

Alexander Verlinsky

PLATO’S LAST WORD ON NATURALISM VS.
CONVENTIONALISM IN THE *CRATYLUS*. II*

I propose that Socrates’ definition of habit (434 e 5–8) should be understood quite literally: habit is what secures a transit from a thing in the mind of a speaker to a name that should indicate this thing, and then the reverse transit from an interlocutor listening to this name and grasping the thing that is indicated by this name. The connection between a name and a thing is established in the minds of speakers not because they are able to recognize the similarity of the name to its referent, but because it is *habitual* for both to recognize this connection – they have been habituated to associate this name and this thing. The point of the definition is that a speaker’s choice of a name and a listener’s understanding due to habit occur automatically, without an analysis of the properties of a name and its referent. Here, for the first time in the whole discussion, we have a sketch of how the communication of mediocre language-speakers proceeds. When, as in the given case, the similarity of the name to its referent is not sufficient for recognition of what this referent is, a competent language-speaker has no other option than to appeal to habit, viz. to the meaning of the name he learned in childhood. A competent language-speaker thus appears to behave in these cases as mediocre language-speakers usually behave.

This supposed explication of what Socrates regards as habit sounds very similar to the conventionalist view to us, who tend to identify the habitual meanings of words with convention. It thus might appear that, for Plato, the appeal to habit means yielding to conventionalism. However, as Plato sees it, we should be not too rushed in identifying habit with conventionalism, as is represented in the dialogue, viz. with the concept of arbitrary agreement on the meaning of names in Hermogenes’ theory.

* See *Hyperboreus* 29: 2 (2023) 196–233.

Let us consider what Socrates understands by agreement in this context. As I have said, the argument about agreement appears to be straightforward: since λ makes σκληρότης dissimilar to its referent, the successful indication of 'hardness' to an interlocutor can be accomplished only by means of agreement, because there is no other mode of indication beyond resemblance and agreement. It is surprising that, on the contrary, Socrates does not conclude that Cratylus thus partakes in the agreement with the other language-speakers by which the name σκληρότης has acquired its reference, i.e., 'hardness', but claims instead that Cratylus "agreed with himself" on the meaning of this name.

Most scholars hold the view that this silent agreement with oneself does not differ from agreement in Hermogenes' theory. Thus, according to Ademollo, Socrates has pressed Cratylus to accept that since the name σκληρότης does not have a meaning that would correspond to its intrinsic features, it is necessary to follow a collective convention about its meaning, and this amounts to following Hermogenes' theory of arbitrary agreement. If I understand Ademollo correctly, he thinks that the agreement among language-speakers is not mentioned because this agreement consists of many acts of individual agreement, as Cratylus performs in our case.¹ But this will not do: Cratylus' agreement is an agreement to follow a linguistic habit; this agreement, as well as similar acts of consent made by language-speakers, are of course necessary to make the existing convention valid for all, but such acts cannot constitute the convention itself. The latter had to take place at a certain moment when somebody proposed to assign an arbitrary name to a thing and some companions agreed that this name will have a given meaning from this moment on.²

¹ Ademollo 2011, 401: "...Socrates apparently thinks that Cratylus' adherence to the public convention according to which σκληρόν indicates hardness is *grounded* in his private convention with himself. His point seems to be that, since utterances of σκληρόν do not have a meaning which depends on their intrinsic features and which a hearer is somehow naturally forced to recognize, Cratylus had to decide, as it were, that he would interpret utterances of σκληρόν as indicating hardness. Thereby Socrates seems to view the collective convention as the sum of a plurality of individual decisions".

² Ademollo 2011, 401 believes that this understanding of a public convention as a sum of individual decisions like that of Cratylus finds support in Hermogenes' reasoning (384 d – 385 a), "where Hermogenes put a convention among a plurality of speakers on a par with the arbitrary decision of a single speaker"; cf. Ademollo 2011, 46. But in fact Hermogenes has in view only that there is no difference between arbitrary imposition of names by means of agreement in a large collective like a state and in a small one like a house (385 d 7 – e 3). It is true, as Ademollo rightly notices,

I propose instead to understand the idea of an agreement with oneself quite literally: it is not the same as an agreement that is made by language-speakers on the meaning of a name when they assign an arbitrary string of sounds to a certain thing, as proposed by Hermogenes, nor does it stem from such an agreement. It is precisely an agreement made by an individual language-speaker with an already existing meaning of a name as fixed by linguistic habit, no more than this. There is a similarity indeed between the two concepts of agreement: both presuppose a lack of resemblance of the name and its referent, and thus the necessity of an external authority that maintains the meaning of the word. But on the other hand, there is a considerable difference: the agreement with oneself that Socrates introduces here is accomplished by a competent language-speaker, who after considering the name in question, diagnoses the difficulty of determining its meaning by means of its intrinsic features and after that agrees to follow the authority of linguistic habit, which conveys its meaning. A competent language-speaker thus descends to the level on which all mediocre language-speakers always dwell: they simply follow linguistic habit because they have no other option. But at the same time, this competent person, unlike his fellow language-speakers, follows habit only because the resemblance of the name to its referent does not work in the specific cases, like the one under discussion. Socrates' reasoning thus does not invite a competent language-speaker to abandon the consideration of intrinsic features of names in determining their reference in favor of following habit on the whole, but demonstrates that it is commendable to do this only in the cases in which the resemblance of a name to its referent does not work, as this competent person has found through consideration. In this respect, the concept of an agreement with oneself endorses the interpretation of the case of σκληρότης as one that does not undermine the principle of resemblance. I thus agree entirely with Sedley³ that the case of σκληρότης appears as exceptional, not violating resemblance as the prevailing principle, although I do not think that, in Socrates' opinion, such cases will be rare, as Sedley believes, because

that Hermogenes can further represent this imposition, without having in view any difference, both as an agreement of some future users of a name, and as an individual decision of a single person which other companions follow (384 d 2–5; 385 d 8–9). Nevertheless, in Hermogenes' theory, both in its initial exposition (384 d 6–7) and in its reformulation by Socrates (433 e 2–9), agreement is treated only as a basis for the imposition of names and for initiating a linguistic habit, not as a way of following already established habit by generations of speakers.

³ Sedley 2003, 143–145, see esp. p. 145.

