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## CHAPTER FOUR

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### RACE AND THE MIDDLE AGES

#### The Case of Spain and Its Jews

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In one of a series of lectures at the College de France in 1976, Michel Foucault insisted that racism was a uniquely modern phenomenon, the product of particular state formations and binary representations of society that did not exist before the seventeenth century. Clearly his audience was not convinced, for he began his lecture of February 4 by addressing their objections. "During the last week or two, people have sent me a number of objections, both oral and written," to the previous lectures, asking in particular, "what does it mean to have racism originate in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, to attach it only to problems of state sovereignty, when we well know, after all, that religious racism (anti-Semitic racism in particular) has existed since the Middle Ages?" Foucault did not respond to these objections. He merely restated his conviction and concluded with the greatest evasion available to a professor: "Come see me during office hours."

The proceedings of Foucault's office hours, unlike those of his lectures, have not been transcribed and published, so we cannot say whether or how he engaged the question. It is, however, a question worth asking seriously. A century ago, few historians would have hesitated before describing medieval and early modern conflicts between Christians and Jews (or Muslims) as "racial." Today the situation has so reversed itself that any invocation of the vocabulary of race by premodernists is an invitation to polemic. Foucault did not bring about this consensus: to the contrary, in his restriction of race and racism to modernity, at least, he was completely orthodox. What is at stake in this orthodoxy? What work does it do for us in the present, and with what effect on our understanding of the past? On what grounds might a critical "reformation" of this orthodoxy be undertaken, and what devotional costs and opportunities might such a reformation offer?

Less than a lifetime ago many believed that racial theories offered reasonable explanations of the differences they perceived between Jews and

Europeans, as well as among many other populations. The turning point in the fate of race as a scientific concept, especially vis-à-vis Jews and Judaism, is not difficult to find: it came at mid-twentieth century, with the German National Socialists' adoption of an explicitly racial ideology and of an exterminationist policy. The Second World War thoroughly discredited race as a mode of discourse in the biological and social sciences (though not in popular usage), so that today few reputable scholars would state that race is a concept capable of providing an acceptable explanation for the existence of cultural, economic, and social difference, or for the persistence of such difference through time. Indeed for the past half-century social scientists have been struggling, with mixed success, to supercede the older vocabulary and find new terms and theories with which to describe the persistence of group identity and group difference across time and space.<sup>1</sup>

For historians, however, the problem is a little different, for their interest is not primarily in the empirical validity or usefulness of racial ideas and ideologies, but rather in the role that these may have played in the thinking of their historical subjects. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians therefore speak without second thought about "racial anti-Semitism." Scholars of premodern European societies have had to ask additional questions. Can people writing before the development of modern evolutionary theories be said to think in terms of "race"? If not, then racism is a misleading anachronism when applied to discriminations between Jew and Christian before the modern age.

Precisely this question began to be posed with urgency after the rise of National Socialism. Some historians, such as Cecil Roth, saw real affinities between premodern ideologies (particularly those of late medieval Spain toward Christians descended from Jews) and modern (particularly German) ones, affinities he explored in an essay published in 1940, entitled "Marranos and Racial Anti-Semitism: A Study in Parallels." Others, like Guido Kisch, categorically denied any racial element in premodern anti-Judaism and criticized those who thought otherwise for "reading modern racist conceptions into medieval sources."<sup>2</sup> Yosef Haim Yerushalmi took up the debate in 1982, comparing late medieval Spanish ideologies that posited the immutability of Jewishness (i.e., that claimed Jewishness was carried in the blood and could not be erased by conversion) with nineteenth-century German anti-Semitic ideologies, and understanding both as recognizably racial.<sup>3</sup> More recently Jonathan Elukin used a similar logic to argue for an "incipient racial ideology" in medieval Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The polemic has grown into a heated one, with important consequences at stake. Did medieval systems of discrimination lead inexorably to modern

exterminations? There are some for whom the gravitational pull of Auschwitz is so great that medieval ideologies about Jews become early coordinates in a trajectory clearly spiraling toward destruction. Such historians (Benzion Netanyahu is an example<sup>5</sup>) make free use of the words “race” and “racism” in their work on premodern attitudes toward Jews. Or was modern racial anti-Semitism the specific and contingent product of the intersection of capitalism, imperialism, and post-Enlightenment natural science, a phenomenon radically discontinuous with other histories? Most have preferred this position, perhaps because it erects a historical *cordon sanitaire* around an ideology that has come to stand for all that is evil in western Europe. The Reformation historian Heiko Oberman, for example, assures us that Reuchlin, Erasmus, and Luther were not racist in their many negative comments about Jews, about converts from Judaism, and about their descendents, for theirs was a purely theological understanding, not a biological one, which we might term anti-Judaism but not anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup> The point is made more generally by Robert Bartlett: “while the language of race [in medieval sources] — gens, natio, ‘blood,’ ‘stock,’ etc. — is biological, its medieval *reality* was almost entirely cultural.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, though there may be a biological tone to some of the language medieval people used to describe difference, the differences they were describing were cultural, not biological, and therefore their ideology cannot be described as racial.

