

CHAPTER 3

*Winckelmann's Greek Ideal and Kant's Critical
Philosophy**Michael Baur*

Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68) was not a philosopher. In fact, Winckelmann had a strong interest in distancing himself from academic philosophy as he knew it. As Goethe reports, Winckelmann “complained bitterly about the philosophers of his time and about their extensive influence.”¹ Still less was Winckelmann a Kantian philosopher; the first edition of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* did not appear until 1781, thirteen years after the fifty-year-old Winckelmann was shockingly murdered in Trieste. Nevertheless, many of Winckelmann’s ideas were philosophically rich and suggestive and interestingly relevant to the philosophical problems that were later to be addressed by Kant and his philosophical contemporaries. It is no wonder, then, that Winckelmann’s influence can be detected in the works of some of the most important philosophically oriented thinkers of Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In addition to Kant himself, these thinkers included Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81), Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831).

3.1 Winckelmann’s Contribution: His Precursors and His Innovations

Winckelmann is widely regarded as the inventor of what we now call “art history.” To be sure, there were others before Winckelmann who sought to analyze great artworks against the backdrop of their historical settings, but such predecessors tended to focus on the lives of the individual artists who

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1805); cited here from *Schriften zur Kunst, Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz, vol. 12 (Munich: DTV, 2008), 119.

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produced the art in question (as in the work of Giorgio Vasari²), or else they tended to compile facts about artworks from the past, without, however, developing a fuller account of the broader aesthetic, cultural, and ideological contexts that informed and made possible the particular artworks in question. One of Winckelmann's innovations was to develop a way of doing "art history" that was vastly more comprehensive in scope and more systematic in its aspirations than the previous work of "art historians" had been. With his major contribution to art history – his *History of the Art of Antiquity* (*Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*) – Winckelmann was able to illuminate the history and character of entire cultures, and he did so through the lens of aesthetic taste, since – for Winckelmann – a people's aesthetic sensibility permeates and manifests itself in all forms of cultural expression.

In the Preface to his *History of the Art of Antiquity*, Winckelmann announces that his own endeavors in art history will go well beyond the aims of those that preceded him: "The history of the art of antiquity that I have endeavored to write is no mere narrative of the chronology and alterations of art, for I take the word *history* in the wider sense that it has in the Greek language and my intention is to provide an attempt at an instructional edifice [*ein Versuch eines Lehrgebäudes zu liefern*]."³ In summarizing the broader aim of Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity*, Elisabeth Décultot explains: "This work, more than a strictly artistic history of antiquity, purports to be a history of the political, climactic, social, sociological, and historical conditions that accompanied the development of art in the ancient world. In short, the *Geschichte der Kunst* purports to be the history of a culture."⁴

In some respects, Winckelmann's broader "cultural-historical approach" to art and art history was not entirely new. One among other precursors to Winckelmann's broader approach was Anne Claude Philippe de Tubières, comte de Caylus (1692–1765). Through his work (most famously through his *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et*

² Vasari's most famous work is *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori* (Firenze: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1550). Expanded in 1568, it is available in a contemporary and abridged English translation as *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, ed. Adolf H. Borbein, Thomas W. Gaehtgens, Johannes Irmscher, and Max Kunze (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), "Vorrede," p. xvi (hereafter "GKA"). A contemporary English translation can be found in *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2006), "Preface," p. 71 (hereafter "HAA").

⁴ Décultot 2000, 261.

*romaines*⁵), Caylus was able to show how an understanding of the entire character and culture of a people could be derived from an aesthetically informed appreciation of the artworks they left behind. For Caylus, a people's way of thinking, or "turn of mind," was made manifest in their aesthetic sensibility and their artistic expressions no less than it was made manifest in their more deliberate, written self-expressions. Caylus explains:

By re-examining the precious remains of the ancients, you are able to conceive a sure idea of their taste. The arts carry the character of the nations that have cultivated them; you sort out their beginning, their infancy, and the point of perfection where they have been taken by every people. If it is permitted to speak in this way: one is no better able to distinguish the taste of these people, their customs, their turn of mind, in the books that they have left us, than in the works of painting and sculpture that have survived until our time. A glance cast rapidly over one of those cabinets, where such treasures are assembled, embraces in a way the picture of all the centuries.⁶

And just as it is possible to obtain an understanding of a people's entire culture and character by developing an aesthetically informed appreciation of their artworks, so too it is possible to rely on that aesthetic-cultural understanding to arrive at a fuller and more precise theoretical knowledge about those artworks, including knowledge about their place of origin and their chronological dating. For Caylus, there is something like a "law of nature" according to which the artworks deriving from a particular time and place will naturally manifest a certain distinctive character or mind-set. And so an aesthetically astute modern-day scholar can include "taste" among the various research tools that might be used for the purpose of accurately locating older artworks within their proper historical time period and geographic place. In other words, the scholar need not be a scholar alone and need not rely only on the explicit writings or inscriptions of ancient peoples but could be a connoisseur-scholar whose sense of taste could be used in the service of research and scholarship. Referring to the "law of nature" that can be used to establish linkages between the qualitative, aesthetic character of artworks and their quantifiable placement within space and time, Caylus observes:

⁵ See Anne Claude Philippe de Tubières, comte de Caylus, *Recueil d'Antiquités, Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, et romaines*, 7 vols. (Paris: Desaint & Sailant, 1752–67); volume 3 bears the title *Recueil d'Antiquités, Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines, et gauloises*.