I do not agree that the problem of this word is the *equal* number of letters designating 'hardness' and 'softness'.⁴

It remains to ask what authority stands behind linguistic habit according to Socrates' argument. As I have just said, the agreement of a competent language-speaker with himself about following the meaning of a name that is sanctioned by linguistic habit should be distinguished from Hermogenes' theory of agreement as the assignment of any arbitrary name to any arbitrary referent. Hermogenes' theory as it is formulated in the dialogue stresses the arbitrariness of name meanings and their changeability; he is not interested in how an ordinary speaker follows these multiple and changeable conventions, precisely because the stability of language contradicts his theory to a large extent: there is no visible reason why these arbitrary names should survive through centuries rather than change by new agreements. He of course assumes that linguistic habit stems from such agreements (384 d 5–7) because it is important for him that we rely on agreed, habitual meaning and not on any inherent properties of names; nevertheless, this does not mean that he regards this habit as something stable. Again, he refers to the differences among Greek dialects and between Greek and other languages as a proof that the correctness of names is nothing more than the will of those who assign names to their referents as arbitrarily as they wish (385 d 7 – e 2). But this does not mean that he thinks that these differences entail any idea of the stability of languages, for instance that the meanings of names stem from an initial assignment.

Of course, we still cannot rule out that Hermogenes' arbitrary agreement is involved more distantly as the source of habit. Socrates might have developed his theory to mean that the linguistic habit the language-speakers learn in their childhood stems from some initial arbitrary agreement. But as plausible as this view might appear, it remains true that Socrates' does not adduce the option of a temporally distant agreement in his argument: from the lack of resemblance of the name, Socrates infers that Cratylus agreed with himself to follow linguistic habit, instead of saying that he follows an arbitrary agreement made in the past. Moreover, it is not clear that habit, which was initially an element of Hermogenes theory, still preserves its Hermogenian character at this stage. Hermogenes, as we know, was urged to yield to Socrates' argument that linguistic νόμος has been created by the skillful lawgiver, who possesses the τέχνη of making names appropriate to things (388 e): linguistic habit thus can be now a part of the naturalist stance. It is thus fairly possible that Cratylus appealed to habit just because he had already learned to associate habit with the naturalist position; his

⁴ Cf. Pt. I, p. 221–223.

proposal is something like this: one cannot recognize the resemblance of σκληρότης to ‘hardness’ in spite of the will of the name-giver to make it resemble its referent, and one is bound to follow the habit according to which σκληρότης indicates hardness, because the name-giver assigned it to ‘hardness’, the similarity having been lost for some reason.

Socrates’ argument is a correction of this view: in spite of Cratylus’ attempt to resist, one should concede that the indication in a given case entails lack of resemblance and thus is based on agreement. But he does not abandon Cratylus’ appeal to habit, and he shows that the agreement here involved differs from that of Hermogenes: it is the agreement of the competent language-speaker with the meaning of the name as assigned to it by a wise name-giver, who tried to create the name appropriate to its referent. This name-giver failed to achieve an unequivocal resemblance or, alternatively, he was successful, but this resemblance was obliterated in the course of the development of language, as many of Socrates’ etymologies imply. Nevertheless, the bond of the name with the thing the name-giver assigned it to is still persistent in habit, as Cratylus may have implied.

My main reason for preferring this option is the premises on which Socrates’ argument is built: both interlocutors assume that the name σκληρότης was coined by a competent name-giver who tried to make a word imitating the property of hardness. There is no sign that they abandoned this initial hypothesis, and the result is quite compatible with it: we should agree to the reference that the habit preserved up to our days, although we are not able to detect this reference due to inherent features of the name itself because it lacks (or lost) similarity to the thing. The bond of the name with the referent is thus still in force, but the manifestation of this bond, the descriptive resemblance, became obscure. This situation would hardly be possible if the habit could be reduced to arbitrary and temporary agreements: the bond with the initial reference would have disappeared.

Another, less important reason for my interpretation of agreement here as compatible with naturalism, is that Socrates’ reasoning about σκληρότης does not aim to demonstrate that it is an arbitrary name, even in its current form, with the λ that is contrary to properties of the referent. If my previous argument was correct, σκληρότης is composed basically from appropriate letters and syllables,⁵ and the authority of habit restores in the mind of a competent language-speaker the true form of the name, which was distorted by the unhappily inserted λ. This would again be impossible if the agreement with oneself meant following an arbitrary agreement of mediocre language-speakers.

⁵ See Pt. I, p. 221–223.

Of course, there is a manifest difficulty for the view I bring forward: Socrates shifts without much ado from the concept of the arbitrary agreement of name-makers, as proposed by Hermogenes, which served throughout the discussion as an antipode of naturalism, to the new kind of agreement, now with a habit that takes its origin from the name-givers who imposed names according to naturalistic principles. I believe that, on consideration, this difficulty is surmountable. After all, both kinds of agreement suggest a lack of resemblance between the name and its referent, and thus restrict radical naturalism. And the reinterpretation of conventionalist concepts in a naturalistic vein is not alien to the dialogue: take for instance Socrates' treatment of language differences, one of the main arguments for conventionalism, both for Hermogenes and after him; Socrates considers this quite compatible with and even inherent in his own concept of naturalism (390 a 5–9).

The interlocutors thus discuss the new concept of linguistic habit that serves as an explanation how language-speakers understand the meaning of words without resorting to the resemblance between a name and its referent. Of course the meaning of the name in such cases is what we today call its referential and conventional meaning, viz. awareness of the object indicated by the name, without any knowledge of the origin of this name (its etymology) and correspondingly of any qualities of its referent as suggested by the name itself (for instance, knowledge of what the name ἄνθρωπος refers to, but without knowing the etymological meaning of the word and the properties of the species 'man'). If this is the case, Plato came closer here than anywhere to our modern concept of conventional language. What is important, however, is that this concept of understanding language as following the authority of habit is essentially different from the conventionalism as defended by Hermogenes, whose crucial point is the arbitrariness of the choice of a name for a thing at the moment of the creation of names.