Whatever their respective merits, these positions pay little attention to the modern theorizations of race and racism whose relevance they are either embracing or rejecting. Even if, for example, the convictions of Jewish immutability on which advocates of medieval racism focus were due to biological ideas (rather than to ideas about the educational influence of parents upon their children, about pollution and infection, about sin and divine will, about climactic influence, etc.), this would not suffice to make them racial in a modern sense. Many racial theories and ideologies allowed for a great deal of mutability, drawing their power precisely from the way they represented the risks of change, hybridity, and decline. Similarly, few of those who deny the possibility of a medieval racism have taken seriously the task of understanding in a suitably complex way the concept they seek to dismiss.<sup>8</sup> Some have taken refuge in nominalism, arguing (for example) that because the word *Rasse* did not enter the German language until the eighteenth century and the word *Anti-Semitismus* until the nineteenth, we need not look for these concepts in the earlier history of German-speaking lands. (As we shall see, the argument will not work for the romance languages, where the word *raza* has a medieval etymology.) Others have embraced narrow definitional strategies, which succeed not in solving the problem but in rendering it uninter-

esting. It is not surprising, for example, that those who define race as the application of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century vocabularies of biological classification to human populations differentiated by skin color are certain that it cannot be found in earlier periods.<sup>9</sup> Such definitions fail to make sense even of modern racial ideologies, which are themselves not only tremendously diverse but also change a great deal over time.

Finally, too many of the arguments against premodern racism still depend on the demonstrably false assumption that there exists a truly biological racism against which premodern forms of discrimination can be measured and judged innocent. What does it mean to say that although a premodern ideology was expressed in biological terms, it was not racial because the differences it reinforced were not really biological? This could be said of any racial ideology. All racisms are attempts to ground discriminations, whether social, economic, or religious, in biology and reproduction. All claim a congruence of "cultural" categories with "natural" ones. None of these claims, not even the most "scientific" ones of the twentieth century, reflect biological reality.<sup>10</sup> From the point of view of population genetics there are of course some real differences between sub-Saharan African populations and, say, Swedish ones, just as there are between Jewish and non-Jewish populations (as any student of breast cancer or Tay-Sachs disease knows), but none of these biological differences have any obvious or natural relationship to the cultural work they are asked to do in systems of racial discrimination, systems that are products of culture, not of nature.<sup>11</sup> If this lack of congruence does not suffice to make modern racist ideologies less "racial," then it cannot suffice to excuse premodern discriminations from the charge.<sup>12</sup>

I am not making these admittedly general criticisms in order to claim that race did exist in the Middle Ages, or that medieval people were racist. Such statements would be reductive and misleading, obscuring more than they reveal. But the same is true of the opposite, and far more common, assertion. The underdetermined and easily exorcised specter of a "true racism" against which premodern discriminations can be measured and exonerated has negatively affected both the medievalist and the modernist. Among medievalists it has stifled investigation of the strategies by which premodern people sought to make their own cultural classifications appear natural. Among modernists it has reinforced a tendency to think of modern ideologies as radically discontinuous from those of the distant past. In other words, the practice of defining race reductively for the purpose of summarily dismissing it from the premodern has effectively short-circuited the very processes of comparison and analogy upon which any argument about the relationship of past and present forms of discrimination must depend.

What might such a process of comparison and analogy look like? Let us focus on one particular geography and historiography, that of the Iberian Peninsula. Iberian history has long served as a focal point for arguments about premodern race because, as is well known, large populations of Muslims and Jews made the peninsular kingdoms the most religiously diverse in medieval western Europe. The late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witnessed massive attempts to eliminate that diversity through massacre, segregation, conversion, Inquisition, and expulsion. In one sense these efforts toward homogeneity were successful. Over the course of the hundred years from 1391 to 1492, for example, all the Jews of Spain either converted or were expelled.<sup>13</sup>

But the conversion of a large number of people whom Christians had perceived as profoundly different transformed the old boundaries and systems of discrimination rather than abolished them. Categories that had previously seemed primarily legal and religious were replaced by the genealogical notion that Christians descended from Jewish converts (*Cristianos nuevos, confesos, conversos, marranos*) were essentially different from “Christians by nature” (*Cristianos de natura, cristianos viejos, limpios*). Moreover, the ideological underpinning of these new discriminations claimed explicitly to be rooted in natural realities, as is most evident in the doctrine of “limpieza de sangre.” According to this doctrine, Jewish and Muslim blood was inferior to Christian; the possession of any amount of such blood made one liable to heresy and moral corruption; therefore any descendent of Jews and Muslims, no matter how distant, should be barred from church and secular office, from any number of guilds and professions, and especially from marrying Old Christians.