⁶ Caylus, *Recueil*, vol. 2, p. i.

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This constancy, or this law that nature seems to impose more or less on all nations, must be seen as an advantage; without it posterity would not be able to distinguish either the period or the place of origin of monuments; and the means of recognition would be confined solely to inscriptions.⁷

The work of Caylus (among others) marks an important step in the development of modern art history because it represents an attempt at combining the seemingly disparate endeavors of aesthetic connoisseurship, on the one hand, and antiquarian scholarship, on the other, or, one might say, it represents an attempt at closing the traditional gap between the more qualitative, aesthetic, evaluative dimensions of art history and the more quantitative, nonaesthetic, descriptive dimensions. But even Caylus's work fell short of the larger systematic and normative imperative that suffused Winckelmann's work and made it so unique and attractive to his audience.

We might begin to appreciate how Winckelmann's work was so innovative and so appealing to his audience if we consider one of his more seemingly outlandish statements regarding the art historians that preceded him. At the beginning of his *History of the Art of the Antiquity*, Winckelmann claims that "[s]ome writings with the title *History of Art* have appeared, but art has played only a negligible part in them."⁸ It seems genuinely outrageous to say that art has played only a "negligible part" in previous works on the history of art. After all, even pre-Winckelmannian works in the history of art (despite the many other shortcomings that they may have had) really do seem to have been substantially (not just negligibly) about art. But Winckelmann goes on to explain himself: even if previous histories of art have, in some measure, been about art, they have failed to tell us what art itself is about. That is to say, they have failed to address art precisely as art. The problem with such prior art histories, says Winckelmann, is that "[t]heir authors were insufficiently conversant with art and could communicate only what they gleaned from books or hearsay. Almost no one has guided us into the essence and towards the interior of art [*in das Wesen und zu dem Innern der Kunst*], and those who have dealt with antiquities have only raised points on which they could display their learning."⁹

If a genuine history of art should guide us "into the essence" and "towards the interior" of art, then what might this mean in concrete terms? And what, after all, is the "essence" or the "interior" of art? Winckelmann does not address these questions with philosophical directness or precision, but he begins to suggest what he has in mind when he

⁷ Caylus, *Recueil*, vol. 5, p. 92. ⁸ HAA 71; GKA xvi. ⁹ *Ibid.*

tells us about his interest in art and the art of the ancient Greeks in particular.

The art of the Greeks is the principal concern of this history, and it requires – as the most worthy object for observation and imitation [*als der würdigste Vorwurf zur Betrachtung und Nachahmung*] insofar as it has preserved itself in countless beautiful monuments – an elaborate investigation: one that consists not in pointing to imperfect qualities and in explanations from the conceited, but rather in a lesson on what is essential [*sondern im Unterricht des Wesentlichen*]; a lesson which conveys not mere skills for the sake of knowledge [*nicht bloß Kenntnisse zum Wissen*], but rather also teachings for the sake of practice [*sondern auch Lehren zum Ausüben*]. The discussion of the art of the Egyptians, the Etruscans, and other peoples can broaden our concepts and can lead to correctness in judgment; but the discussion of Greek art should seek to determine itself on the basis of the one and the true, with the aim of establishing a rule for judging and doing [*aufeins und auf das Wahre zu bestimmen, zur Regel im Urteilen und im Wirken*].¹⁰

One might say that what Winckelmann proposes in his *History of the Art of Antiquity* is to do art history in a way that is guided by our very vocation as human beings. For Winckelmann, our interest in art is connected to our interest in the “most worthy object” that we can observe and imitate, and this interest does not find its satisfaction merely in book-learning or in knowing for the sake of knowing. It pertains rather to our very own activity insofar as we engage in acts of judging and doing, and this activity cannot be properly oriented unless it is guided by a concern for “the one and the true.” In short, Winckelmann’s suggestion is that our interest in art (and in ancient Greek art especially) is intimately bound up with our very nature as human beings because as human beings – as doers as well as knowers – we cannot be indifferent to the one and the true.

If one of Caylus’s primary contributions to art history consisted of the move toward narrowing the gap between connoisseurship and scholarship (between qualitatively oriented art appreciation and quantitatively oriented research), then perhaps it is accurate to say that one of Winckelmann’s primary contributions consisted in the move toward narrowing the gap between what we know and what we do in our encounters with art, between what we see and what we become in the midst of our seeing, between our vocation as knowers and our vocation as doers, between theoretical reason and practical reason, and – ultimately – between the past, seemingly defunct world of ancient Greece and our

¹⁰ HAA 186; GKA 128.

