely as an awareness or as an introspective reflection but principally as an ^{reflective} act of understanding. Just as the activity of abstraction proceeds from the self-possession of intelligence in act, grasping and defining the conditions of ~~the~~ its act, so critical understanding is a much fuller self-possession of intelligence in act, reaching back to sense data, looking forward to a projected judgment, and ~~measure~~ measuring all by the absolute standard of necessity; for it is the necessity grasped by critical understanding that will give the judgment-content the absolute quality of truth, and that will give the assent its freedom from the formido contradictorii.²⁷⁰