The debate over the utility of concepts such as race and racism in explaining these conflicts, discriminations, and ideologies has been heated. It has remained, however, bedeviled by the fiction of true race. In the early years of history as *Wissenschaft*, of course, this fiction enabled racial analysis, because historians themselves believed in the racial logic they were attributing to their historical subjects. In writing of conflict between Christians, Muslims, and Jews, historians constantly employed the vocabulary of race, although they meant very different things by it.<sup>14</sup> An early example is that of Leopold von Ranke, who believed that the Old Christian refusal to intermarry with New Christians was an extension of the ancient abhorrence that the “Germanic” and “Romanic” races felt toward amalgamation with “Semitic” Jews and Muslims.<sup>15</sup> Half a century later (ca. 1882) the great historian Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, in whose honor Spain’s Real Academia de la Historia is named, could echo Darwin unselfconsciously: “It is madness to believe that battles for existence, bloody and century long struggles between races, could

end in any way other than with expulsions and exterminations. The inferior race always succumbs. . . .” Elsewhere he opined that “the matter of race [by which he meant the existence of “Semitic” Jews and Muslims] explains many phenomena and resolves many enigmas in our history” and “is the principal cause of decadence for the [Iberian] Peninsula.” At much the same time, though an ocean and an ideology away, Henry Charles Lea also adopted racial categories in order to make more or less the opposite argument, that the Spanish Inquisition was an instrument of racism.<sup>16</sup>

But as we have already seen from the debate between Cecil Roth and Guido Kisch, such certainties began to fade in the mid-twentieth century. Within the ambit of Spanish historiography, Américo Castro became perhaps the most influential critic of racial vocabulary. Castro was interested in debunking not just notions of Jewish or Muslim racial identity but the idea of a “*raza hispanica*” as well. As he put it in one of his later works, “faith in the temporally uncertain biological continuity of the Spaniard has inspired the works both of respected men of wisdom and of superficial scholars.”<sup>17</sup> His task, as he saw it, was to demonstrate the falsity of any model of Spanish identity based on such a faith. To this end, Castro began nearly all of his books with an attack on the relevance of the concept of race to Spanish history.<sup>18</sup> In the opening of *The Spaniards*, for example, he explains that he speaks of Muslim, Jewish and Christian “castes,” not races, “for in that Spain of three religions everyone was light-skinned, with horizontal eyes, except for a few black slaves brought in from Africa,” (v) Similarly in the introduction to the 1965 edition of *La realidad* he writes, “A much wider detour will be necessary in order to include in future historiography the positive and decisive presence of the Moorish and Jewish castes (not races!). Because the resistance is notable to the acceptance that the Spanish problem was of castes, and not of races, [a term] today only applicable to those distinguished, as the Dictionary of the Academy has it, ‘by the color of their skin and other characteristics.’”<sup>19</sup>

When Castro made these arguments he was engaging many Spanish scholars who maintained that Jews and Muslims were members of races inferior to the “*raza hispanica*.”<sup>20</sup> By repudiating the vocabulary of race, he helped bring these groups back into the mainstream of Spanish history and culture. That repudiation, however, depended on familiar strategies: first a nominalist focus on the *Diccionario*’s definition of race as referring only to skin color (he ignored the ominous “*Y otros caracteres*”), then the conjuration of an easily dismissed “true” biological racism based solely on external physical characteristics.<sup>21</sup>

Castro’s approach to race is the one point of his *oeuvre* with which nearly



all Spanish and French scholars of peninsular history agree. In the words of a devoted "Castrista," F. Márquez Villanueva, "The problem of the New Christians was by no means a racial one; it was social and in the second line religious. The *converso* did not carry in any moment an indelible biological stigma. . . ." Historians with less enthusiasm for many of Castro's broader arguments agree. As Adeline Rucquoi recently put it, "Loin d'être lié à des concepts plus ou moins biologiques de 'race,' loin aussi d'être un simple mécanisme d'exclusion d'un groupe social par un autre, le problème de la pureté du sang nous paraît être un problème ontologique, lié dans l'Espagne du début des Temps Modernes au problème du salut." [Far from being linked to more or less biological concepts of "race," and far from being a simple mechanism for exclusion of one social group by another, the problem of purity of blood seems to us to be an ontological problem, linked in early modern Spain to the problem of health.] The fact that the few dissenting voices are mostly American has perhaps contributed to the polarization, as Spanish scholars have sought to distance themselves from what they perceive to be a polemical Anglo-Saxon historiography.<sup>22</sup>

As these examples make clear, the trajectory of Iberian historiography on the subject of race is parallel to that of other European historiographic traditions, though of course it has its own particular history. What might a counterhistory look like? To begin with, it might emphasize, rather than elide, the medieval vocabularies through which "naturalizations" of difference were expressed. The history of the Romance word "raza" (from whence came the English word "race") provides an obvious starting point. The Castilian word does cover a broad semantic field,<sup>23</sup> yet certain corners of that field deserve closer cultivation than they have received. Castro's invocation of the Real Academia's modern definition of "raza" in order to dismiss the possibility of premodern "Spanish" racism is in fact a startling procedure, given that Castro was a philologist who had elsewhere, for example, deployed the history of the word "Español" to suggest that the concept of "Spanishness" was a late import to Spanish culture. *Raza* too is a word with a suggestive history in the various romance languages of the peninsula.