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own present, seemingly living modern world. The stunning vision that Winckelmann puts forward in his *History of the Art of Antiquity* – and elsewhere – is a vision that suggests that the modern world is more fragmented and dead and the remnants of the ancient Greek world more pregnant and alive than we moderns realize and that if we pay attention to the ancient Greeks and their artwork, we stand to learn a great deal about our own nature and vocation as human beings.

Hegel was speaking for a large number of thinkers in his generation when he observed that Winckelmann's interest in art was an interest that touched on the "highest interest of humanity." According to Hegel:

Winckelmann was inspired in such a way that he opened up a new meaning for the observation of art, and he wrested art away from the perspectives belonging to coarse aims and to the mere imitation of nature, and he provided a powerful impetus towards finding the idea of art in works of art and in the history of art. For Winckelmann is to be regarded as one of those men who, in the field of art, knew how to open up a new organ for spirit [*für den Geist ein neues Organ*] and an entirely new way of observing.¹¹

Like Winckelmann before him and Hegel after him, Kant also recognized that an interest in art and aesthetic taste is not a merely "academic" or "specialized" interest but an interest that is exceedingly relevant to our deepest interests as human beings. And like Hegel, Kant also praised Winckelmann for having taken important steps beyond a merely "sensualistic" account of aesthetic taste. According to the sensualistic view, when a person makes a judgment of taste (when a person judges that this or that is "beautiful"), that person is essentially doing nothing more than declaring that the allegedly "beautiful" object happens to give satisfaction to him or her, thanks to the particular, contingent, individual-relative desires or interests that happen to condition his or her feeling of satisfaction. But just as a judgment about contingently connected perceptions is not really a judgment about any "object" as such,¹² so too a judgment about how one happens to be physiologically affected by a thing is not really a judgment about beauty or a judgment of taste. A judgment of taste is not only about what is idiosyncratically or physiologically agreeable to a person but also about something that calls for – even if it does not and cannot bring about – intersubjective agreement or recognition from others. In a set of

¹¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 13: *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik I*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 91.

¹² For more on this, see Kant's distinction between "judgments of perception" and "judgments of experience" in his *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, §§18–20 (Pro 4:298–301).

unpublished notes, Kant gives credit to Winckelmann for having recognized this much about beauty and aesthetic taste.

By means of taste I judge of the object, whether my state is much or little affected by it. If I call it beautiful, I do not thereby declare merely my own satisfaction, but also that it should please others. We are ashamed when our taste does not correspond to that of others. In matters of taste one must distinguish charm from beauty; the former is often lost in this or that, but the beauty remains. The decorated room always remains beautiful, but it has lost its charm with the death of the beloved, and the lover chooses other objects. This concept of beauty, says Winckelmann, is sensual, i.e., one does not distinguish the charm from the beauty.¹³

3.2 Winckelmann on the Greek Ideal and Imitation of the Greeks

What, for Winckelmann, does beauty reveal to us that addresses our very vocation as human beings? And why does Winckelmann regard the Greeks as especially important for showing us how we ought to relate to beauty, and to our own selves, through beauty? Winckelmann's suggested answers to these questions are widely dispersed throughout his writings, and they are not always developed with complete clarity and rigor. But one can begin to appreciate Winckelmann's thinking on these topics by considering why he regarded the ancient Greeks as such unique and compelling models of human excellence.

It was by means of freedom that the thinking of an entire people rose up, like a noble branch from a healthy trunk. For just as the spirit of an individual accustomed to thought tends to rise higher in a wide field or on an open path or at the top of a building than it does in a low chamber or in any restricted place, so also the way of thinking among the free Greeks must have been very different from the concepts of dominated peoples . . . Greeks in their prime were thinking beings: they were already thinking twenty years or more before we generally begin to think for ourselves, and they fostered their spirit when it was most fired up by the liveliness of the body, whereas with us the spirit is ignobly nourished until it falls into decline.¹⁴

Two things are especially noteworthy in this passage. First, Winckelmann suggests that the Greeks were able to think more naturally, more readily, more nobly, and more freely than we moderns are currently able. And second, their more excellent freedom and nobility of thought were not simply a function of their own doing or their own achievement.

¹³ NF 15:280–81. ¹⁴ HAA 188; GKA 233.

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The Greeks were able to become the exquisitely free, noble-thinking beings that they had become because they were surrounded by an especially freedom-conducive condition that they themselves did not choose and could not have chosen. In paraphrasing Winckelmann's point, one might say that just as the mind of a man accustomed to reflection tends to rise higher in a wide field than in any restricted place, so too the minds of the Greeks tended to rise higher than our own modern minds because the Greeks – unlike us moderns – were gifted with natural, unchosen conditions that favored and made possible their noble free-thinking. Winckelmann is well known for his argument (an argument that is indebted to similar arguments in Dubos and Montesquieu¹⁵) that the ancient Greeks' exceptional freedom of action and thought were what we might call a "situated" or "environmentally conditioned" freedom. The Greeks would not have become the people they did become if it were not for the natural and unchosen conditions (including the geographic, climatic, hereditary, ethnic, and physiobiological conditions) into which they were born.