The agreement of a competent language-speaker with himself turns out to be linguistic habit;⁶ to a certain extent, this recalls Socrates'

⁶ Leslie Brown notices the oddity of the concept of agreement with oneself in this part of the dialogue (Brown 2021, 22 f.), but in fact Socrates applies this unusual designation only because it follows from the premises of the discussion that lack of resemblance of the name with its referent entails the presence of agreement on the name's meaning and that, in the absence of a visible partner to this agreement, he supposes that agreement occurred in Cratylus' soul (note again that Socrates does not mention that Cratylus agreed with Socrates or earlier with his compatriots). But this does not imply an absurd idea that Cratylus should "make a promise with oneself", as Brown supposes, only that he in fact agreed with the habit as the higher authority.

famous agreement to follow the laws of Athens in the *Crito*. Contrary to Plato's usual notion of agreement, which corresponds to the standard understanding of his contemporaries, namely the agreement of two equal sides to follow certain rules that the agreeing parties constitute together and that are equally binding for all who partake,⁷ the agreement in the *Crito* is the (silent) agreement by which a lower party agrees to follow the rules set by the higher one (and to get benefits for fulfilling duties that follow from this agreement).⁸ Ademollo⁹ connects the concept of agreement in *Crito* with Hermogenes' conventionalism and supposes that Socrates' implicit agreement with the Athenian laws in the *Crito* may imply that, for Hermogenes, linguistic agreement also had its origin in the earlier speakers' tacit adherence to the usage of one or more speakers. But in fact, Hermogenes is quite explicit about the open, bilateral (or multi-lateral), and equal character of linguistic agreement. *Crito*'s theory of the underling's tacit agreement with the will of the higher authority of the laws is much more similar to Socrates' appeal to agreement with linguistic habit: in both cases, it is about following the rule, not about creating it, and the concept is authoritarian: in the *Crito*, once one accepted the agreement with the laws (by the fact itself of living in the state), he should obey them unquestionably; in the *Cratylus*, one should accept the meaning dictated by the higher authority of linguistic law, or habit, for otherwise the communication fails.

I believe that this step of the argument sheds light on its overall purpose. Both Socrates and Cratylus assume that σκληρότης is a name whose sounds imitate the object this name indicates, even if this name is not entirely correct. The supporters of the conventionalist interpretation of the dialogue claim that Socrates' argument destroys this assumption and

⁷ The most important example of this view of agreement is the theory of 'many' voiced by Glaucon in Plato's *Republic* 358 e – 359 a, that the initial agreement neither to do injustice nor to suffer is the essence of justice and that it underlies all later laws and covenants (the parts of this agreement are ordinary people who thought that to do injustice is good "by nature", but to suffer injustice is bad); cf. Callicles' theory in *Gorg.* 483 b–c; 492 c 7 on laws as a creation of the 'weak', made in order to restrict those who are stronger, and as συνθήματα; for the popular notion of the law as agreement of citizens see: Hippias in *Xen. Mem.* 1. 4. 12; Anaxim. *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1. 8. 1422 a 2–4; 2. 13. 1424 a 10; [*Demosth.*] 25. 16.

⁸ See *Crito* 51 c 6 – e 4: a citizen who stays in the city and does not abandon it at the age of dokimasia or later by this very fact agrees that he approves of its laws and thus should obey them without demur (see further, 52 c 1–3 and e 3–5 on Socrates staying in Athens in the course of all his life as a sign that he liked Athenian laws).

⁹ Ademollo 2011, 38 f.

demonstrates that the resemblance of the name to the thing is entirely unnecessary, and that convention can entirely substitute it as the principle of naming.¹⁰ If on the contrary, as I have argued, the agreement Socrates pleads for helps the competent name-speaker to grasp the similarity of the name to its referent with the help of linguistic habit, his reasoning confirms the original assumption that the names are imitations of things and thus are produced by learned name-givers. It also suggests that this habit itself is the creature of the name-giver(s) who both made the (similar even if imperfect) name and established permanently its connection with the thing 'hardness'.

There is one previously unnoticed sign that the discussion of the difficulties associated with the word σκληρότης and the recognition of the need for agreement did not change Socrates' commitment to naturalism. Having proved that linguistic habit presupposes convention, Socrates admits for a moment that his argument is wrong and that habit, as Cratylus had previously believed, does not presuppose convention (435 a 10):

εἰ δ' ὅτι μάλιστα μή ἐστι τὸ ἔθος συνθήκη, οὐκ ἂν καλῶς ἔτι ἔχοι λέγειν τὴν ὁμοιότητα δῆλωμα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔθος – ἐκεῖνο γάρ, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ ὁμοίῳ καὶ ἀνομοίῳ δηλοῖ.

But if, which is extremely unlikely,¹¹ habit is not an agreement, then it will no longer be correct to assert that indication must be made on the basis of similarity, but [it will be correct to assert that it must be made] on the basis of habit: for habit seems to indicate by means of what is similar [to things] and what is not similar.

¹⁰ See Ademollo 2022, 40: "It is important to be clear that this argument not only is aimed at, but also *depends on*, the naturalist premise that names resemble things. The basic idea appears to be that if naturalism is true, then names (or some names) resemble things; but if names resemble things, then they can do so also in a partial way (as Socrates has already shown), and if so, then they are conventional. Thus there is a sense in which naturalism about names is self-refuting". I believe that Socrates does not make the step from the partial resemblance of names to their (total) conventionality. The names that partially resemble can be better or worse and thus correspond more or less to the naturalist standard. The case of σκληρότης demonstrates only that habit and agreement is a necessary means for grasping the meaning of *some* names, but it is hard to see how this could refute naturalism as a principle.

¹¹ The understanding of ὅτι μάλιστα as "wholly", "entirely", as it was often rendered, is erroneous, as Ademollo rightly points out. This expression usually introduces an assumption that the speaker does not consider likely or even regards as incorrect (Ademollo 2011, 402 n. 36, with examples), cf. Latin *si maxime* (OLD s.v. maxime 5 b); see already Heindorf 1806, ad loc.

In rejecting this assumption, Socrates explicitly makes it clear that the truth of his argumentation guarantees that the preservation of the naturalistic principle of similarity prevails. This step in Socrates' argument and the precise meaning of οὐκ ... ἔτι is usually overlooked. On the contrary, scholars for the most part understand this phrase as saying that in both cases, whether the habit is agreement or not, it *still* would be wrong to claim that the principle of indication is similarity.¹² They give to the main sentence the meaning of a consequence that occurs irrespective of whether the condition formulated in the adventitious sentence occurs or not. However, οὐκ ἔτι normally means that something is *no longer* the case.¹³ In reality, the point here is about a consequence that occurs only if the condition is true, and its truth is presented as highly unlikely.¹⁴ Cratylus is thus invited to concede that agreement plays a certain role in the functioning of language, not only because of Socrates' arguments, but also because this ensures that the principle of similarity, dear to Cratylus, is preserved as the basic standard for the correctness of names.

