

Should References to "Natural" Be Understood As Contrasting "Given By Nature" to "Given By Convention"?

Post by "Cassius" of January 23, 2026 at 4:52 AM

This is a discussion that originated in the recent Zoom in which we were discussing the relationship between "hedonic calculus analysis" and "natural/necessary analysis." It's really a part of that discussion, but the question is of such significance that it deserves a thread of its own.

Thread

[What Is The Relationship Between "Hedonic Calculus" Analysis" and "Natural and Necessary Desire" Analysis?](#)

In tonight's Zoom we went at length into the question posed in the title to this thread, but I need to explain the background. First, it appears that there is a division of opinion about whether "Hedonic Calculus" analysis is more fundamental and primary, or whether "Natural and Necessary Desire" analysis is more fundamental and primary. In other words,

1. Does one analysis come before, or override, or overrule the other?
2. Do you start with one analysis and then bring the other into play only if

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Cassius

January 21, 2026 at 9:25 PM

In that discussion, Bryan mentioned that he thought it was significant to observe that it is possible to be more specific as to what Epicurus and/or other Greeks meant when they were discussing whether a desire is "natural" or not. At least in my own mind I tend to have a hard time getting any specificity out of "natural" because I presume that the other position is "unnatural" or "not natural." If that's all we can say, that doesn't help much, as that simply uses the same term "natural" on both sides of the equation without bringing any explanation to the picture.

Bryan says that he believes it is clear from numbers of texts (I gathered included outside the Epicurean context) that what the Greeks were really saying is that they were contrasting "what is established by nature" with "what is established by CONVENTION." In other words, they were

saying that the opposite of natural is not just "unnatural" but "conventional." This would lead us to focus on understanding the things to be avoided as unnatural as those which originate "by agreement with others" or "in consensus among human minds" or other descriptions that emphasize that the issue is a product of reasoning rather than being directly given to us by nature, such as through the five senses (and presumably the feelings and the anticipations as well).

I said to Bryan during the meeting that if this could be established through citations that it would probably be very helpful to our American/modern understanding to do so. For that reason I am posting this thread to set up a place to see if we can do that.

Thanks go to Bryan as the real impetus behind this conversation.