Already in the early fifteenth century "raza," "casta," and "linaje" were part of a complex of interchangeable terms that linked both behavior and appearance to nature and reproduction. Some of these terms, like "linaje," had a long history that was only tangentially related to Judaism, even if they could be used to tie character to lineage. By about 1435, for example, it made sense for Gutierre Díez de Games to explain all treason in terms of Jewish "linaje": "From the days of Alexander up till now, there has never been a treasonous act that did not involve a Jew or his descendants."<sup>24</sup> The Castilian

word “*raza*” was newer, and it seems to have emerged as a way of describing defects linked specifically to Judaism. Francisco Imperial’s exhortatory poem addressed to the king in 1407 provides an early but ambiguous example: “A los tus suçessores claro espejo/ sera mira el golpe de la maça./sera miral el cuchillo bermejo/que cortara doquier que falle Raza.” [It shall be a clear example to your successors to see the blow of the mace, to see the roseate knife that will cut wherever it finds a flaw (“*raza*”).] Scholars have not seen in this early use an association of “*raza*” to “lineage of Jews.” But the poet’s condemnation of the “*bestia Juderra*” a few lines before (line 321) suggests otherwise, as does his echo of the exhortation, commonly addressed to Trastamaran kings of Castile, that they defeat that Jewish beast.<sup>25</sup>

In any event the relationship soon became more obvious. Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, writing around 1438 in the midst of an evolving conflict over converse office holding in Toledo (discussed below), provides a clear example of the emerging logic of *raza*. You can always tell a person’s roots, he explains, for those who descend from good stock are incapable of deviating from it, whereas those of base stock cannot transcend their origins, regardless of whatever money, wealth, or power they may obtain. The reasons for this, he asserts, are natural. The son of an ass must bray. This can be proven, he suggests, by an experiment. If one were to take two babies, one a son of a laborer, the other of a knight, and rear them together on a mountain in isolation from their parents, one would find that the son of the laborer delights in agricultural pursuits, while the son of the knight takes pleasure only in feats of arms and equestrianism: “*Esto procura naturaleza.*” “Thus you will see every day in the places where you live, that the good man of good *raça* always returns to his origins, whereas the miserable man, of bad *raça* or lineage, no matter how powerful or how rich, will always return to the villainy from which he descends . . . That is why when such men or women have power they do not use it as they should, as the old refrain says: ‘*Vídose el perro en bragas de cerro, e non conosció a su compañero.*’”<sup>26</sup>

Not everyone agreed with such ideas; indeed they were subject to strenuous debate (just as there were many who doubted the claims of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racial theories). But there is no doubt that this language was saturated, then as now, with resonance to what contemporaries held to be “common sense” knowledge about the reproductive systems of the natural world.<sup>27</sup> To confirm this we need only open a medieval manual on animal husbandry like that of Manuel Diez. His popular manual on the care of horses (written ca. 1430) admonished breeders to be careful in their selection of stock: “For there is no animal that so resembles or takes after the father in virtues and beauties, nor in size, or coat, and similarly for their con-



traries. So that it is advised that he who wishes to have good race and caste of horses that above all he seek out the horse or stallion that he be good and beautiful and of good coat, and the mare that she be large and well formed and of good coat."<sup>28</sup> The relevance of knowledge about horse breeding to an understanding of the application of *raza* to the descendants of converts from Judaism and Islam was noted already by scholars in the early modern period. Sebastian de Covarrubias, in the famous Spanish dictionary he published in 1611, defined "raza" as "the caste of purebred horses, which are marked by a brand so that they can be recognized. . . . Race in [human] lineages is meant negatively, as in having some race of Moor or Jew."<sup>29</sup>

The natural science upon which such wisdom was based was not that of the nineteenth century, but it was nonetheless capable of generating conclusions startlingly similar to those of a later age.<sup>30</sup> Nor, I hasten to add, was this logic in any way particular to Spain. In 1538 Jacobus Sadoletus would urge the readers of his child-rearing manual "that what is done with horses and dogs should also be done with men . . . so that out of good parents there might be born a progeny useful to both the king and the fatherland." Joachim du Bellay (ca. 1559) admonished the French parliament in a similar vein:

For if we are so careful to preserve the race  
Of good horses and good hounds for chase  
How much more should a king carefully provide  
For the race, which is his principal power?<sup>31</sup>