So, if Socrates' reasoning is wrong and habit does not presuppose agreement (agreement of a specific kind), then interlocutors will have to abandon the idea that the standard for language is the similarity of a name

¹² Already Heindorf 1806, ad loc., noticed that one would expect ὅμως before οὐκ ἂν καλῶς, and in fact the scholars often render the text as if it has done so: Schofield 1982, 77: "Even if habit is very far from being convention, it would still not be well to say that it is not resemblance that discloses, but habit; for that, as it seems, discloses, and it does so by both what resembles and what does not resemble"; Reeve 1999, 87: "And even if usage is completely different from convention, still you must say that expressing something isn't a matter of likeness but of usage"; Sedley 2004, 140: "And even if habit is not at all the same thing as agreement, it still would not be right to say that similarity is the means of indication"; Ademollo 2011, 402 f.: "And even if habit were not convention, still it would no longer be right to say that similarity is a means to indicate, but that habit is; for that, it seems, indicates both with something similar and with something dissimilar". Ademollo, who faithfully renders the meaning of οὐκ ἔτι ("it would no longer be right"), nevertheless adds "still", to which nothing in the text corresponds, and he understands the sentence in the same way as the scholars just cited – even if habit differs from contract, it can *still* no longer be said the resemblance is the principle of indicating things.

¹³ LSJ s.v. οὐκέτι ("no more, no longer, no further"); for Plato, see Ast, *Lexicon Platonicum*, s.v. οὐκέτι (iam non..., nicht mehr et nicht weiter), with examples.

¹⁴ For the correct translation, see Dalimier 1999, 178: "D'ailleurs, à supposer que l'usage ne soit pas une convention, on ne serait plus en droit de dire que la ressemblance est le moyen de faire voire".

to the thing it indicates. Then the only standard would be habit, since it consists in indicating by means of elements of language both similar and dissimilar to their referents, without making any difference between them. The meaning of this dilemma appears to be as follows: let us grant that, as has been proved, the standard of language is resemblance, while indication by means of non-resembling names that owe their meaning to an arbitrary assignment by conventionalist agreement is a worse kind of indication. Now, as the case of σκληρότης demonstrates, situations arise when the resemblance of a name to its referent is not sufficient for successful indication, and a competent language-speaker has no other option but to rely on the habitual meaning of the name, viz. the meaning rooted in tradition and learned by all language-speakers. Resemblance or non-resemblance of a name to its referent is irrelevant for this habitual meaning. If a naturalist like Cratylus does not accept that following the habitual meaning of a name in such particular cases entails the silent agreement of a competent language-speaker with himself, this would mean that even such a person follows linguistic habit automatically, without any analysis of the imitative properties of words. But in this case, a naturalist should admit that even if resemblance is theoretically preferable as the principle of indication, in practice we all, including linguistic experts, simply follow habitual meanings.

If on the contrary, Socrates is right and following habit in such cases entails agreement, i.e., a competent language-speaker follows habit only after having analyzed the structure of a name and recognized that it is impossible to discern the referent of this name relying on the imitative properties of its sounds, then the principle of resemblance stands. The conscious, expertise-based character of following habit in such particular cases guarantees the validity of resemblance as the standard of language and as the criterion for the estimation of names.

This limited concession to agreement is consistent with Socrates' conclusion following these words (435 b 3 – d 1):

ἐπειδὴ δὲ ταῦτα συγχωροῦμεν, ὦ Κρατύλε – τὴν γὰρ σιγὴν σου συγχώρησιν θήσω – ἀναγκαῖόν που καὶ συνθήκην τι καὶ ἔθος συμβάλλεσθαι πρὸς δῆλωσιν ὧν διανοοῦμενοι λέγομεν – ἐπεὶ, ὦ βέλτιστε, εἰ θέλεις ἐπὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἐλθεῖν, πόθεν οἶε ἔξαι ὀνόματα ὅμοια ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἀριθμῶν ἐπενεγκεῖν, ἐὰν μὴ ἔῃς τι τὴν σὴν ὁμολογίαν καὶ συνθήκην κῦρος ἔχειν τῶν ὀνομάτων ὁρθότητος πέρι; ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν καὶ αὐτῷ ἀρέσκει μὲν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ὅμοια εἶναι τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγμασιν – ἀλλὰ μὴ ὡς ἀληθῶς, τὸ τοῦ Ἑρμογένους, γλίσχρα ἢ ἡ ὀλκὴ αὕτη τῆς ὁμοιότητος, ἀναγκαῖον δὲ ἢ καὶ τῷ φορτικῷ

τούτω προσχρησθαι, τῇ συνθήκῃ, εἰς ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητα. ἐπεὶ ἴσως κατὰ γε τὸ δυνατόν κάλλιστ' ἂν λέγοιτο ὅταν ἡ πᾶσιν ἢ ὡς πλείστοις ὁμοίοις λέγηται, τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ προσήκουσιν, αἰσχισται δὲ τοῦναντίον.

(1) Since we have agreed on this, for I understand your silence as consent, it is necessary that *also* the agreement, together with habit, should contribute to the designation of those things which we think. (2) For, my dear fellow, if it pleases you to refer to numbers, whence will you take resembling names to be assigned to each of the numbers, unless you allow *your* consent and agreement to govern to *some extent* the correctness of the names. (3) I myself am committed that names should be (as far as possible) similar to things, but I fear that indeed this pull of similarity becomes, in Hermogenes' phrase, "viscous", and that it is necessary to make *additional use* of this crude thing, agreement, in regard to the correctness of names. (4) For perhaps the most beautiful way of speaking is when it is expressed by [elements of speech] similar to [things], that is, corresponding to [them] either entirely or to as many of them as possible, and the most unsuitable way is the opposite.