In one of his most famous and oft-quoted statements, Winckelmann tells us that "[t]he only way for us to become great or, if this be possible, inimitable, is to imitate the ancients."¹⁶ But one may well ask, How can we become great by imitating the ancient Greeks if their greatness consisted (at least in part) in their exercise of a most excellent form of freedom that is superior to our own and if imitation (by its very nature) seems to entail a kind of slavishness or following, which is the very opposite of being free? Furthermore, how can we become inimitable by imitating the Greeks when our imitation of them would imply that they are not inimitable (after all, they will have been imitated by us)? And so it seems that if we were to imitate the Greeks, then we ourselves – like them – would also not be inimitable.

Winckelmann's overtly paradoxical language takes on a more subtle, revealing character if one considers what Winckelmann has in mind when he talks about "imitation" (*Nachahmung*). In various works of his, Winckelmann points out that "imitation" for him is not the same thing

¹⁵ See especially Jean-Baptiste Dubos's 1719 work, *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting (Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture)*, and Montesquieu's 1748 work, *On the Spirit of the Laws (De l'Esprit des lois)*.

¹⁶ J.J. Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildhauer-Kunst (1st edn, 1755)*, in *Kleine Schriften: Vorreden, Entwürfe*, ed Walther Rehm (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), 27–59, here 29 (hereafter "GNGW"). An English translation can be found in *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1987), 5 (hereafter "RIGW").

as copying. For example, in his “Reminder about the Observation of Works of Art,” Winckelmann distinguishes between artistic production, which is based on genuine thinking, and that which is based on mere copying. In accordance with this distinction, Winckelmann advises would-be connoisseurs: “With regard to the maker of the work you are observing, pay attention to whether he himself engaged in thinking or instead only copied [*selbst gedacht oder nur nachgemachet hat*]; whether he knew the noblest aim of art, beauty, or instead only depicted things in accordance with the commonplace forms known to him.”¹⁷ Winckelmann goes on to explain:

What I oppose to one’s own thinking is copying, not imitation [*Gegen das eigene Denken setze ich das Nachmachen, nicht die Nachahmung*]. Copying is what I understand to be slavish following [*die knechtische Folge*]. But with imitation, what is imitated, if it is done with reason, can take on another nature [*eine andere Natur annehmen*], so to speak, and can become something in its own right [*etwas eigenes werden*].¹⁸

The argument seems to be that when something is properly imitated, there is a sense in which the thing being imitated takes on another nature, and in taking on another nature, it becomes something in its own right; that is, it becomes something that is not merely a replication but is instead novel (“another nature”) and unique (“something in its own right”). But how can imitation generate something novel and unique? For Winckelmann, the answer has to do with the fact that imitation consists of a kind of idealization, or a kind of “projection” that takes place within the understanding.

In the masterpieces of Greek art, connoisseurs and imitators [*Kenner und Nachahmer*] find not only nature at its most beautiful but also something more than nature [*sondern noch mehr als Natur*], namely certain ideal forms of its beauty, which, as the ancient interpreter of Plato teaches, are made from depictions projected only in the understanding [*von Bildern bloß im Verstande entworfen, gemacht sind*].¹⁹

¹⁷ *Erinnerung über die Betrachtung der Werke der Kunst*, in Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Kleine Schriften: Vorrede, Entwürfe*, 2nd edn (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 149–56, here 149 (hereafter “EBWK”). For an English translation, see “Recalling the Observation of Works of Art,” in *Johann Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology*, trans. David Carter (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013), 129 (hereafter “ROWA”).

¹⁸ EBWK 151; ROWA 130.

¹⁹ GNGW 30; RIGW 7. Along similar lines, Winckelmann observes a bit later in his *Reflections* that “[t]hese frequent opportunities to observe nature prompted the Greek artists to go even further: they began to form certain general concepts of the beauties of the individual parts as well as of the overall proportions of bodies, beauties which were to be elevated above nature itself; their archetype was

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With his mention of “the ancient interpreter of Plato,” Winckelmann is thinking about Proclus and his commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*. In that commentary, Proclus refers to Phidias’s making of the famous statue of Zeus and offers an interpretation of the metaphysical views presented in Plato’s *Timaeus*. According to Proclus, the demiurge is the maker of the world, and the sculptor is the maker of the statue, but the beauty that is manifest in the world or in the statue does not come merely from the maker (whether this maker be the demiurge or the sculptor) but rather from the model (*paradeigma*) or the Platonic idea.²⁰