The point, in short, is that words like *raza* and *linaje* (and their cognates in the various Iberian romance languages) were already embedded in identifiably biological ideas about breeding and reproduction in the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the sudden appearance of this vocabulary and its application to Jews precisely coincides chronologically (the 1430s) with the appearance of anti-*converso* ideologies that sought to naturalize religious categories and hierarchies and to legitimate their reproduction. One of the earliest examples comes from 1433. It was on January 10 of that year that Queen María decreed on behalf of the converts of Barcelona that no legal distinction could be made between "natural" Christians on the one hand and neophytes and their descendants on the other, a decree which implies that some people were attempting to make precisely those distinctions.<sup>33</sup> The following year the Council of Basel decreed that ". . . since [the converts] became by the grace of baptism fellow citizens of the saints and members of the house of God, and since regeneration of the spirit is much more important than birth in the flesh . . . they enjoy the privileges, liberties, and immunities

of those cities and towns where they were regenerated through sacred baptism to the same extent as the natives and other Christians do."<sup>34</sup>

Such proclamations had suddenly become necessary. A few months later King Alfonso of Aragon rejected attempts in Calatayud to impose disabilities on neophytes; in 1436, the councilors of Barcelona moved to bar converts and those whose parents were not both "christianos de natura" from holding the office of notary; in 1437 the town council of Lleida attempted to strip *conversos* of broker's licenses.<sup>35</sup> The converts of Catalonia and Valencia felt compelled to appeal to the pope, and in 1437 Eugene IV condemned those "sons of iniquity . . . Christians only in name," who suggested that recent converts be barred from public office and who "refuse to enter into matrimony with them."<sup>36</sup> Similar attempts took place in Castile. In Seville, an antimonarchical rebellion may have planned to murder the *converso* population in 1433–1434, and ten years later, still in the midst of civil war, King Juan II felt obliged to instruct the cities of his kingdom that the *conversos* were to be treated "as if they were born Christians," and admitted to "any honorable office of the Republic."<sup>37</sup>

As we can see from these examples, a naturalizing vocabulary was beginning to be applied to converts and their descendants. The "christiano de natura" mentioned by Queen María became a common (though by no means exclusive) term of reference for old Christians. The exclusionary genealogical logic of the term was perfectly clear to *conversos*, some of whom coined a rebuttal: "cristianos de natura, cristianos de mala ventura" (Christians by nature are Christians of bad fortune). By this they meant (or at least so they told the Inquisition decades later) that *conversos* shared the lineage of the Virgin Mary, whereas old Christians were descended from idol-worshiping gentiles.<sup>38</sup> The topic is too complicated to address here, but such evidence suggests that the converts, under the pressure of the Old Christian *Naturgeschichte*, were beginning to see their own identity in increasingly genealogical terms.<sup>39</sup> In any event the wide extension of such vocabulary in the 1430s and following decades makes clear that the role of lineage in determining character, which had become an increasingly important aspect of chivalric and aristocratic ideology in Iberia in the decades following the Trastamaran civil war, was now becoming more explicitly biological and being applied extensively to converts from Judaism.<sup>40</sup> As the *conversos'* rebuttal makes clear, the logic of lineage was not *a priori* prejudicial to converts, and indeed was often deployed in defense of *converso* rights. Many writers argued, as did Diego de Valera around 1441, that the *conversos'* descent from the chosen people ennobled them.<sup>41</sup> But in fact throughout the middle decades of the fifteenth century, these naturalizations came increasingly to be deployed against *conversos*.

The Toledan revolt of 1449 against the monarchy and its perceived agents, the *conversos*, provides a good example of such deployment. The Toledans and their sympathizers were clearly anxious about the reproduction of social and political status, an anxiety they transposed into a sexual key. Thus they claimed that converts were motivated only by ambition for office and “carnal lust for nuns and [Christian] virgins,” and that Marrano physicians poisoned their Christian patients in order to get hold of their inheritance and offices, “marry the wives of the old Christians they kill” and stain their “clean blood” (*sangre limpia*).<sup>42</sup> Arguing that Jewish ancestry (somatically expressed in terms of Jewish blood) predisposed people to corruption and viciousness (cf. the passage from the *Arcipreste* cited in note 26 above), the Toledans proposed to stem this tide of sexual and economic competition with what later would come to be called a purity of blood statute: descendants of converts were to be banned from holding public office.<sup>43</sup>