Let us start from the names of numbers. Socrates' treatment of numbers became an object of intensive discussion. At first sight, the names of numbers can be nothing but conventional.¹⁵ But Socrates asserts clearly that agreement in the case of numbers is necessary, precisely in order to find the names that *resemble* each number (πόθεν οἶει ἔξεν ὀνόματα ὅμοια ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἀριθμῶν ἐπενεγκεῖν).¹⁶ Note also that he

¹⁵ Schofield 1982, 79 supposed that the only way to make the names of numbers resemble their referents would be to make simple numbers like 'one', 'two', 'three' having one, two, and three syllables; since, however, this demands a convention that the number of syllables corresponds to the number that the name refers to, the names of numbers demonstrate that even the representation of thing by a name (the capacity that the conventional names usually do not have) may be performed according to conventional rules; Ademollo 2011, 407–411; 2022, 41, denies that the names of the numbers resemble their referents in any way (cf. already earlier Robinson 1955/1969, 117; Ackrill 1994/1997).

¹⁶ I here stick with Sedley 2003, 142, to the literal understanding of this statement. Ademollo 2011, 411 argued *contra* that Socrates' reasoning is a kind of *modus tollens* – argument in an elliptical form: (if Cratylus assigns to agreement some role, he would be able to recognize that a name may not resemble its referent entirely); if on the contrary he denies a role of agreement totally, then he has to admit that every name resembles its referent. But there cannot be names similar to

speaks about “your” agreement, which should play a limited role in the “correctness of names” (ἐὰν μὴ ἔᾳς τι τὴν σὴν ὁμολογίαν καὶ συνθήκην κῦρος ἔχειν τῶν ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος πέρι). This shows that Socrates still has in view the agreement of the language-speaker with himself, which is agreement on the validity of linguistic habit in certain cases, not agreement in Hermogenes’ sense, namely on the imposition of names that are entirely arbitrary. Where then does this Socratic kind of agreement rule in the case of numbers? Most probably, in evaluating names for basic numbers, just as in the general case of names, the necessity of agreement to which has been maintained for the “first” fundamental names that do not derive from others. There is a limited group of names that correspond to the basic numbers 1–10, 100, and 1000 – those from which all other numbers are formed in the Greek system of counting. We cannot maintain that these names resemble the numbers they indicate, and we thus have no other option than to agree with the linguistic habit that they belong to these numbers.¹⁷ The names of other numbers are derivative from the names of the simple ones and resemble numbers in this derivative sense, viz. as far as they can be reduced to elements that we assume to be

each number. (Thus, agreement should have some authority concerning correctness.) This reconstruction not only makes the reasoning unduly elliptical, but goes against the immediate linguistic meaning of the passage: namely, that the denial of a role of agreement would render impossible the resemblance of the names to each number they refer to; on the contrary, the acceptance of agreement opens the door for resemblance.

¹⁷ At first glance, ἐπιφέρειν implies that Socrates discusses the way the initial imposition of names for numbers and ὁμολογίαν καὶ συνθήκην should refer to the mode of this imposition by the initial creators of the name; for this meaning of ἐπιφέρειν, cf. 424 d 6. 7; e 4–5 etc. (σὴν ὁμολογίαν καὶ συνθήκην would then have the meaning like “the agreement” you spoke about). But ἐπιφέρειν is a less technical term that τίθεσθαι: for instance, at 432 e 3. 5, ἐπιφέρειν clearly has the meaning “to use a linguistic expression (sound, word, sentence) on account of a certain thing”. It is thus entirely possible that in our passage Socrates is discussing not how the names of numbers were initially created, but how a competent language-speaker should interpret them in terms of naturalist theory. This can explain why he is obscure about how precisely these names were created in terms of their resemblance and non-resemblance to their referents: important is only how we today understand and use them. But it is entirely possible that the initial creator of these names operated in the same way: in the absence of names that might resemble the basic numbers, he had no other option than to select arbitrary strings of sounds for them, introducing a habit of considering these strings their names; they were not however the objects of a changeable agreement, since the whole system of further names for derivative numbers was built on the initial assignment.

appropriate to the simple numbers: for instance, if we assume that ἕν in accordance with habit is the correct name for 1 and δέκα for 10, then we can recognize in ἑνδεκα a name that resembles 11.¹⁸ The numbers thus confirm the necessity of agreement with the habit, in the sense maintained above by means of the case of σκληρότης, as the principle additional to that of resemblance.

Now to Socrates' summarizing judgment on the main issue of the discussion. Some scholars see in this judgment an explicit signal of his apparent, though not consistent (Robinson, Schofield) departure from his earlier support of naturalism.¹⁹ Ademollo denies that this signal is present and argues that the reader should himself come to the conclusion that naturalism has been refuted, but nevertheless finds in Socrates' words hints at the abandonment of his earlier position.²⁰ For all these scholars, reasoning about σκληρότης logically leads to the recognition that the similarity of name and thing is superfluous. Barney claims, on the contrary,

¹⁸ I agree with Sedley, who argued that the names of numbers are compatible with the naturalist principle (Sedley 2003, 142 f.), but I disagree with his proposal that the names for basic numbers resemble their referents while names for derivative ones indicate them conventionally. On the one hand, it is difficult to imagine how Socrates, who earlier assumed that letters (elementary sounds) imitate physical qualities, could claim that basic names were made of imitative sounds, too. On the other hand, I don't see why Sedley thinks that the names of derivative numbers should be indefinitely long without agreement on their composition: once the names of basic numbers have been imposed, the other numbers acquire quite naturally names that are composed of principal ones.

¹⁹ Robinson 1955/1969, 122 (in Socrates' words, there is only a "vain regret" that the resemblance of names to things is desirable but unattainable; the contract theory is "vulgar", but, as Socrates seems to imply, has no alternative); Schofield 1982, 67–68: when discussing the word σκληρότης, the discovery that the naturalistic theory has to rely on the idea of "pure convention" creates a crucial obstacle for Socrates to accept naturalism; he still claims to endorse the idea of the resemblance of names to things as far as possible, but is aware that the price to be paid to gain confidence in it is too high.