For Winckelmann, “imitation” of the beautiful in art and nature clearly has something to do with Platonic ideas and with the way in which such ideas are apprehended through a kind of “idealization” or “projection” in the understanding. Winckelmann’s suggestion is that it is only by means of “idealization” or “projection” that what is beautiful or true in nature can make its appearance to us in the first place. Along these lines, Winckelmann explains that a draftsman “who wants to give the character of truth to his academic studies will not achieve even a shadow of the true” if he is incapable of going beyond what is merely given, and “if he does not provide his own substitute [*ohne eigene Ersetzung*] for what the art-model’s unmoved and indifferent soul fails to feel.”²¹ In a similar vein, Winckelmann says that it is the beauty that is made and observed in artwork (i.e., an imitated, idealized, and projected beauty) that teaches us how to observe beauty in nature and not the other way around. Even “the great Bernini,” who wrongly held that beauty is to be apprehended primarily in nature and only secondarily in art, learned to observe beauty in nature because he had first observed beauty in art: “So it was the Venus [of Medici] that taught [Bernini] to discover beauties in nature – beauties which previously he had believed could be found only in nature and which, without the Venus, he would not have looked for in nature.”²²

There is a twofold explanation for why beauty in art teaches us how to observe beauty in nature and not the other way around. First of all, for Winckelmann, the beautiful as such (whether in nature or in artwork) consists in a kind of unity-in-diversity or (what amounts to the same thing)

a spiritual nature which was projected only in the understanding [*ihr Urbild war eine bloss im Verstande entworfene geistige Natur*]” (NGW 34; RIGW 15).

²⁰ The standard source for material from Proclus’ commentary on the *Timaeus* is the Teubner edition, which allows for citations of volume number, page number, and line number: *Procli in Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. E. Diehl, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–6). The material referenced here comes from Proclus’ commentary at I.265.18–26.

²¹ NGW 33; RIGW 13. ²² NGW 37; RIGW 19.

a diversity-in-unity. The beautiful “consists in the harmony of parts”²³ or in “manifoldness within the simple [*besteht in der Mannifaltigkeit im Einfachen*].”²⁴ And second, the harmony-in-complexity, or unity-in-diversity that constitutes the beautiful, is manifested more perfectly in great artwork than in nature because in nature the elements of the beautiful are more fragmented and dispersed; thus “the beauty of Greek statues is . . . more moving, and not so dispersed but rather more united in one, than the beauty of nature.”²⁵ These considerations also explain why, for Winckelmann, great artists are great precisely to the extent that they are able to reveal more by means of less (they are able to show greater complexity by means of greater simplicity). As Winckelmann explains:

it is more difficult to indicate much by means of a little [*viel mit wenigem anzuzeigen*] than it is to do the opposite, and good sense prefers to bring about its effects with less rather than more effort; similarly, it is possible for a master-artist to make use of a single figure as the venue for all of his art.²⁶

This is why great artists thrive on displaying their complex and multifaceted abilities by working with just one medium or one particular shape; by contrast, inferior artists think that they can more impressively display their craft by throwing together a variety of different gimmicks and techniques. If a joke requires too much explanation, then it is not a good joke; similarly, if an artwork tries to show too much by doing too much, then it is not a good artwork. This helps us to understand why Raphael’s depiction of Plato (in his *School of Athens*) is so beautiful; Raphael gently points us in the direction of Plato, who, in turn, with just a simple movement of one finger indicates a world of difference.²⁷

In further elaborating on what he means by “imitation,” Winckelmann distinguishes between, on the one hand, an inferior kind of imitative activity that focuses only on the empirically given individual instances and, on the other hand, a superior kind of imitative activity that starts with individual instances but goes beyond them in the direction of generalization and universalization (unification and oneness).

The imitation of the beauty of nature either is directed at an individual model, or else it gathers observations from different individual models and

²³ J. J. Winckelmann, *Abhandlung von der Fähigkeit der Empfindung des Schönen in der Kunst*, in *Kleine Schriften*, 211–33, here 219 (hereafter “AFES”). For an English translation, see “Treatise on the Capacity for Sensitivity to the Beautiful in Art and the Method of Teaching It,” in *Johann Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology*, trans. David Carter (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013), 155 (hereafter “TCSB”).

²⁴ EBWK 152; ROWA 131. ²⁵ GNGW 37; RIGW 19. ²⁶ EBWK 150; ROWA 129.

²⁷ See EBWK 149; ROWA 129.

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brings them into oneness. The former means making a copy based on likeness, or a portrait [*eine ähnliche Kopie, ein Porträt machen*]; this path leads to the Dutch way of making forms and figures. But the latter path is the path to what is universally beautiful and to idealized depictions of the universally beautiful; and this is the path that the Greeks took.²⁸

For Winckelmann, the Greeks were truly excellent at imitating nature in the superior sense of the word “imitation,” and we moderns can learn from them precisely by imitating their imitation (or idealizing their idealization). In trying to learn about beauty and oneness, we moderns should not turn directly to nature but rather to the Greeks. Our imitation of the Greeks

can teach us to be knowledgeable more quickly, because here in one object can be found the essence of that which is dispersed throughout nature, and what is more it can teach us how far the most beautiful nature can go in boldly yet wisely rising above its own self [*wie weit die schönste Natur sich über sich selbst kühn, aber weislich erheben kann*].²⁹

But even as we look to the Greeks and try to imitate them, we must not lose sight of the fact that there is a significant difference between them and us.