The texts produced by the rebels and their allies in defense of their position, and by opponents like Alonso de Cartagena, Lope Barrientos, and Fernán Díaz de Toledo against it, became central texts in the Spanish debate over the “Jewishness” of converts and their descendants. The eventual victory of the anti-*converso* genealogical arguments in the debate was not obvious or easy, for medieval people had a great many ways of thinking about the transmission of cultural characteristics across generations without invoking nature and sexual reproduction. Pope Pius II, for example, authorized an annulment for Pedro de la Caballeria in 1459, on the grounds that his wife was a heretic who had been taught to “judaize” by her mother. “. . . Pedro, a true Catholic, is prepared to endure . . . every danger of death rather than consummate a marriage of this sort, lest [any] begotten offspring follow the insanity of the mother, and a Jew be created out of a Christian.” Though this text has been interpreted as exhibiting a sense of hereditary Jewishness, its logic appears quite different once we realize that Pedro de la Caballeria was himself almost certainly a *converso*. The problem here is one of pedagogy and nurture, not inheritance.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless the genealogical turn was taken, and it proved to be one of extraordinary power. The reasons for its success are many and complex, but one which should not be underestimated is the power of its appeal to medieval “common knowledge” about nature. Consider, for example, the language of a treatise like the *Alborayque* (ca. 1455–1465). The treatise maps moral attributes and cultural practices of the *conversos* onto diverse body parts of the Alborayque, the Qur’anic composite beast (part horse, part lion, part snake, etc.) that carried Muhammad to heaven. The use of this hybrid to stand for the converts, though often treated by modern critics as a mere conceit, is in

fact a systematic strategy of argument from nature. The converts are not only Alborayques. They are bats, unclassifiable as animal (wings) or bird (teeth); they are a weak alloy rather than pure metal; and above all, they are a mixed lineage, a mixture of Edom, Moab, Amon, Egypt, and more. These unnatural mixtures support the conclusion (and here is the leap to culture) that the *conversos* can never be classified as Christian, for “si los metales son muchos . . . segun la carne, quanto mas de metales de tantas heregias”<sup>45</sup> [if the alloys are many . . . according to the flesh, how many more the alloys of so many heresies]. Similarly the negative imagery of mixed species in the treatise leads ineluctably to its conclusion: a prayer that the “clean” lineages of the Old Christians not be corrupted through marriage with the New.<sup>46</sup>

Like a number of polemicists before him, the author of the *Alborayque* chose to focus on the corruption of the Jewish lineage in historical time, but other approaches were possible.<sup>47</sup> Writing at about the same time, for example, Alonso de Espina verged on a polygenetic approach when he related the lineage of Jews to the offspring of (1) Adam with animals and (2) Adam with the demon Lilith. As a result of these unions, he wrote, Jews are of the lineage of demons and of monsters, the mule and the sow their adoptive mother.<sup>48</sup> Such genealogies doubtless seemed as fantastic to many medieval readers as they do to us. They provided an important theoretical underpinning, however, for the doctrine of “limpieza de sangre,” or purity of blood: the idea that the reproduction of culture is embedded in the reproduction of the flesh. It is upon this logic that new boundaries would be built between Christian and “Jew” in Spain. These new boundaries were enormously controversial.<sup>49</sup> I know of no more extensive premodern discussion about the relationship between biology and culture than that in the literature produced in the debate over *converso* exclusion between 1449 and 1550.<sup>50</sup> But the logic of the *Alborayque*, with its mapping of Judaizing behavior onto Jewish genealogy, was eventually victorious, and the consequences of that victory were momentous. The argument that *converso* morals were habitually corrupt, for example, led to the establishment of the first “proto-Inquisition” under Alonso de Oropesa in the 1460s. Oropesa, a prominent opponent of discrimination against descendents of *conversos*, found little evidence for these charges, but their increasingly effective reiteration was used to justify the establishment of the Inquisition itself in 1481. And this Inquisition operated according to a logic strikingly similar to that of the *Alborayque*. Judaizers were to be identified by their behavior, but that behavior only gained meaning in light of their genealogy.

Already in 1449 Fernán Díaz, the relator of Juan II, had pointed out the dangers of such a genealogical system. There was scarcely a noble house in

Spain that had no *converso* in its family tree. If Jewishness were attached to blood, the relator warned, the nobility of Iberia would be destroyed.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, because the effects of genealogy were primarily expressed culturally, the religioracial classification of cultural practice became an important part of the accusational economy. Virtually any negative cultural trait could be presented as Judaizing. We have seen the *Alborayque*'s list, and there were many others, each sounding more and more like Borges's Chinese encyclopedia. Jewish characteristics, according to the bishop of Cordoba in 1530, included heresy, apostasy, love of novelty and dissension, ambition, presumption, and hatred of peace. The list of traits grew ever longer, and all of them could be encoded, at least in theory, in the smallest drop of blood. The effectiveness of such claims in attracting the attention of Inquisitional courts made them strategically useful and thereby judaized ever more extensive cultural practices. By 1533, even Rodrigo Manrique, son of the then inquisitor general, could write to the self-exiled humanist Luis Vives, "You are right. Our country is a land of . . . barbarism. For now it is clear that no one can possess any culture without being suspect of heresy, error, and Judaism."<sup>52</sup>