²⁰ Ademollo 2011, 406–407, 418–421: although Socrates' literal words mean only a partial concession to conventionalism, the role of agreement in the understanding of the word σκληρότης could allow him to speak in favor of full conventionalism. Plato's rejection of this conclusion is necessary to keep the reader interested in the next part of the discussion, in which Socrates discusses Cratylus' thesis that knowledge of names ensures knowledge of things themselves (435 d – 439 b). The refutation of this thesis by proving that names can reflect the mistaken opinions of their creators finally opens the reader's eyes, Ademollo suggests, to the fact that names designate their referents on the basis of convention.

that Socrates, as before, expresses his commitment to naturalism, but recognizes that names, again on the basis of the case of σκληρότης, cannot fully fulfill their purpose of being derived from things.²¹ Sedley argued,²² however, that these statements by Socrates are quite consistent with the qualified form of naturalism that he defends throughout the dialogue: he assigns to agreement only the role of an additional means of designation, necessary where the resemblance of the name to the thing is for one reason or another insufficient to recognize the thing. Sedley's view seems to me in general correct, but some difficulties should be settled.

There is in fact some ambiguity in the concluding sentence of this part: ἐπεὶ ἴσως κατὰ γε τὸ δυνατόν κάλλιστ' ἂν λέγοιτο ὅταν ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ ὡς πλείστοις ὁμοίοις λέγεται, τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ προσήκουσιν, αἰσχισται δὲ τὸναντίον. This can be understood both in the sense that the language consisting of the parts that, as far as possible, resemble their referents is the principle one should follow (in imposing names and in analyzing their meaning in the existing language), but also in the sense that it is theoretically a fine principle, but it cannot be realized. The decision about which horn of this dilemma one should prefer depends on understanding the immediately preceding statement, since the discussion of the case of σκληρότης and of the numbers assign to convention only a limited role, and thus left intact the prevailing role of resemblance:

ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν καὶ αὐτῷ ἀρέσκει μὲν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ὅμοια εἶναι τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγμασιν· ἀλλὰ μὴ ὡς ἀληθῶς, τὸ τοῦ Ἑρμογένους, γλίσχρα ἢ ἡ ὀλκὴ αὕτη τῆς ὁμοιότητος, ἀναγκαῖον δὲ ἢ καὶ τῷ φορτικῷ τοῦτω προσχρῆσθαι, τῇ συνθήκῃ, εἰς ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητα.

The *prima facie* meaning of this sentence appears to be as follows: Socrates summarizes that he approves the principle he defended throughout the whole discussion that the names should resemble their referents as much as possible, but he admits that resemblance does not work as a single standard for indication, and it is necessary to use additionally agreement (agreement with habit) as a second and subordinate standard (see **καὶ** and **προσχρῆσθαι**), as has already been asserted above (453 b 3–6).

Ademollo forwards quite a new interpretation both of the literal meaning of this sentence and of its theoretical import.²³ He denies that Socrates here approves resemblance as a theoretical preference.

²¹ Barney 2001, 137.

²² Sedley 2003, 140–145.

²³ Ademollo 2011, 413–420.

He argues that ἀρέσκειν with the infinitive construction dependent on it is usually employed for the idea that Y believes X where “X” stands for a proposition. Ademollo thus proposes that Socrates refers to the factual state of affairs: he *believes* that names are “as far as possible” similar to their referents, which in turn, according to Ademollo, means that most names resemble their referents; this further construes Socrates’ thought as maintaining that although most names resemble their referents, they do it imperfectly and thus they indicate the referents by means of convention, as, for instance, σκληρότης. He further interprets the words γλίσχρα ἢ ἡ ὀλκή αὕτη τῆς ὁμοιότητος as meaning that “resemblance carries little weight with regard to the correctness of names” (p. 417) and comes to the view that the concluding passage on using also convention understates the results of the previous discussion – namely, that convention has already won the field entirely – because of Plato’s special strategy (p. 420).

This appears to give the passage a sense that contravenes its most obvious meaning. But let us discuss Ademollo’s points in sequence. First, the meaning of the ἀρέσκει phrase (ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν καὶ αὐτῷ ἀρέσκει μὲν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ὅμοια εἶναι τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγμασιν): I believe that he is right that the infinitive construction corresponds to the proposition that a person approves. But linguistically, it is impossible to distinguish in this construction the approval of a fact from the approval of a principle; only the context helps. At 433 c 9, for instance, Cratylus uses this construction to contravene Socrates’ statement that something is a name, even if it is falsely imposed. When saying that he does not like Socrates saying this (a fact), he implies that he does not approve such a statement as a piece of doctrine. And when Socrates responds, asking him whether it appeals to him that a name is the indication of a thing, he asks him, not whether he is happy with the fact that names indicate things (there is no specific reason for Cratylus to be happy with this trivial thing), but whether he admits that it is their standard role. Grant that it is impossible to maintain formally whether Socrates regards resemblance as a fact of language or as a norm of it, the next sentence, which maintains the principle of resemblance as the norm (ἐπεὶ ἴσως κατὰ γε τὸ δυνατόν κάλλιστ’ ἂν λέγοιτο ὅταν ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ ὡς πλείστοις ὁμοίοις λέγῃται, τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ προσήκουσιν, αἰσχισται δὲ τοῦναντίον), acquires the decisive role for the meaning of the sentence we are discussing. Moreover, Ademollo’s understanding of κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ὅμοια εἶναι τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγμασιν as “most names resemble their referents”, implausible by itself, is refuted by the meaning of κατὰ γε τὸ δυνατόν in the next sentence: in both cases Socrates says that he approves that the names should resemble their referents as far as possible.

Now to the second part of the sentence:

ἀλλὰ μὴ ὡς ἀληθῶς, τὸ τοῦ Ἑρμογένους, γλίσχρα ἢ ἡ ὀλκὴ αὕτη τῆς
ὁμοιότητος, ἀναγκαῖον δὲ ἢ καὶ τῷ φορτικῷ τούτῳ προσχρῆσθαι, τῇ
συνθήκῃ, εἰς ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητα.

