

Idealism versus naturalism

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Idealism versus Naturalism By focusing on the statue of god Hermes with the Infant Dionysus, Ernst Gombrich shows the shift from idealism to naturalism by Praxiteles and other Greek artists. Gombrich argues that in pursuit of idealism for self-interests, the artists omitted any feature to they did not like to produce ‘...an idealized statue that usually lack character and vigour’ (103). Moreover, their desire to portray the true, the good, and the beauty of a real a man - ideal humanistic outlook – resulted in a quite ‘ symmetrical, well-built and beautiful statue.

Due to the flawed figures of idealism, Greek artists adopted the naturalist perspective that represents the human form in its natural appearance or realistic look. The proponents of naturalism argue that the idealistic idea was only to add aesthetic value to drawings and sculptures and avoid reality. For instance, in Hermes with Dionysus, Praxiteles portrays the natural gesture of a hairy, wise, loving, caring and anxious man with human quality carrying a playful child (Gombrich 102). Moreover, he curved a younger non-stiff body leaning on a post for balance while maintaining elegance and smooth surfaces. These are realistic features that contrast the idealistic principle of calm and ever-smiling man to reflect an ideal situation of harmony and happiness. Moreover, the height of 3. 5 feet tall of the idealistic approach fails to reflect the proper size of a human, 6. 9 feet as depicted by Praxiteles.

Despite these differences, one similarity of the two approaches is the Contrapposto where the right leg is bent while stepping forward and the left hip elevated to support body weight. With the head slightly tilted, the Contrapposto gives the natural and realistic pose (Gombrich 103).