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Abstract: Against the view that symbol-based semiosis is a human cognitive uniqueness, we have argued that non-human primates such as African vervet monkeys possess symbolic competence, as formally defined by Charles S. Peirce. Here I develop this argument by showing that the equivocal role ascribed to symbols by “folk semiotics” stems from an incomplete application of the Peircean logical framework for the classification of signs, which describes three kinds of symbols: rheme, dicent and argument. In an attempt to advance in the classifying semiotic processes, Peirce proposed several typologies, with different degrees of refinement. Around 1903, he developed a division into ten classes. According to this typology, symbols can be further analysed in three subclasses (rheme, dicent, argument). I proceed to demonstrate that vervet monkeys employ dicent symbols. There are remarkable implications of this argument since ‘symbolic species theory’ fails to explore the vast Peircean semiotic philosophy to frame questions regarding the emergence and evolution of symbolic processes.

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