This is the difficult item. Some scholars take this phrase as undermining the principle of resemblance. After an interesting discussion, Ademollo comes to the following sense: *this* resemblance (viz. the one referred to in the preceding sentence) carries little weight with regard to the correctness of names (p. 415–417). Now, the adjective γλίσχρος has the literal meaning ‘sticky’, ‘glutinous’, with further development in different directions – on the one hand, ‘clinging fast’, as metaphor for thorough or excessively thorough work, and, on the other, to ‘greedy’ or ‘stingy’ persons, and from this to ‘cheap’ things (Ademollo prefers this latter meaning). But “this”, αὕτη, in the sentence we are discussing, does not modify resemblance as such, but ἡ ὀλκή, the “dragging” of resemblance. Hermogenes reacted with γλίσχρως to Socrates’ overly bold restoration of the initial form of the word. It is thus less probable that Socrates alludes here to the insignificance of resemblance as such (this is certainly not the point Hermogenes made) than to the strained character of some etymologies, and ἡ ὀλκή also favors this option. Socrates is thus paying a tribute to Hermogenes’ criticism: this “dragging” of resemblance turns out to be “sticky”, i.e., it would be far-fetched to claim resemblance for every name and to search for strained etymologies.²⁴ This sentence does not attack resemblance as a principle: Socrates merely says that we should not unduly press resemblance in every case; when the resemblance of the name to the thing cannot be safely maintained, it is necessary to be satisfied with a competent language-speaker’s agreement with the meaning of this name as constituted by habit. Note that agreement features as “base”, “inelegant” (τῷ φορτικῷ τούτῳ), which should not be taken as ironic. Although as I argued this is about agreement with the obscured will of the name-giver, not about conventional agreement, it is not a principle that Plato admires, but one he thinks will inevitably be appealed to.

²⁴ Reeve translates it: “I fear that defending this view is like hauling a ship up a sticky ramp, as Hermogenes suggested”. This seems to be correct in respect of the immediate metaphoric meaning, but the metaphor Socrates uses is related not to the defense of naturalism, which was not Hermogenes’ point, but to the undue defense of resemblance in particular cases. Shorey 1933, 265 rightly renders the meaning of the sentence with its hint at Hermogenes’ remark and objects (p. 570) to Jowett’s translation “the force of resemblance is a mean thing”.

The concluding remark corresponds entirely to this reasoning:

ἐπεὶ ἴσως κατὰ γε τὸ δυνατόν κάλλιστ' ἂν λέγοιτο ὅταν ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ ὡς
πλείστοις ὁμοίοις λέγῃται, τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ προσήκουσιν, αἰσχίσται δὲ
τοῦναντίον.

At first glance it simply reformulates the principle as it was already stated earlier. Reeve, for instance, translates ὁμοίοις as modifying the implied “names”. But there is no need to suppose a tautological statement: ὁμοίοις can imply all parts of language and thus refer back to Socrates’ summary of the results of his discussion of resemblance with Cratylus (432 d 11 – 433 a 6). According to it, not only can a name contain some inappropriate letters, but also a sentence can contain some inappropriate words, provided that they preserve general resemblance to their referents: the best way of saying something will be by means of all appropriate elements, the worst by means of only a few. This general principle thus remains valid after achieving the new insights into the inevitable role that agreement plays in indication. The sentence justifies (ἐπεὶ) why agreement should be used only when resemblance is unattainable. This is the case because the best possible way is to use the parts of language that resemble things as much as is possible. Notice that not only the standard itself remains valid; it is also the working standard, contrary to the “pessimistic” understanding of Socrates’ naturalism; it would be useless to distinguish between best and worst in respect of resemblance, if Socrates’ final position were a pessimistic retreat to arbitrary names because resemblance is desirable, but unattainable.

Ademollo, unlike Robinson and Schofield, admits that Socrates’ very statements summarizing his reasoning in this part of the dialogue (435 b 2 – c 6) do not mean literally that naturalism is refuted, but merely concede to convention some role in indicating things, along with resemblance. Ademollo suggests that Socrates, as a character in the dialogue in this part of the conversation, is not yet conscious of what is clear to Plato himself and what should be clear to a competent reader. According to Ademollo, it is only in the final part, after Socrates has demonstrated that words cannot serve as a reliable source of knowledge of things, that conventionalism triumphs definitively: “for if a name may convey false information about its referent, then clearly it can only indicate its referent by convention”.²⁵

Now it is true that in discussing the case of σκληρότης, Socrates, in connection with it and similar words, does speak of “correctness according

²⁵ Ademollo 2011, 419; cf. 2022, 41.

to agreement" (435 a 8, b 6 – c 7), that is, that the use of a name is governed by agreement and not determined by resemblance to a thing. Agreement, then, serves to make up for lack of similarity or to substitute for similarity where it is unattainable, and, at least in this respect, does not in any way, no matter how one understands agreement here, undermine the principle of similarity as a standard for language on the whole. Ademollo is apparently inclined to regard the mistaken names in the final part of the *Cratylus* as something along the same lines. In reality, however, the word σκληρότης is erroneous only in terms of inadequately conveying the language creator's correct judgment about the thing in question, whereas the names in the final section are erroneous because they reflect their creators' false judgments about the world. However, the existence of names in a language that reflect the language creators' mistaken opinions about certain things does not mean that Plato regards all names are mistaken in this sense. Still less does the existence of such words undermine the naturalistic principle itself, based for Plato not on what language actually is, but on the standard to which names must conform according to their purpose, to instruct about the true properties of the things they indicate.

To summarize, the final part of the discussion of the issue of naturalism versus conventionalism does not show any signs that the former principle is abandoned in favor of the latter. The yielding to conventionalism, as I argued, in the case of "agreement", is even less important than is usually understood. According to Socrates, the lack of the name's resemblance to the thing should be compensated not by appeal to convention, viz. the arbitrary agreement of mediocre language-speakers as in Hermogenes' view, but by appeal to the agreement of the competent language-speaker, to linguistic habit. The universal authority of the latter suggests that interlocutors view it as fixing the ancient and permanent bond, created by the ancient name-giver, between the name and the thing it indicates. It also appears plausible that habit owes its permanence to the initial resemblance of names created by name-givers to things, which persists in language in spite of its partial obscuring by later developments. This moderate yielding to "agreement and habit" (not to be confused with conventional agreement) corresponds entirely to Socrates' following summary of the discussion: the naturalist principle of resemblance is not abandoned in theory or practice, but only supplemented by a necessary appeal to habit for the names whose initial resemblance to the things they indicate has been obscured.