The difference, however, between them and us is this: the Greeks could obtain these depictions – even if they were not taken from the more beautiful bodies – through the opportunity that they had every day to observe the beauty of nature, which, however, does not show itself to us every day, and rarely in the way that the artist wishes.³⁰

For Winckelmann, the Greeks were superior at imitating the beauty of nature because the unity, harmony, and wholeness that constitute the beautiful as such were already more actual and evident in the natural conditions that surrounded them. Once again, these natural conditions included conditions that were not and could not have been deliberately chosen by them (e.g., geographic, climatic, hereditary, ethnic, and physiobiological conditions) – and such unchosen and unchoosable conditions are what made it possible for them to enjoy a superior freedom of action and thought.

From Winckelmann's point of view, the common (modern) notion that such “natural conditioning” must be opposed to genuine freedom is itself a symptom of a modern, alienated, fragmented way of thinking, a way of thinking that fails to recognize that beauty in things outside the observer (e.g., in nature) is inseparable from beauty within the observer (within the

²⁸ GNGW 37; RIGW 21. ²⁹ Ibid. ³⁰ Ibid.

embodied, thinking, free human being). Recall that, for Winckelmann, beauty consists of a kind of harmony of parts (a unity-in-diversity). If a harmony of parts within the human observer allows the human observer to act and think in a more capacious and more open-minded (less fragmented and less constrained) way, then perhaps it becomes possible to begin comprehending how the human observer can be genuinely free, even while this freedom remains conditioned by (inseparable from) a harmony of parts outside the observer (e.g., in nature). And then, in turn, perhaps it also becomes possible to begin comprehending how we moderns can imitate the ancient Greeks, even if we can never copy or replicate the unique freedom they enjoyed.

3.3 Winckelmann and Kant on Art and Beauty

Like Winckelmann, Kant recognized that art aims to do more than merely copy or replicate what can be empirically observed in nature as immediately given. But Kant's thinking about art and aesthetic judgment also diverged from Winckelmann's in important ways. For Kant, a key aim of art is to induce in the observer a kind of "free play" among the observer's faculties of mind (including the sensory faculty of imagination and the thinking faculty of the understanding). Because it induces this "free play" of faculties in the observer, art provides the observer with a kind of sensuous presentation that facilitates and enriches the observer's thinking about (1) how it is that the human observer's faculties are perhaps suited or outfitted for apprehending and relating to a causally governed natural world that seems alien and externally given to the observer and also (2) how it is that a natural, causally governed world that seems to be morally indifferent and even inhospitable to the human observer's aspirations as a knower and as an agent is perhaps suited or outfitted for conforming or accommodating itself to those aspirations.

Kant saw the need for art to play this quasi-mediating role, since his critical philosophy had led him to conclude that we finite human knowers are limited to obtaining knowledge of objects of possible experience and perennially disbarred from apprehending things as they are in themselves (including the things that constituted the traditional objects of special metaphysics: mind, world, and God as they are in themselves). Along these lines, Kant writes that "there is an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the

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concept of freedom, as the supersensible.”³¹ Because of this gulf, Kant held that it was impossible for us humans to arrive at theoretical knowledge regarding how it is that the human being’s empirically uncaused activity as a knower and as an agent might be related to the natural, causally governed sensuous world as it appears to us within experience. Thus Kant states that it is impossible for us, by means of theoretical reason, to effect any kind of “transition” from the realm of freedom to the realm of nature.³² However, Kant also realized that we are embodied rational beings who seek to live within the context of a sensuously given, causally governed natural world, and so we live and act with the hope and expectation that this sensuously given natural world is ultimately conformable to our human ends and that our striving to know and to change that world for the better are not foolish and futile. Even if we cannot know (as a matter of theoretical reason) whether and how a transition from “freedom” to “nature” is to be achieved, we inescapably live in accordance with the idea that such a transition *ought* to be achieved. On Kant’s view, art provides us with a means for living, acting, and thinking in accordance with this “ought,” and so for Kant, as for Winckelmann, the making and the observing of art are deeply bound up with our very vocation as human beings.

In contrast with Kant, Winckelmann offers what is arguably a more radical view of what art is for and what art can do in the service of our vocation as human beings. Even if art induces in us what Kant calls a “free play” of the faculties, Winckelmann holds that art can do more than that by enabling us to “see” the world altogether differently, and in enabling us to “see” the world altogether differently, it can emancipate us to “be” in the world altogether differently. Furthermore, Winckelmann suggests that if we are to “be” in the world differently, then we must be willing to question and possibly give up the view that our activity as knowers and doers occurs through the operation of faculties that are somehow found or discovered by us as already fragmented and separated from one another. Perhaps, Winckelmann suggests, the appearance that our faculties (e.g., our sensuous and intellectual faculties) are already fragmented and separated from one another (as a matter of “natural” or “transcendental” necessity) may itself be a function of our own activity, a function of the way that we ourselves (apart from any “natural” or “transcendental” necessity) continue to “see” and to “be” in the (modern, fragmented) world.