We have seen that fifteenth-century Spaniards utilized a vocabulary of race grounded in theories of animal husbandry that posited the biological reproduction of somatic and behavioral traits. We have also seen how this vocabulary underwrote a set of strategies that explained and legitimated the creation and perpetuation of certain hierarchies and discriminations through the language of reproduction. We cannot, however, therefore conclude that we are justified in speaking of modern "race" and "racism" in fifteenth-century Spain. All we have shown is that one influential family of arguments for dismissing the relevance of "race" to medieval Spain, that of Américo Castro and his disciples, makes inadequate sense of the "natural histories" available to residents of the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The humility of this conclusion can be defended on a number of grounds. Perhaps the least rigorous (though not necessarily the least important) is previous experience with the risks of certainty. Américo Castro's easy isolation of race in the epidermis, for example, blinded him to the ways in which his methodology simply displaced the naturalizing and essentializing functions of race unto the less charged term of "caste" (much as many speakers today use "ethnicity"). There is a close kinship between Castro's "Semitic caste" and "Semitic culture" and Ernest Renan's "Semitic race." Both posited stable, essential, and inescapable forms of group identity continuously reproduced across time. Castro, like Renan, combed "Jewish" texts beginning with the Old Testament for Semitic characteristics whose entrance into Spain he then attributed to Jews and *conversos*. He found a number of them. "In-

quisitorial fanaticism and recourse to slandering informants — what one might call in Spanish ‘*malsinismo*’ — frantic greed and plundering, the concern over purity of blood . . . the concern with public reputation . . . the desire of everyone to be a nobleman . . . somber asceticism . . . the negative view of the world . . . disillusionment, and the flight from human values,” all of these were the “poisons . . . that seeped into Spanish life, Spanish Christendom, in the increment of forced converts.”<sup>53</sup>

These “cultural” traits of Jews and converts are startlingly similar, not only to those “racial” ones listed by Renan or his disciples (which on this score included Claudio Sánchez Albornoz<sup>54</sup>) but also to those of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century anti-*converso* tracts advocating *limpieza*. Nor are the means of their reproduction so very different, for though Castro and his students rejected biological explanations for cultural transmission, they relied heavily on genealogical ones, frequently mapping a particular intellectual position or literary style onto a family tree in order to prove the “Semiticness” of either the idea or its exponent, a type of logic that has turned the Iberianist into a disciple of the inquisitor.<sup>55</sup> Like many other historians and philologists, Castro fled from the horrifying embrace of race straight into the arms of another genetic fantasy. Small wonder that, far from having banished race and racism, he found himself accused of replicating it under another name.<sup>56</sup>

There are more methodological arguments for humility. It is an ancient tendency of the historical imagination to think of ideas and concepts as having a discrete origin in a particular people, whence they are transmitted from donor to recipient cultures across space and time. There may be some concepts whose histories are well described by such etymological and genealogical approaches.<sup>57</sup> In this chapter, however, we are concerned with the conviction that culture is produced and reproduced in the same way as the species procreates itself. This conviction, which we might call the enabling condition of racial thought, is so venerable and widespread that Giambattista Vico elevated it to a universal in his *Principles of the New Science*. Moreover it is also infinitely diverse. Even when restricted to modernity, “race” and “racism” encompass too heterogeneous a set of discourses and outcomes to be understood as a “concept” or a “theory.” Given this range and diversity, any history of race’s origin and transmission can only be the product of our (generally inadvertently) constrained recognition of significance. Foucault famously illustrated the limitations of such “histories of knowledge” by quoting from Borges’s Chinese encyclopedia. Frege put it in very different but still useful terms: “What is known as the history of concepts is really a history either of our knowledge of concepts or of the meaning of words.”<sup>58</sup> Taken too



seriously, such Platonism would paralyze the writing of history. Its warning becomes more relevant, however, the more generalized our topics. Specifically, when historians relate diverse “natural histories” to each other in an evolutionary genealogy, they are not so much clarifying the histories of these discourses as reproducing their logic.

None of this means that histories of race should not be written. There will always be strategic reasons for choosing to represent the relationship of ideas about the natural reproduction of culture that are scattered across time and space in terms of filiations or, conversely, in terms of disjuncture. Yet the choice can only be situational and polemical, in the sense that its recognition of significance springs from the needs and struggles (political, philosophical, theological, historiographic, etc.) of a specific moment. The polemics produced by such choices are invaluable when they stimulate us to self-consciousness. If, however, we treat them as anything but strategic, we simply exchange one lack of consciousness for another.

As an example of this last point, let us return to the conceptualization of race with which we began, that of Michel Foucault. Foucault’s treatment of race (which came only late in his career) derived from his understanding of other transformations more central to his *oeuvre*, particularly those from “regimes of blood” to “regimes of sex.” Foucault understood the emergence of racism as a consequence of a struggle for sovereignty. According to him, medieval sovereignty was organic and corporatist. It was of course hierarchical and therefore potentially conflictual, but the potential for conflict was always contained by a ritual regime and a historical discourse that were celebratory and inclusive. Even warring nations never forgot their common ancestry, going back, if not to Rome then to Troy. And from this memory sprang as well a common historiography. “What is there in [medieval] history,” Foucault asked, quoting Petrarch, “that is not in praise of Rome?”<sup>59</sup>

