

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

Post by "Bryan" of January 23, 2026 at 10:50 AM

I will throw in a few related quotes:

"Epicurus {as reported by Colotes} acts with the purest effrontery when he claims to lay down the same first principles, but nevertheless does not say that "color is by convention" and thus the qualities sweet, bitter, etc. "
[Plutarch (fl. 80 CE), Against Colotes, 1111A]

"Oh by the Gods! Through your disposition, you revealed to us that you were deserving -- not according to the conventions of civic freedom"
[Philodemus (fl.c. 70 BCE), Treatises, P.Herc. 1418, col. 32]

"for one ought not to study nature according to empty axioms and conventional rules – but as apparent things call out"
[Epicurus, Lives, 10.86c]

"...[*to such an extent produces linguistic*] conventions by [*your*] memory through [*the use of*] a term – oh, by gods! – that you see these [*conventions*] as an established thing... [*with you*] proceeding according to [*your*] judgements as [*practical*] situations arise in various ways: anyone could disturb [*those practical situations*] – for they are always empty..."
[Epicurus, On Nature, Book 10, P.Herc. 1413/1416 fragment 5]

"...and You happened to be applying [*your choice of words*] at that time without the association of certain conventions [*which have been developed*] – [*thus*] you would not have made clear: the [*fact that*] judging every expression applies to a certain [*judgment** – but you were] still seeing [*the public*] indiscrimination of words vs. [*practical*] situations, [*and*] You were fully conceiving [*this issue*]" * *i.e., most words naturally apply to an originally specific concept.*
[Epicurus, On Nature, Book 28, P.Herc. 1417, fr. 13 (col. 2 inf.)
| P.Herc. 1479, fr. 13 (col. 3 sup.)]

"...indeed, to integrate [*common terms into technical vocabulary*] to a larger [*extent*] with what we ourselves want – but if at that time, thinking the same thing, we were speaking according to the interpretation [*then*] set-forth: in which [*we said*] that every human Error exists having no different shape than what is produced due to the multifaceted conventions of terms upon the preapprehensions and [*upon*] the appearances [*of objects*] , and... ...because of these things, We have split [*them*] into two... ...[*with the*] anticipations... ...every saying..."
[Epicurus, On Nature, Book 28, P.Herc. 1479, fr. 12 (col. 3)]

"...He [still] laughs at this [riddle] in regards to [its] sophistry since he had not completely comprehended together in that response what also would have been adapted out of some convention of a term in this way *- so as to fall into saying that it is possible for the same person to understand and also to not understand..."

[Epicurus, On Nature, Book 28, P.Herc. 1417, fr. 13 (col. 9 inf.)

| P.Herc. 1479, fr. 13 (col. 10 sup. - part 1)]

"We do not remove ourselves from the cause [of the generation of movement] - and [we do not remove ourselves from] what [movement] has been fully generated but by [even] doing one certain thing, We similarly clarify [the nature of] ourselves and [of our] composition. We do not instruct about it - indeed, We do not even rearrange many [words] in accordance with certain conventions without [taking any] mind of the terminology... ...for what is removed from a cause [of movement] by necessity [is itself its own cause of movement]..."

[Epicurus, On Nature, Book 25, P.Herc. 1191 fr. 104, 105]

ὁ νόμος οἱ νόμοι	law	NOMOS <i>allotting</i>
ἡ νομοθεσία αἱ νομοθεσίαι	conventional rules	NOMOTHEΣIA <i>allotting place</i>
τὸ ἦθος τὰ ἦθη	disposition	HTHOS <i>custom</i>
ὁ ἐθισμός οἱ ἐθισμοί	convention	ETHISMOS <i>result of being accustomed</i>
ἡ ὄχλησις αἱ ὄχλήσεις	[feeling of] disturbance	OKHLSIS <i>process of a crowd of people</i>