³¹ “Introduction,” §II, CPJ 5:175–76. ³² “Introduction,” §II, CPJ 5:176.

One might say that Winckelmann's primary aim is not just to get us to *see* more in artworks but also to get us to *be* more by means of our seeing. And for Winckelmann, the more we *see* the unity-in-diversity that is beauty (e.g., beauty in ancient Greek artworks), the more we ourselves can *be* the unity-in-diversity that is beauty. Furthermore, we do not come to *be* this unity-in-diversity (this beauty) simply by means of a deliberate choosing, judging, or mastery of concepts; we can come to *be* this unity-in-diversity only by letting ourselves be addressed by a unity-in-diversity that is beauty outside of us. Conversely, our letting ourselves be addressed by the beautiful outside of us cannot simply be a matter of allowing ourselves to be passively, or empirically, or physiologically affected; instead, it also requires our own thinking activity. As noted earlier, Winckelmann believes that beauty can be perceived only by means of our own "projection" in thought or understanding; without such an idealizing projection, beauty (even merely natural beauty) cannot even make its appearance in the first place.

Kant would agree with Winckelmann's idea that if we are to appreciate beauty at all (whether in nature or in artworks), we cannot be merely passive, sensuously determined beings but must also be active, in some sense, as thinking beings. But Kant differs from Winckelmann on the question of what we are capable of achieving as thinking beings, and this difference leads Kant to diverge in important ways from Winckelmann's views on art and aesthetic judgment. Unlike Winckelmann, Kant is committed to the view that our thinking activity is "bounded on the outside," so to speak, by what is external to it. This view is implicit in Kant's belief that our very own cognitive faculties (e.g., our sensory and our thinking faculties) are to be found or discovered by us as separate and "bounded on the outside" relative to one another. And because our thinking activity is bounded on the outside by what is external to it (and what is "external" here includes not only the nature that is outside of our bodies but also the bodily, natural determinations of our very own sensory and imaginative faculties), Kant holds that our thinking activity is disbarred from apprehending being as it is "in itself" and is limited to apprehending being only as it is "for us." Accordingly, Kant also holds that we cannot really say that our appreciation of beauty is an appreciation of anything that is genuinely beautiful (or one or true) "in itself"; in the final analysis, Kant's explanation of our appreciation of beauty is not an account of what is "in itself" but rather an account of a "free play" of faculties within us.

Recall now what Winckelmann says about the "essence" or the "interior" of art: art fundamentally has to do with our interest, as human beings, in "the one and the true." And when Winckelmann talks about "the one

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and the true," he means (unlike Kant) the one and the true as they are "in themselves" and not merely "for us." Winckelmann thus holds that our judgments of taste and our appreciation of beauty really are about what is genuinely beautiful (or one or true) "in itself." Recall also that, for Winckelmann, it is not possible for us to apprehend the beautiful (not even the beautiful in nature alone) if we ourselves do not engage in a certain kind of thinking activity: the activity of "imitation," whereby we bring about a certain kind of idealizing "projection" in thought or understanding. But how can Winckelmann coherently hold that we are able to apprehend what is beautiful "in itself," even though this apprehension takes place only by means of a thinking activity (a "projection" or "idealization") that we ourselves actively undertake? Why isn't it the case for Winckelmann (as it is for Kant) that our own thinking activity ends up barring us from apprehending the beautiful (or the one or the true) as it is "in itself"?

The answer is that for Winckelmann, our thinking activity of "imitation" or "projection" does not have to be construed as a merely subjective or one-sided activity, or as an activity that emanates merely from us, and so it does not have to be construed as an activity that operates as an external, deforming sort of imposition on some already-given "know-not-what" that gets distortedly apprehended by us. For Winckelmann, there is no "naturally" or "transcendentally" compelling reason why the intellectual activity of "imitation" or "projection" cannot *also* be the activity of what is thoughtfully apprehended, just as it is the activity of the thoughtful apprehender. For Winckelmann, if we learn properly from the Greeks (if we first imitate their imitation rather than imitate nature directly), we may eventually come to see how our own activity of imitating nature can be understood – truly – as being nothing other than the activity of nature "rising above its own self."³³ If we look to the Greeks, we may come to see how our own imitative, projective, idealizing depictions of nature are not merely arbitrary, distorting, subjective impositions of our own doing but rather depictions of nature as nature in itself "demands to be depicted."³⁴

³³ GNGW 38; RIGW 21.

³⁴ GNGW 39; RIGW 23. The full passage here reads as follows: "Nothing would more clearly show the advantage of imitating the ancients over imitating nature [*den Vorzug der Nachahmung der Alten vor der Nachahmung der Natur*] than if one were to take two young people with equally beautiful talent, and have one of them study antiquity and the other study only nature. The latter would depict nature as he found it [*Dieser würde die Natur bilden, wie er sie findet*] . . . but the former would depict nature as it demands to be depicted [*jener aber würde die Nature bilden, wie sie es verlangt*]."