Alexander Verlinsky
Institute for Linguistic Studies, RAS

verlinsky@mail.ru

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The second part of the article, dealing with the question of Plato’s own position in the discussion of naturalism and conventionalism in the *Cratylus* (for part I, see *Hyperboreus* 29: 2 [2022] 196–233), continues with an analysis of a key point in the discussion between Socrates and Cratylus (434 a – 435 c). Cratylus argues that when the descriptive properties of a word conflict with each other and thus make it impossible to establish which “thing” such a word denotes, a competent native speaker capable of analyzing such properties is forced to follow linguistic habit like ordinary speakers. Socrates points out that following the linguistic habit with which a competent native speaker is forced to “agree” is nothing but understanding a word that is *dissimilar* to its referent. This in turn entails, in accordance with the dilemma of the whole discussion, that understanding in such cases can be based only on a “contract”, or “agreement” stipulating the meaning of a word, with the competent speaker negotiating it with himself. Cratylus’ forced agreement that contract plays a role in linguistic communication is usually understood by scholars as a partial concession to conventionalism on the part of Plato himself, or even as evidence that Plato fully supports the arguments of conventionalism and sees no need for words that have similarities with their referents.

The article substantiates a different understanding of this part of the dialogue. It argues that Socrates agrees with Cratylus in treating linguistic habit as an

independent factor in linguistic communication: understanding a word on the basis of habit does not need a word to resemble its referent through the descriptive and “mimetic” capacities of words; however it does not follow that the meaning of such words derives from the arbitrary “agreement” by which any arbitrary name can be assigned to any thing and at any moment change its name, as according to the theory of Hermogenes. The “agreement” of the competent native speaker with the meaning that a word possesses according to habit applies, first, only to a limited category of words that have no resemblance to their referents (in this the author of the article agrees with David Sedley’s understanding). Plato does not mean that understanding according to habit should make the similarity of a word to its referent superfluous: the highest purpose of words is their philosophical purpose as “instruments” for distinguishing the essential properties of things, while linguistic habit provides only knowledge of what a word refers to, but not of the properties of this referent.

Second, the “agreement with oneself” by which a competent native speaker is forced to agree to habit in the course of communication differs significantly from the arbitrary contract of *assigning* meaning to words in Hermogenes’ theory. Socrates’ argument does not assume that linguistic habit arises from such an establishment of meaning that makes any people, even the most mediocre ones, creators of language. On the contrary, his reasoning about the word *σκληρότης* is based on the premise that this word was created by one of the wise creators of language who strove to create words similar to the things they designate. This implies that the similarity was either not achieved, through error, or was lost in the course of the long history of language; the habit has nevertheless preserved the word’s connection to the thing to which the word was assigned by a “lawgiver” of language (apparently by virtue of his high authority), although the sound composition of the word does not allow us to define this thing by virtue of its intrinsic properties. Following the linguistic habit should thus be understood as an imperfect kind of linguistic communication, a forced retreat from the principles of naturalism, but not as a concession to conventionalism or even as Plato’s acknowledgment of its victory.

Во второй части статьи, посвященной позиции самого Платона в дискуссии о натурализме и конвенционализме в *Кратиле* (часть I см. *Hyperboreus* 29: 2 [2023] 196–233), продолжается разбор ключевого места в дискуссии Сократа и Кратила (434 а – 435 с). Кратил утверждает, что в тех случаях, когда дескриптивные или миметические свойства слова конфликтуют между собой и не позволяют установить, какую “вещь” обозначает подобное слово, компетентный носитель языка, способный к анализу подобных свойств, вынужден следовать за языковым узусом, подобно заурядным носителям языка. Сократ доказывает, что следование языковому узусу, с которым вынужден “согласиться” компетентный носитель языка, есть ничто иное, как понимание слова, несходного со своим денотатом. Это в свою очередь предполагает, в соответствии с дилеммой всей дискуссии, что понимание в подобных случаях может основываться лишь на “договоре” о значении слова, причем

компетентный носитель языка договаривается при этом сам с собой. Вынужденное согласие Кратила с тем, что “договор” играет определенную роль в языковой коммуникации, обычно понимается исследователями диалога как частичная уступка конвенционализму со стороны самого Платона или даже как свидетельство того, что Платон полностью поддерживает доводы конвенционализма и не видит необходимости в словах, обладающих подобием со своими денотатами.

В статье обосновывается иное понимание этой части диалога. Доказывается, что Сократ согласен с Кратилом в трактовке языкового узуса как самостоятельного фактора в языковой коммуникации: понимание слова на основе узуса не нуждается в сходстве слова с его денотатом благодаря дескриптивным или миметическим свойствам слов. Из этого, однако, не следует, что значение подобных слов восходит к произвольному “договору”, посредством которого можно присвоить любое имя любой вещи и в любой момент изменить ее именование, как предполагает теория Гермогена. “Договор” компетентного носителя языка с тем значением, которым слово обладает согласно узусу, относится, во-первых, лишь к ограниченной категории слов, которые не обладают сходством со своим денотатом (в этом автор статьи согласен с пониманием Д. Седли); Платон не имеет в виду, что понимание согласно узусу должно сделать полностью излишним сходство слова с его денотатом: высшее назначение слов состоит в их философском назначении как “орудий” для различения сущностных свойств вещей, а языковой узус обеспечивает лишь знание самого денотата слова, вещи, на которую указывает слово, но не ее свойств.

Во-вторых, “договор с самим собой”, посредством которого компетентный носитель языка вынужден согласиться с узусом в ходе коммуникации, существенно отличается от произвольного договора о *присвоении* слову значения в теории Гермогена. Аргументация Сократа не предполагает, что языковой узус восходит к подобному установлению значений, в котором могут участвовать любые, самые заурядные носители языка. Напротив, в основе его рассуждения о слове σκληρότης лежит посылка, что это слово было создано одним из мудрых творцов языка, стремившихся к созданию слов, подобных обозначаемых ими вещам, но это сходство либо было не достигнуто в силу ошибки, либо было утрачено в ходе длительной истории языка; узус, тем не менее, сохранил связь слова с вещью, которой присвоил это слово “законодатель” языка (очевидно, в силу его высокого авторитета), хотя звуковой состав слова не позволяет определить эту вещь в силу его внутренних свойств. Следование языковому обычаю следует, таким образом, понимать как несовершенный вид языковой коммуникации, вынужденное отступление от принципов натурализма, но не как уступку конвенционализму или даже признание его победы со стороны Платона.

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