Foucault believed that race arose out of the collapse of this system. By the early seventeenth century, society was no longer thought of as an organic system, but as a binary. The governing metaphor was no longer that of society as a harmonious body, but of society as a war between two irreconcilable groups or bodies. And although those groups could be characterized and classified in a number of ways (e.g., as classes), the symbolic logic underlying these classifications was always racial, in that it imagined one group as polluting and the other pure, one to be isolated or exterminated, the other to be protected and reproduced. The emerging nation-state was at first the venue for this struggle between groups, then eventually its arbiter, the chief guarantor of racial purity. This final nineteenth-century stage Foucault referred to as “state racism.” And just as history in the Middle Ages had been a reflec-

tion of the symbolic order that articulated power in terms of organic unity, in modern history it became a battlefield, an accounting of losses and victories in the eternal war of the races.

Foucault's "history" of race, like his other histories, was explicitly strategic. It was designed to counter the fantasies of lineage that he perceived as seducing prevailing history. "History," he therefore insisted, "is for cutting." Perhaps because these cuts were meant to denature the workings of modern discourse, the premodern often fell on their far side, as it does here, in the case of race. How should premodernists confront such a history?<sup>60</sup> Remaining within the example of Spain and its Jews, we might be inspired to ask if medieval Christian understandings of sacred history also took the form of a binary opposition between Christian and Jew, and if so, how the cultural work of such a binary in the Middle Ages differed from or was similar to the work Foucault had in mind in the modern age. We might note the formal similarities with the "racial antisemitism" of later periods that so struck scholars like Netanyahu, Yerushalmi, Frederickson, and Waltz. But we might also note how different the uses, functions, and effects of these medieval ideologies were from modern ones. We might, in other words, use Foucault's history as a stimulant best expressed by the almost untranslatable German term "Auseinandersetzung."

What we should not do, however, is take its dictates too seriously. On the one hand, if we embrace its disjunctures as sufficient evidence for the irrelevance of race and racism in the Middle Ages, then we are replicating Foucault's strategic use of the premodern as an unhistoricized foil for the modern. If, on the other hand, we argue from similarity in order to establish the identity of the premodern with the modern, we simply reverse the polemic. Kathleen Biddick, for example, finds in medieval texts a simultaneous insistence on the importance of blood and of pedagogy and concludes that Foucault's insistence on the modernity of blood regimes and disciplinarity is therefore incorrect. "Disciplinarity (pedagogy) was always already folded within this colonial symbolics of blood."<sup>61</sup> With this discovery she claims to have uncovered the "banality" of Foucault's periodization, though to my mind her "always already" threatens to substitute a more dangerous one in its place.<sup>62</sup>

Race demands a history, both because it is a subject both urgent and vast and because its own logic is so closely akin to that of the disciplines (etymology, genealogy, history) with which we study the persistence of humanity in time. For these same reasons, any history of race will be at best limited, strategic, and polemical and at worst a reproduction of racial logic itself. In either case, histories of race are best read by premodernist and modernist alike not

as prescriptive but as provocations to comparison. There is energy to be drawn from the collision of such polemics with our own particles of history, and new elements of both past and present to be found in the wreckage. Put another way, we might read such histories as metaphors. I mean metaphor not in the sense of model or map, as some anthropologists and scholars of comparative religion have recently championed, but in the medieval sense articulated by Albert of Monte Casino: "it is the function of metaphor to twist, so to speak, its mode of speech from its property; by twisting, to make some innovation; by innovating, to clothe, as it were, in nuptial garb; and by clothing, to sell, apparently at a decent price."<sup>63</sup> As in Albert's understanding of good metaphor, good histories and theorizations of race are a source of productive deceit. The associations they provoke are seductive, communicative, startlingly revealing, but also in some sense fraudulent. We cannot reject their power without impoverishment, but neither can we accept their suggestions without suspicion.

The same is true, of course, in reverse. Just as modernity provokes the medievalist, so should medieval encounters disturb the troubled certitudes of the modernist. The latter will, however, not travel without guides: yet another reason why it is important that premodernists (or at least those interested in specific problems, such as the transformations of religious categories in fifteenth-century Spain) confront their subjects' natural histories, rather than hiding behind a nominalist rejection of race. But it is equally important that we not confuse the strategic comparisons and heuristic polemics produced by such confrontations with a history of "race" or "racism." The suggestion that we can benefit from the systematic juxtaposition of various strategies of naturalization need not imply that these strategies can be arranged into an evolutionary history of race, just as the argument that we can learn from the similarities we discover between, say, fifteenth-century ideologies and twentieth-century ones need not suggest that one followed from the other.<sup>64</sup> Admittedly the danger of such a fallacy is great, for the subject of race tends to bewitch its historians with the same philogenetic fantasies and teleological visions that underwrite racial ideologies themselves.<sup>65</sup> But if we wish to study how medieval people sought to naturalize their own histories while at the same time attempt to denaturalize our own, it is a risk worth taking.