Winckelmann's argument seems to be, then, that the actualization of our own projective, idealizing, thinking activity (our activity of "imitation") is not to be understood as something that is separable from the actualization of what is genuinely true and beautiful (what is a genuine harmony of parts or a unity-in-diversity) "in itself." So Winckelmann seems to be claiming that it is possible for us to engage in some version of what Kant would have called "intellectual intuition": a nonsensory, intellectual kind of intuition by means of which the activity of thinking apprehends that which is "in itself" even though that which is "in itself" does not have any being (not even any hidden, unknowable being "in itself") apart from the thinking activity that apprehends it.

Kant famously denied that we finite human knowers are capable of intellectual intuition.³⁵ Winckelmann, by contrast, suggests that we must engage in acts of intellectual intuition if we are to apprehend the beauty "in itself" that we seek. So Winckelmann argues that one must take risks in one's search for the beautiful. As Winckelmann explains, there is nothing given to our thinking activity, in advance of the thinking activity itself, that can tell us whether or not our thinking activity (our imitative, projective, idealizing activity) will or will not lead to the apprehension of the beautiful (the one and the true, the unity-in-harmony) that is sought. And this frightening lack of any prior givenness (this lack of any previously given, determinately available guideposts or criteria or concepts) has led some people to "err out of caution," for it has led them to refrain from the attempt at projecting or idealizing. But to refrain in this way is to commit a mistake, says Winckelmann, because without taking the risk of projecting and idealizing (without venturing on the basis of one's own "biases" [*Vorurtheile*]), it becomes impossible for a person to find the beauty that might be found. And furthermore, suggests Winckelmann, it becomes impossible even for the beauty that is found to be the beauty that it really is in itself.³⁶

Winckelmann's account of "imitation," insofar as it implies the possibility of some kind of "intellectual intuition," also implies that it is necessary for us to think about the relation between mind and world, subject and object, knower and known in a way that departs from the more common (modern) way in which this relation is understood. For Winckelmann, the unity-in-diversity that is beauty need not be restricted to the unity-in-diversity (harmony of parts) that is observed in nature or in

³⁵ See, for example, B 72. ³⁶ HAA 214; GKA 185–86.

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artwork outside of us. And it need not be restricted to the unity-in-diversity (harmony of parts, including parts that are faculties of the mind) that is apparently found or discovered within us. Instead, for Winckelmann, the unity-in-diversity that is beauty might also exist as an all-comprehensive unity-in-diversity of mind and world (subject and object, knower and known), where mind and world are parts of a larger whole and where this larger whole – precisely because there is no mind outside of it – cannot be apprehended as any kind of determinate, object-like thing at all. Furthermore, if mind (i.e., if our own thinking activity) is an essential part of this all-comprehensive unity-in-diversity (if mind is a part without which this harmony of parts cannot be what it is), then even this all-comprehensive unity-in-diversity (this all-comprehensive beauty) cannot be what it is apart from mind (apart from thinking activity). Winckelmann seems to be pointing in the direction of such an all-comprehensive, non-object-like unity-in-diversity of mind and world when he says that, for him, knower and known (person and thing) are not really two things but one: “The capacity for feeling the beautiful in art is a concept that at once encompasses within itself both the person and the thing, both that which contains and that which is contained, but which are things that I regard as one [*ein Begriff, welcher zugleich die Person und Sache, das Enthaltende und das Enthaltene in sich faßt, welches ich aber in eins schließe*].”³⁷

Finally, Winckelmann's account of imitation (along with his implicit account of intellectual intuition) entails a rather anti-Kantian notion of freedom. For Winckelmann, human freedom is not primarily about “autonomy” or “independence”; instead, human freedom consists primarily of a kind of dual or twofold (inner and outer, spiritual and natural) activity. Although Winckelmann himself never would have expressed it in such ugly philosophical language, human freedom for him consists of the dual activity of (1) the nonviolent (i.e., natural and not externally imposed) harmonization of a given multiplicity of parts of some natural thing seemingly external to the agent doing the harmonizing, where this harmonization (precisely because it is not externally imposed) is the actualization of the very being of the natural thing that appears to be external to the agent doing the harmonizing, and (2) simultaneously the nonviolent harmonization of a given multiplicity of parts internal to the agent doing the harmonizing, such that this “internal” harmonization is the actualization of the very being of the agent doing the harmonizing. Winckelmann would agree with

³⁷ AFES 212/TCSB 149.

Kant that art is deeply relevant to our vocation as free, thinking beings, but from Winckelmann's point of view, the "free play" of faculties that Kant discusses (the unity-in-diversity of faculties within the finite knowing subject) is really only a partial, one-sided, fragmentary, idiosyncratic (and uniquely modern) expression of a more genuine and more freedom-conducive unity-in-diversity: the unity-in-diversity that is beauty in itself.

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