



Palacký University  
Olomouc

Claudio J. Rodríguez H.

# **AGAINST UNIVERSALISM**

## **IN BIOSEMIOTIC THEORIES**

# INTRODUCTION

- This is a twofold presentation:
- Description of an 'extended model of semiosis' as it occurs within biosemiotics
- And a critique to such an idea
- So what's the deal with 'universalism'?

- Meaning-making processes are an inextricable part of the fabric of the universe
- Biosemiotic theories work on a more fundamental level of semiotic processes
- Extending semiotic theories to what is not covered by biosemiotics usually requires biosemiotics
- I'm taking 'universalism' to mean semiotic theories that try to go below the biosemiotics threshold
- Some examples can be found in pansemiosis, physiosemiosis and evolutionary theories of semiosis

---

**AGAINST UNIVERSALISM**

# **POSITIVE ARGUMENTS FOR UNIVERSALISM**



# **THE EXTENDED MODEL OF SEMIOSIS**

- General proposal about semiotic theories
- The semiotic threshold is what makes the division feasible
- “Orthodox” view on the threshold vs. Extended model
- Caveat: The distinction between life and non-life!



- We need to go beyond the idea of protosemiosis
- But to go beyond the gray area, we need to invoke semiotic properties or causes (as nomological)
- We are neutral as to which ones can be chosen, but they better count for something

**SEMIOTIC  
PROPERTIES,  
CAUSES, AND  
SO ON**

# **CAUSING PREFIXED SEMIOSES**

- Semiotic theories that want to go below the threshold need some basal semiotic action
- If that is the case, then it's these basal causes/properties that give rise to other varieties of semiosis
- The extended model could be seen as supporting the idea that semiosis evolves and becomes different things at different times

# THE EXTENDED MODEL

(in a nutshell)

7



Reaching below the  
orthodox threshold



Extending explanations  
towards more complex  
forms of semiosis



Staking claims beyond  
traditional biosemiotics



---

AGAINST UNIVERSALISM



- Semiotic theories come in different flavors
- *Evolutionary cultural semiosis*
- Physiosemosis and *vis a prospecto*
- Pansemiotism

*(what's with the peircean bent here?)*

# THE UNIVERSALISTIC VISION OF SEMIOTIC THEORIES



If we want to go the Extended route, we need to ask ourselves the following:

**Can theories of semiotics have this level of explanatory power?**

**Why would we need them to act that way?**

# **CAN SEMIOTIC THEORIES BE THEORIES OF EVERYTHING?**

---

**AGAINST UNIVERSALISM**

- **Why would we need such explanatory power?**
  - ↳ Responding to a specific Peircean interpretation
  - ↳ If semiotics can be a fundamental sort of science, then it can supersede other sciences
- **Can semiotic theories have such explanatory power?**
- **Is the extended model the correct way forwards?**

# PROBABLY NOT on both accounts.

- No harm done in exploring, sure
- But claims about meaning at a *fundamental* level are overtly expensive: Non-trivial connection from bottom to top
- If we have a radical semiosis, is that a discovery or a commitment?
- Do we have to change our description of physical systems because interactions are meaningful in the extended model?
- Mereological issues re. signs
- The extended model is useful for explaining other semioses, but doesn't carry semiotic discoveries

# THANK YOU

CLAUDIO RODRÍGUEZ



*claudiojrodriguezh@gmail.com*



*Palacký Uni, Olomouc, Czechia*



---

Palacký  
University  
Olomouc